

KURDS OF IRAQ

Party Portrait

The Kurds of Iraq are a distinct ethnic group in Northeastern Iraq. One of the four groups of Kurds, they are predominantly moderate Sunnis, seen as a stable, progressive and Western looking society. They are historically oppressed and manipulated by Iraqi and Iranian leaders. They have narratives of victimhood, fierce soldierhood and honored martyrdom. They seek security and self- autonomy. Their biggest threats are internal corruption, Islamic (Shia and Sunni) extremists and loss of legitimacy when applying for autonomy.

Key Interests

- Gain enough leverage to be able to establish borders and to also acquire international legitimacy so their political and physical state can be established. Requires breaking Iraq's territorial integrity; not supported by the international community.
- Develop petroleum and tourism industry while enhancing civil society and infrastructure.
- Maintain and enhance Western support
- Retain Peshmerga's absolute control over Iraqi Kurdistan.

Sources of Leverage

Energy – The Kurds of Iraq are located atop lucrative petroleum resources. They are developing these resources, and host International Oil Companies such as Exxon Mobile. They are creating strategic ties with Iran and Turkey through petroleum diplomacy.

Military – They maintain an efficient military, the Peshmerga.

Soft power – They project a peace-loving image and maintain public diplomacy policy that portrays them as a stable, progressive, continually Western-backed actor in the region.

Regional Strategy

Through the creation of diplomatic ties based on mutual security and economic interests, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) seeks to increase its eternal legitimacy and leverage against Baghdad. It is particularly working on their regional arrangements with Turkey, Iran and Israel and are developing relations with EU states. Superficially, the KRG is developing relations in line with international order, seeking to use policy paths to autonomy that increase their legitimacy and do not paint them as rogue actors.

Powerful Individuals

Massoud Barzani (President of the KRG; Party leader of the Partiya Demokrat a Kurdistanê, or the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP))
 Nechervan Barzani (Prime Minister; from the Barzani Tribe)
 Muhammad Fuad Masum (President of Iraq; Talbani tribal affiliation; Member of the Yekîtiya Nîştîmanî ya Kurdistanê, or Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, (PUK))

Potential Negotiation Moves

Advancing petroleum-based, diplomatic ties with Iran - Subject to upcoming Iranian presidential elections.

Assist NATO Interests - KRG may choose to partner more intensely with NATO to continue their Western partnership

Negotiate - With the rise and current dismantling of ISIS, the KRG expanded its territorial administration of security, most notably into oil rich Kirkuk. The KRG may use this in negotiation with Baghdad.

Potentially partner with Syrian, Iranian, Iraqi Kurds and their diasporas to pressure their respective governments for greater autonomy.

Internal Conflicts

There is a longstanding feud between the PUK and KDP. This took the shape of a civil war, which was quelled by a peace agreement after intervention by Ankara and negotiations brokered by Washington. The power struggle stems from a differing of social ideology; the KDP, led by the Barzani Tribe, is highly tribal, nationalistic and dynastic in its leadership, while the PUK, led in part by Jalal Talbani is affiliated with socialism and elitism. Within Iraqi Kurdistan, the KRG incorporates the politics of Iraqi Turkmen, Assyrians and other minority groups, such as the Yezidis.

Memberships

N/A

Allies

N/A

Partners

GERMANY, KURDS of Iran, KURDS of Syria, KURDS of Turkey, ISRAEL, TURKEY

Rivals

IRAQ State of Law Coalition

Adversaries

N/A

Active Armed Opponents

ISIS

Proxy

N/A

External Sponsor

GERMANY, NATO, UNITED STATES

Aid Recipient

N/A

Aid Donor

UNITED STATES