

Kurdish Elites: State, Identity, and Citizenship

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Introduction

On September 25, 2017, 92 percent of Kurds voted for independence from Iraq in a referendum in which 72 percent of the residents of Kurdistan participated. The referendum was not officially recognized on an international level and prompted a wave of angry responses from the Council of Representatives and the federal government. This move further entrenched long-standing disagreements on many issues including oil, distribution of wealth, border crossings, legal jurisdiction, and defense, among others.

Regarding the long history of the relationship between the Kurds and the modern Iraqi state, researchers have tended to reduce the problem to a national- ideological issue between two sides. However, a deeper look at these unresolved questions, and a reexamination of the Kurdish demands from the perspective of the elites in Kurdistan, may reveal other implications in addition to the national angle (which has taken on deep psychological and emotional resonances).

This study aims to explore these implications, and solutions that have been proposed, to further Kurdish integration within the Iraqi state. This takes into account the failure of the independence project, at least for the foreseeable future, as a result of the geopolitical realities in the region as well as the lack of a cumulative, regional foundation for establishing a state in Kurdistan.

Methodology, Terminology and Theoretical Approach

This study employs an analytical survey methodology based on direct interviews with the “elite.” “Elite” here refers to activists, academics, media professionals, and party politicians who are present and active in the public sphere, and who are working within the geographical area that includes Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Dahuk, and Kirkuk governorates.

There were 15 interviews conducted using a matrix of diverse questions. These questions dealt with the respondent’s stance on the referendum to establish a Kurdish state and its consequences for the Kurdistan Region and the Region’s relationship with the federal government of Iraq. They also touched on the Kurdish elite’s perceptions of relationships with Arabs and the potential for a common Iraqi national identity.

The members of the elite, with whom the interviews were held in June 2019, belonged to many different Islamic, liberal, regional, tribal, and party affiliation within Kurdistan. This diversity of participants reflects an effort to more broadly represent all elements of the Kurdish elite.⁽¹⁾

As used in this study, “Kurdish” is an ethnic, anthropological category. The criteria for defining “Kurdish” in this study is belonging to this ethnicity, culture, space, geography, or folkloric identity present in the governorates that constitute the Kurdistan Region.

We have included other members of Kurdish elites from the governorate of Kirkuk in this category of the elites of Kurdistan, not because they are part of Kurdistan, but because they contain a high percentage of Kurds, in addition to being part of an area of contention between Baghdad and Erbil.

These conversations also included members of the elite from minorities in Kurdistan, in an effort to represent the widest set of elite viewpoints there.

We use the term “the state” to refer to an established legal-political entity located in a particular geographic space, which its citizens feel they are part of, and which has institutions that work towards creating unity among these citizens.

Of course, the state in this situation is a project that is constantly under construction, through which administrative, financial, and military apparatuses are also established. Through these apparatuses, the state carries out its exclusive duties in order to impose legislative authority.⁽²⁾

By “identity,” we refer to the notion that “identity is composed of tangible and intangible elements, through which a given individual or group distinguishes themselves and which is adapted over time through his or her relationships with others.”⁽³⁾

For “citizenship,” we draw upon a definition that “first and foremost denotes rights and responsibilities, but also includes living inside a state/nation, and

¹ The names of members of the elite who were interviewed, along with some brief biographical information, can be found at the end of this paper.

² Tomas Ertzman, “State Formation and State Building in Europe” Ed., Thomas Janoski, *The Handbook of Political Sociology* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005), 367.

³ Ali Taher al-Hamoud, *Iraq: From Identity Shock to an Awakening of Identities* (Beirut, Masarat Institute for Cultural and Media Development, 2012), 49.

maintaining identification with the public culture and communicating in the language of that country to the greatest extent possible. The citizen should also be tolerant of difference.⁽⁴⁾

The Referendum for a State: Potential or Predicament?

Kurdish elites agree that building a Kurdish state is their national, humanitarian, and historical right. International treaties have failed to draw out borders to establish a Kurdish state, as the Kurds have been distributed among four neighboring countries: Iraq, Turkey, Iran, and Syria. The elite's dream of establishing a Kurdish state has remained unfulfilled for decades, and is mixed with armed struggle, growing nationalist sentiment, and a strong sense of distinct identity on the one hand, and frustration and disappointed hopes on the other.

