
IRAQI PRESIDENT TO PAY VISIT TO TURKEY THIS WEEK

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Turkey and Iraq will discuss all aspects of bilateral relations, as well as regional developments, during Iraqi President Barham Salih's visit to the Turkish capital this week, diplomatic sources have said.

Salih, who was elected as the president of Iraq early October, will pay his first visit to Turkey's leader upon an invitation by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Salih, along with Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan, will be Erdoğan's first international guest in the year of 2019.

Bahram Salih, a former prime minister of the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) from the ranks of Jalal Talabani's Kurdistan Patriotic Union (PUK), is a well-known figure in Ankara. Turkey had welcomed his election as the president of Iraq and Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu paid a visit to Baghdad to meet the new president late October.

Progress on Turkish-Iraqi ties has been observed particularly after Turkey's firm stance against the KRG's independence referendum late September 2017. Turkey claimed the biggest share for reconstruction of Iraq by pledging \$5 billion in an international donor conference in Kuwait early 2018. Iraq stands as one of Turkey's top trade partners with around \$9 billion trade volume in 2017.

Among issues to be discussed between the two presidents are ways to improve bilateral trade, cooperation in the field of energy and transportation, opening a second border gate and other issues to their mutual concern.

Erdoğan and Salih will also exchange views on regional developments, particularly Syria after the United States decision to withdraw troops from this country. A major concern is a potential re-grouping of ISIL, which still has support in some parts of Iraq and Syria. Erdoğan, in a phone call with Trump, had vowed that Turkey can fully eliminate the residues of ISIL in Syria.

Another important issue the two leaders will discuss is the continued presence of the PKK in northern Iraqi territories. Turkey had hit the PKK positions in Sinjar province of Iraq last month on grounds that the group was trying to establish a new headquarters in the said region.

Despite Iraq's criticisms on the Turkish attack, the government had stressed that it will continue fighting terrorists in Iraq if the Iraqi government fails to do so.

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