

Divided Forces in Iraq

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Washington is relying on local forces to carry out ground operations following airstrikes against ISIS, but disunity within the Kurdish ranks may hamper their ability to defeat the insurgents.

Iraqi Kurdistan is gaining in importance by the day as a launchpad for military operations against the "Islamic State." The US military and CIA are expanding their pre-existing facilities at Erbil International Airport and may soon begin basing unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and combat search-and-rescue aircraft at the site. Other coalition partners such as the UK, Canada, Australia and France may follow. In return, Iraq's Kurds are pushing for greater international support for the development of the Peshmerga, the armed force of Iraqi Kurdistan.

The US and other international partners are likely to seek closer military-to-military ties with Iraqi Kurdistan in the forthcoming years, both to counter IS in Iraq and also to capitalise on Iraqi Kurdistan's potential as a base from which to train and equip Syrian Kurdish fighters. Baghdad is likely to support this engagement under the rubric of the new National Guard scheme being developed by Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi, under which the KRI's military forces would receive financial support from the federal government. The remaining obstacle to international training is the structure of Iraqi Kurdistan's armed forces, which remain bifurcated along party political lines...

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