Kurdish sentiments have been characterized by a high degree of confidence in self-definition, as well as ongoing anguish from living as second-class citizens, and being a scapegoat for Iraqi governments even after 2003.

It has become clear that the most important Kurdish demands are recognition of their language and culture, rejecting Baghdad's imperious tone with them, and protection from ongoing injustice. Other key demands are restoring rights they have been deprived of, ending persistent harms from exclusion and marginalization, and achieving the dream of equality and just citizenship.

To those following the Kurdish situation, these appear to be the demands of a weak minority rather than those of a component that is considered the strongest in Iraq's balance of power. After all, the Kurds hold near-absolute sovereignty in four governorates as well as considerable authority in managing their own armed forces, in addition to control over foreign relations and other constitutional and non-constitutional powers.

These feelings of ongoing persecution can only be understood within complex social and psychological contexts that have produced and continue to produce negative sentiments towards the situation that the Kurds face.

⁴ Derek Heater, *A Brief History of Citizenship*, translated by Assef Nasser and Makram Khalil (Beirut, Dar el-Saqi, 2007), P.15.

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The Kurdish elite made clear that society in Kurdistan is going through a stage of rethinking its self-definition and learning its limits and capabilities, and thus strongly criticized Kurdish politicians and their errors as well as the historical positions of the Iraqi regime in general.

The opinions of the Kurdish elite after the referendum could be placed in two main categories: comments which pertain to internal Kurdish affairs, and those which pertain to external affairs beyond Kurdistan.

Regarding internal Kurdish affairs, the elite drew a distinction between the dream of a Kurdish state and the act of holding a referendum on the state. The elites were ready to realize the dream of a Kurdish state, and felt there was solidarity among all elements of society (people, political parties, elites, and constituents in Kurdistan) in achieving this goal.

However, they feel there are many factors stymieing the achievement of a Kurdish state. These obstacles include the lack of international sympathy for the cause, anti-Kurdish views in the region, and the lack of preparedness for a state in terms of infrastructure, institutions, legal bodies, armed forces, and the economy. There are also difficulties posed by regional disagreements between Sulaymaniyah and Erbil, as well as ongoing tribal conflicts.

With regard to the referendum, a majority of respondents said that it was a “wrong-headed gamble,” “a dangerous risk” or a “losing battle,” in the words of some members of the Kurdish elite.

These deep feelings of shock regarding the outcomes of the referendum were apparent in interviews with Kurdish intellectuals. Some stated that neither they nor Kurdish politicians anticipated what happened after the referendum, especially after the federal government retook Kirkuk, suspended salaries, and halted flights to and from international airports, in addition to other steps taken from Baghdad’s side.

Meanwhile, others stated that they had warned since the beginning about what would come after the referendum, pointing to the lack of a plan from politicians despite the consensus about the Kurdish right to establish a state. The time was not right to hold a referendum, and the internal political climate was equally unprepared for it. Another missing piece was the lack of social readiness for citizenship in this future Kurdish state.

Some members of the elite were open about their anger and frustration that the goal of the referendum was, in their opinion, nothing other than the personal glorification of Kurdish leaders who wanted to leave their mark on history. In doing so, they sacrificed the gains that the Kurds had achieved since 2003 in the Iraqi state. As one academic succinctly stated, “We lost the referendum, and they sent us back to before where we had been in 2003.” Another media professional suggested that “the Kurdish political mindset is a tribal mindset, and the referendum was nothing more than a feeble tribal response to the government in Baghdad dismissing the president of the Region’s uncle, Minister of Finance Hoshyar Zebari, on accusations of corruption.”

