

Deconstructing the Kurdistan Referendum: Who Wins, Who Loses and the Fate of a Region

Global Research News Hour episode 192

By [Michael Welch](#), [Henry Heller](#), and [Joe Lauria](#)

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Region: [Europe](#), [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [GLOBAL RESEARCH NEWS HOUR](#),
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"We will not allow the creation of a second Israel in the north of Iraq."

– Iraqi Vice President Nouri al-Maliki. [1]

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While the world reels from news of Catalonia's secession vote from Spain over the weekend, major powers have been sounding off on a similar referendum just six days earlier.

The area in northeastern Iraq known as Iraqi Kurdistan, or the Kurdistan Region, [voted 92.73 per cent](#) in favour of independence from Iraq.

While Kurds in the affected area [were jubilant](#), leaders in surrounding countries fulminated and in some cases uttered threats.

The government of the multi-ethnic city of Kirkuk [called for a curfew](#) on the night of the vote. The central government of Iraq imposed an [international flight ban](#) on cities in the Kurdistan Region. [Iraqi Prime Minister Haidar Al-Abadi](#) said he would not enter into negotiations with the Kurdistan Regional Government, claiming the referendum was 'unconstitutional.'

The Turkish government has threatened [to cut off the supply of oil coming into the country](#) from the Kurdistan Region. The United Nations Security Council members [discouraged the vote](#), saying it "could hinder efforts to counter so-called Islamic State (IS) and help displaced Iraqis return home."

The United States has likewise refused to recognize the referendum outcome. In a Saturday September 30 statement, none other than [US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson](#) said, "The vote and the results lack legitimacy and we continue to support a united, federal, democratic and prosperous Iraq."

Israel meanwhile is the only country [expressing support](#) of Kurdistan's aspirations to statehood.

In the century since [British officer Mark Sykes and French diplomat François Georges-Picot signed an agreement](#) setting the boundaries of the Middle East, the Kurds have been frustrated in their desires to secure a homeland. Does the referendum, binding or not, put the Kurds one step closer to achieving that dream? Or will it bring more bloodshed, or even war?

This week's Global Research News Hour examines the fall-out from the referendum vote with three guests.

Henry Heller is Professor of History at the University of Manitoba. He is also the author of several books including [The Capitalist University: The Transformation of Higher Education in the United States: 1945-2016](#) and [The Cold War and the New Imperialism: 1945-2005 \(1986\)](#). In the first half hour, Professor Heller puts the referendum in an historical context, explaining the origin of the Kurds, their grievances with its neighbours, and the comparison with stateless Jews in the period before 1948.

Nametuwillah Emre is Vice president of the Kurdish Association of Manitoba. He is also a Canadian citizen of Kurdish extraction living in the city of Winnipeg. Mr. Emre presents 'the view from the diaspora.' He does not seem to take the threats by Iraq and Turkey very seriously, and feels that his countrymen abroad are deserving of their own state.

Joe Lauria is a veteran foreign-affairs journalist. He has written for the Boston Globe, the Sunday Times of London and the Wall Street Journal among other newspapers. He has spent a lot of time in Erbil and was there for the referendum vote. He wrote an article on the eve of the vote published at Consortium news called [Vote by Iraqi Kurds Adds to Tensions](#). He explores his understanding based on the fact he was present during the referendum vote in Erbil. He joins us from Cairo.

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Notes:

1. <https://www.telesurtv.net/english/news/Baghdad-Rejects-Second-Israel-US-and-Australia-Rejects-Kurd-Referendum-20170918-0018.html>

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