

The Future of the Iraqi Kurds

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What is the Kurdish Regional Government's current status in northern Iraq, and what implications does it hold for the United States? Is Kurdish independence a likely scenario? To examine these questions, a four-member Washington Institute delegation visited the KRG in February 2008, exploring its political and economic situation, its ties to the rest of Iraq, and its relations with Turkey, Syria, and Iran. The trip resulted in a set of benchmarks to assess the region's future prospects, both domestically and internationally.

In this Policy Focus, Soner Cagaptay, Audrey Flake, Michael Knights, and David Pollock discuss each of these benchmarks, outlining important new findings on issues such as the KRG's little-known financial dependence on Baghdad, its lethargic economic growth, its "love-hate relationship" with Iran, and its tolerance of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) -- a factor that haunts Turkish-KRG and Turkish-Iraqi relations alike. Taken together, these and other findings could give policymakers significant leverage in their efforts to secure a broad spectrum of U.S. interests in Iraq, from human rights concerns to investment opportunities.

The AUTHORS

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