On the internal level, the respondents also acknowledged that the status of minorities was better in general than the political regime in the federal government. They pointed to the quota as an example of positive discrimination that included minorities that were not recognized in Baghdad, such as Kakais and Zoroastrians. This included elected councils, as well as some of the political parties and security forces. However, minorities were still concerned about the referendum, although they voted in favor of it. These fears can be traced back to the lack of organized legal protections for minorities in the Region, and dissatisfaction with orders coming directly from the president of the Region regarding their affairs. This situation did not provide sufficient reassurances about the status of minorities in the future of Kurdistan. Furthermore, some Kurdish elites noted there was uncertainty about whether minorities in a Kurdish state (if such a state came to be) would not also demand their independence due of the fragility of the political regime, and its recently established nature in Kurdistan.

Some intellectuals said that the Kurds would not attempt another referendum, since what happened constituted a setback, and that people in Kurdistan had become convinced that achieving a Kurdish state was not possible in the short-term. Furthermore, they had lost trust in the ability of Kurdish politicians to peacefully lead the process of independence with any success.

Regarding foreign affairs outside Kurdistan, the elites were generally of the opinion that the Kurds needed to get used to living with the reality of a failed referendum, and dealing realistically with the new status quo through the federal government. Elites were frank about the necessity of returning to

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Baghdad and working through the situation there, but here attitudes splintered again amongst the Kurdish elites. A very small number wanted to work with the federal government to achieve a Kurdish state, but the vast majority of respondents called for integration into the federal political process, and to attempt to reform the political system there in order to achieve equal citizenship for all Iraqis.

With regard to the path towards and preconditions for integration, some elites indicated that it would be necessary to work towards improving economic production (both industrial and agricultural) and educational achievement as two appropriate paths towards national cohesiveness. Furthermore, they emphasized the need to work within the Iraqi constitution that the Kurds approved in order to achieve a civil state that guarantees equal citizenship and the rule of law, and which would address unresolved issues, such as Article 140, which pertains to disputed areas. The intellectual elites also pointed out that people today want to know they will have pensions and security, and that they will have their basic needs met and rights recognized. If this has not been achieved, then independence from Iraq is not a good option for the Kurds.

Kurds and Arabs: A Fraught Relationship

The period of Kurdish semi-independence from Iraq during the economic sanctions in the 1990s profoundly affected how younger generation of Kurds saw Iraqi Arabs. The nineties generation, that is, those who are now in their twenties, equate Iraqi Arabs with what the Saddam regime did to the Kurds in the 1980s. According to the Kurdish elites, these youth are always carrying this past with them—they hate the Arabic language, and dread what Arabs might do, for they “see the present in light of the memories of chemical warfare and Anfal,” in the words of one academic. “It is a generation raised on hate” one male activist said, while a female activist added that “history has created a very fraught relationship between Arabs and Kurds; the referendum is simply the culmination of these tensions.”

Most respondents stated that Kurdish politicians are acutely responsible for this societal fracturing, particularly because of their lack of attention to the danger of using media to equate Iraqi Arabs with the actions of dictatorial regimes, and of playing on these sentiments in order to maintain power. Even worse has been the elimination of Arabic from school curricula after

the 1991 uprising, which was the primary reason behind the psychological separation of Arab and Kurdish youth.

Despite all this, the opening of the media and the internet after 2003, and tourist activity in Kurdistan, as well as trade and commerce throughout the Region, has continued to increase contact between Kurdish society and Iraqi Arabs and helped improve attitudes towards Arabs.

The Kurdish elites agree that the internal displacement of Arabs to Kurdistan from the governorates that ISIS occupied in 2014 had a significant impact in correcting stereotypes about Iraqi Arabs. The Kurds feel grateful towards these displaced Iraqis Arab as well as Iraqi Arab tourists, without whom the Kurdistan Region would have been plunged into a much worse economic crisis during the years in which Baghdad suspended salaries for employees in Kurdistan (following a dispute over oil exports in 2015).

Some of the elites pointed out that there were growing numbers of Kurds learning Arabic, and broadcasting Arabic songs from their shops, and that there were also international organizations in the Region that often require Arabic in addition to other languages in order to work as an employee there.

It seems that learning the Arabic language, as well as the openness to Arabic in markets, restaurants, and touristic places is primarily due to economic necessity. This does not necessarily indicate absolute tolerance, or the elimination of barriers between Arabs and Kurds.

