

# Kurdish leader warns Turkey not to intervene in Kirkuk



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Turkey must not interfere in the Kurds' bid to attach Iraq's oil-rich city of Kirkuk to the Kurdish semiautonomous zone, the top official in Iraqi Kurdistan said in remarks broadcast Saturday.

Otherwise, Kurdish leader Massoud Barzani said, Iraq's Kurds will retaliate by intervening in Turkey's predominantly Kurdish southeast, where insurgents have battled for decades to establish their own autonomy.

Barzani, president of the 15-year-old Kurdish autonomous region in northern Iraq, issued the warning after last week's endorsement by the Iraqi government of a decision to relocate and compensate thousands of Arabs who moved to the city as part of Saddam Hussein's campaign to push out the Kurds.

The government's decision was a major step toward implementing a constitutional requirement to determine the status of the disputed city by the end of the year. The plan will likely turn Kirkuk and its vast oil reserves over to Kurdish control, a step rejected by many of Iraq's Arabs and Turkmen " ethnic Turk who are strongly backed by Turkey.

"We will not let the Turks intervene in Kirkuk," Barzani said in an interview with Al-Arabiyah television. "Kirkuk is an Iraqi city with a Kurdish identity, historically and geographically. All the facts prove that Kirkuk is part of Kurdistan."

Some in Turkey have hinted at military action to prevent the Kurds from gaining control of Kirkuk.

Turkish leaders are concerned that Iraq's Kurds want Kirkuk's oil revenues to fund a bid for outright independence, not just autonomy. The Turks fear that would encourage separatist Kurdish guerrillas in Turkey, who have been fighting for autonomy since 1984. The conflict has claimed the lives of 37,000 people."

Turkey is not allowed to intervene in the Kirkuk issue and if it does, we will interfere in Diyarbakir's issues and other cities in Turkey," Barzani said. Diyarbakir is the largest city in Turkey's Kurdish-dominated southeast.

Asked if he meant to threaten Turkey, Barzani responded that he was telling Ankara what would happen "if Turkey interferes." He said Turkey had military and diplomatic clout, but that the Kurds had survived through the Saddam Hussein regime and that what happened in Kirkuk was "none of their (Ankara's) business."

When asked about the Turkmen minority in Kirkuk and Turkey's concern for its ethnic brethren, Barzani shot back: "There are 30 million Kurds in Turkey and we don't interfere there. If they (the Turks) interfere in Kirkuk over just thousands of Turkmen then we will take action for the 30 million Kurds in Turkey."

"I hope we don't reach this point, but if the Turks insist on intervening in Kirkuk matter I am ready to take responsible for our response," Barzani said.

The ancient city of Kirkuk has a large minority of Turkmen as well as Christians, Shiite and Sunni Arabs, Armenians and Assyrians. Turkmen were a majority in the city during the Ottoman Empire.

Barzani said the independence and statehood for Kurds, who live in Turkey, Iran, Syria and Iraq was a "legitimate and legal right."

"But I am against the use of violence to reach this goal," he continued.

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