Other members of the elite emphasized that the generations before the 1990s had good memories of Arabs, and spoke about the bonds of friendship, mixed marriages, and shared suffering. Likewise, religion, art, and trade are examples of points of commonality that could be built upon to strengthen societal relationships between Kurds and Arabs. An activist in Kirkuk stated that the model of peaceful coexistence among different segments of his governorate could serve as an example for how to build upon and expand shared experiences. This is provided that political authorities better fulfill their duties, and do not continue to squander these similarities.

National Iraqi Identity: Is It Really Possible?

In general, the Kurdish elite was hesitant to recognize the possibility of building a common Iraqi national identity that includes Kurds and Arabs. There is ongoing fear and suspicion of Baghdad and their failure to address the status of minorities, as well as concerns about identity being imposed through governmental procedures. Furthermore, there is continuing skepticism about Arab politicians and the quota system, which remains an obstacle to achieving a civil state built on citizenship. Other problems include the absence of the rule of law and rampant corruption. For the elite, all of these issues make it difficult to consider a common national identity. One female activist even went as far as to say that “the citizens of the Kurdistan Region have made a psychological decision to give up on this identity. » Another female activist stated that there was interest in Kurdistan being an independent region inside Iraq without there being a desire for a single Iraqi identity. The female activists and academics seemed generally more pessimistic about achieving a national Iraqi identity, and expressed clearer Kurdish national sentiment. Meanwhile, male activists, academics, and media professionals focused more on explaining the conditions that would be required to achieve an Iraqi national identity, but admitted that this project would require decades of cumulative work over multiple generation in order to be achieved.

Perhaps this dramatic divergence in attitudes is the result of disparate levels of engagement with the public sphere. In this regard, Kurdish society is like most eastern societies that give more room for men to connect with each other in the public sphere compared to women. Additionally, the Kurdish issue has more direct economic consequences for men in these societies, as compared to women.

Many members of the elite stated that there was a need to rebuild genuine trust as a key condition for building a national identity, and that this was a step that the federal government must take “for it will determine the fate of the Kurds,” as one activist in Kirkuk said. In this particular context, the changing Kurdish media discourse towards Arabs is crucial to building bridges of trust and getting across the message to Iraqi Arab society that Kurds are interested in openness and integration, as one of the activists in Kirkuk said.

The elites generally affirmed that “people in Kurdistan today have become aware of the disingenuous approach of Kurdish politicians in building Kurdish identity” and that they are therefore in the most favorable situation for integrating with the federal government, if they could achieve the same rights as other Iraqi citizens.

The elite felt that international and regional interference in supporting the Region vis-a-vis Baghdad-or the reverse-had a markedly negative effect on achieving a common national identity. However, one female activist in Dahuk remarked that “local and international organizations play an important role in improving societal cohesion through coexistence projects and building a common identity.”

Building a national identity will not be possible without the different sides getting to know each other, through re-reading history, re-writing curricula, changing media and political discourses, and letting go of what happened in the past, as one academic in Sulaymaniyah said.

Liberty, security, and a decent life, as well as the fair division of natural resources among people, implementing of the constitution, passing laws specific to this purpose, and fighting sectarianism and corruption are the other conditions necessary to achieve a common national identity.

Only one intellectual from Sulaymaniyah did not believe in any of these calls for unity and said, “There is no trust in Arabs; we would want independence even if we were in a barren desert.”

Towards Integration or Independence? The Three Key Issues

It has seemed to the Kurds since the moment the Iraqi constitution was written in 2005 that the three crucial issues that need to be resolved to establish a Kurdish state are foreign affairs, defense, and natural resources. However, after 15 years of change, and the failed Kurdish referendum, as well as people in Kurdistan getting better acquainted with the nature of the political regime in Erbil and Baghdad, most elites interviewed felt that the Kurdistan Region had not been successful in dealing with these issues. Instead, they called for these issues to be transferred to the federal government.

Some of the elites stated that it is not possible to build a state inside a state with the chaotic distribution of powers in having both Baghdad and Erbil deal with these issues. They also affirmed that Kurdistan's management of the issues had not been transparent, with political leadership pursuing their personal interests, especially regarding oil.

Nevertheless, a significant majority emphasized that Baghdad does not have the capacity to impose and dictate on these three issues, suggesting that the federal political regime should be more representative of its constituents, and have more just, clear and transparent legal policy. The presence of constitutional and legal assurances is necessary to soothe fears that have gripped the Kurdish street.

The primary obstacle to a resolution of these three issues is the chaotic relationship between the center and the Region, and disputes over interpreting the articles of the constitution. Other problems included a lack of legislation necessary to manage these issues and a mutual lack of trust caused by politicians' self-interest.

According to many members of the elite, it is not possible for the Kurdistan Region to have authority over certain things, including but not limited to issuing national ID cards. The undemocratic partisan mentality in Kurdistan prevents trust among people in managing this issue, since there have been cases in which opposition elements were sent to Sulaymaniyah.

One of the academics from Dahuk had an insightful position on this, which was that the experience of the Kurdistan Region after all these years has failed to convince Kurds of their capacity to manage these three issues in a neutral and rational matter. Therefore, it is necessary to transfer these issues to the federal government. He also suggested that this could happen as part of a constitutional amendment that included the right of Kurds to automatically declare independence upon holding a successful referendum 20 years after passage of the amendment. This period of time, in the academic's opinion, would be sufficient to soothe Kurdish fears and also to give the federal government the opportunity to display good intentions towards the Kurdish people. This would increase the opportunities for integration, and make it more possible to achieve equality and justice.

The Two New Governments of Erbil and Baghdad: Hope for a Better Future?

In general, the elites appeared optimistic about the choice of Nechirvan Barzani as the president of the Kurdistan Region, and described him as a reasonable man focused on security and the economy, as opposed to someone trying to score political points against his rivals. The elites were even more optimistic about the choice of Adil Abdul-Mahdi as prime minister of Iraq, and felt that he was a man looking for solutions to long-standing problems. There was even optimism about the rifts, divisions, and popular disaffection among the political forces in Iraq, since this was felt to increase opportunities for mutual understanding and finding solutions for unresolved issues.

Nevertheless, several members of the elite felt that that the new president of the Region would not be flying solo, since Masrour Barzani is joining him in negotiations with the federal government. Masrour Barzani was regarded by elites as a sharp leader who was serious about dealing with Kurdish national issues. Nechirvan Barzani was perceived as being governed by party mechanisms still in the hands of Masoud Barzani, the former president of the Kurdistan Region.

The elites from Sulaymaniyah and Kirkuk appeared more pessimistic about the possibility of the new president being able to resolve the internal problems of the Region, especially regarding uniting the two administrations in Sulaymaniyah and Erbil. They pointed out that the two cities, which are led by the two main political parties in Kurdistan, face deep, historical challenges that constitute a deep wound and lasting fracture between the two administrations even until today.

The elites stated that the nationalist discourse had become less pronounced after the referendum, and that everyone is now trying to adapt to the new reality.

Some of the elites said that the judiciary and the federal courts should be given authority to resolve disputes between the federal government and Kurdistan Region.

They also called for signing written agreements and establishing clear and transparent supervisory legal bodies to support any future negotiations between the new administration in the Region and the federal regime. As one activist from Kirkuk put it, “The Kurdish issue is one of the most complicated and fraught questions on the path to building a modern civil Iraqi state.”

The Kurdish Puzzle in Iraq: Is a Solution Possible?

It is difficult to imagine solutions to a riddle that is mixed up in national sentiments and a long history of suffering, as well as partisan, regional, and tribal interests. However, it remains in the realm of possibility that we can use these in-depth conversations with the Kurdish elites to make recommendations for policies that could allow the regime in Kurdistan and the federal government to close the gap between parties in disputes.

General Recommendations for the Federal Government and Kurdistan Region

- Emphasize that the dispute between the Kurdish Region and Baghdad is a legal, constitutional, and administrative dispute, and not an ethnic conflict.
- It is important to focus on the interests of each party instead of specific positions adopted in any dialogue between Baghdad and Erbil.
- It would be useful to seriously think about incrementally making amendments to the constitution without infringing on matters in which the Region and its citizens hold exclusive jurisdiction.
- It is necessary for the federal government and the Region to differentiate between political issues and decisions, and other matters, since most unresolved issues between the two sides are of a technical and specialized nature. Resolving these matters will require technical specialists among mid-level personnel in the relevant ministries, academies, and companies.
- The dialogue between Baghdad and Erbil must include the standardization of procedures for issuing passports, granting visas, owning property, issuing national identification cards, housing cards, ration cards, and voter ID cards, as well as vehicle registrations, driver's licenses, arms licenses, and procedures for prosecution and extradition.
- Establish the Bekhme Dam in the Kurdistan Region (after building was previously stopped due to objections from Erbil.) This could contribute to increasing cooperation on the issue of water between the Region and other governorates. It is necessary that this dialogue between Baghdad and Erbil include re-starting this project, taking into account Kurdish feedback on this matter.

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- Establishing a network of roads and railroad routes will help streamline trade and tourism for the Kurdistan Region. This could be part of a larger economic project with other governorates in Iraq to promote economic cooperation and mutual reliance on products from the Region. This would contribute to increasing integration and societal solidarity, and would ultimately yield political benefits as well.
- The federal government needs to utilize Kurdish teachers to teach the Kurdish language, which has been a part of the Iraqi educational curriculum for years. It is likewise incumbent on the Regional government to give attention to reinstating Arabic language in their educational curricula, and recruiting Arab teachers for this purpose.
- The federal government's Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, in coordination with the Ministry of Education in the Kurdistan Region should reevaluate the plans for admitting high school graduates to universities, institutes, and military colleges, and standardize application and admissions procedures and degree equivalence. They should also work towards distributing students in a way that promotes social mixing among the populations of all Iraqi governorates, especially among Arabs and Kurds.
- International organizations and their centers of study, as well as local NGOs, have a key role to play in raising awareness about the dangers of violence and extremism, and in strengthening societal integration through long-term programs that specifically target the young generation in Kurdistan and other areas in Iraq.

Recommendations for the Federal Government

- The best tools for solving disputes with Kurdistan are the constitution, non-selective adherence to its articles, and appealing to its authority through established mechanisms such as the federal court and the defunct federal council.
- The Iraqi constitution still needs its interpreting laws to be enacted, especially those that pertain to the powers granted to the Region, as well as the oil and gas law, the federal council, protection of liberties, rights of minorities, the distribution of financial resources, public civil services, and additional laws that must be written into legislation in order to regularize the relationship between the federal government and Kurdistan.

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- There is an increasingly vocal Kurdish position convinced of the need to manage the issue of oil and gas, the armed forces, and foreign policy through the federal government, provided that Kurds are given assurances that the decisions made by the federal government in Baghdad will represent all its constituents. This could happen first as a political decision, and secondly as a constitutional amendment.
- Implement Article 140 of the constitution, especially the section that applies to disputed areas, and give special status to the governorate of Kirkuk to transform it into an autonomous region. (This is something that many members of the Kurdish elite insisted upon.) This could take place by making sure the law guarantees that one ethnic group will not dominate over another, and to designate it through a special law as the capital of coexistence in Iraq. These two steps could greatly mitigate the sources of tension between Erbil and Baghdad.
- It is crucial for the federal government to issue a special law to protect minorities and to counter racism, sectarianism, and discrimination, and to acknowledge minorities that are not protected in the constitution or current laws, such as the Yarsanis (Kaka'i), Zoroastrians, and Baha'is, among others. It should also attract talented members of the minorities to work in state agencies through a system of positive discrimination.
- It is important for the federal government to work directly with the political and social forces in Kurdistan and Kirkuk in a balanced and just manner as part of finding political solutions and carrying out official dialogue with the Region.
- There is no reason that what happens regarding freedoms in the Region, such as the drafting of a Regional constitution and issuing of laws, be carried out without oversight from legal institutions in the federal government. This will help identify problem areas, and monitor them using constitutional institutions, such as the federal court. It may help the citizens of the Region feel that the central state is taking more interest in them.
- The federal government must not count on the passage of time to solve problems, since the events after 2003 have proved that these are fraught and complex issues that only become more fossilized as time passes.

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- The influence of neighboring countries has been an essential piece of the relationship between Baghdad and Erbil. This situation is the result of geography and the historical influence of Turkey and Iran in Iraq's Kurdish area. It seems that neutralizing interventions from these two countries could have a positive impact in solving the long-standing problems between the Region and the federal government. But in so far as it is unimaginable that neighboring countries would refrain from trying to influence the situation in Kurdistan, it has been suggested that a joint Turkish-Iranian mediator oversee the agreement between the Region and the federal government. This kind of mediator would guarantee some sort of even footing between the two regional forces in their efforts to influence the situation in Kurdistan. It would also ensure that a more stable agreement would be reached more quickly between the federal government and the Region, and that the agreement would include the interests of Kurdistan in the Iraqi constitution while still preserving the unity of the country.

Recommendations for the Kurdistan Region

- The Kurdistan Region still constitutes a successful experience in the eyes of Iraqis regarding reconstruction, public services, and security. Maintaining this image is necessary for creating a progressive, civil Iraq. For this to happen, the Regional government must take a serious interest in fighting corruption, promoting transparency in economic matters, and ensuring more public freedoms, especially as pertains to political parties, the media, and activists.
- The presence of a strong Kurdistan within a federal Iraq safeguards the civil nature of the Iraqi state, as well as the rights of religiously, nationally, and culturally diverse groups in the country. The politicians of the Region can open channels of direct communication with intellectuals, academics, media professionals and activists from different Iraqi governorates to advocate for these kinds of projects within the state as whole, and not only the project of Kurdistan.
- The administration in the Region must overcome the impression that it is only run by a particular tribe or political party. The development of a democratic regime in Kurdistan is a recipe for its success in a federal Iraq, and in the international arena as well.

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- Solving internal problems between the two administrations in Sulaymaniyah and Erbil can strengthen Kurdistan's position in its negotiations with the federal government. Overcoming internal problems will also weaken the loud nationalist voices that have papered over internal conflicts by venting towards Baghdad.

Names of Kurdish Elites Surveyed

- Awaz Salim Abdullah: Media professional and director of the Kurdistan for All Organization for Democratic Development – Kirkuk
- Enas Reda Asghar: Academic and Activist - Sulaymaniyah
- Berivan Abdel Khaliq: Academic - Sulaymaniyah
- Dr. Galal Hasan: Academic - Sulaymaniyah
- Dr. Hakim Abdel Rahman Al-Babiri: Academic - Dahuk
- Khalid Peshawa: Independent Politician - Sulaymaniyah
- RajabIssaKarim: A Yarsani activist and the president of the Metra organization - Kirkuk
- Reber Ismail Mohamed Amin: Political and Human Rights Activist - Kirkuk
- Zhalian Karim Ahmed: Activist - Sulaymaniyah
- Shamal Abu Bakr Hussein: Academic - Dahuk
- Dr. Sabah Sobhi Haidar: Academic - Erbil
- Karzan Hamid: Researcher on Political and Economic Issues - Erbil
- Govend Shafiq: Academic - Erbil
- D. M. A.: Academic - Erbil
- Heyman Ramzi: Turkmen Activist - Erbil

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About the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

The Friedrich Ebert Stiftung is a non-profit organization committed to the values of social democracy. It is also the oldest German political institute, founded in 1925 as the political legacy of the first democratically-elected German president, Friedrich Ebert. The Friedrich Ebert Stiftung aims to promote and encourage democracy and political participation, support progress towards social justice and gender equality, and contribute to environmental sustainability, peace, and security in the region. In addition, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Office supports the building and strengthening of civil society and public institutions and works through wide-ranging partnerships with civil society organizations and different political spectrums to establish platforms for democratic dialogue, hold conferences and workshops, and publish policy papers related to current political issues.

