

# Iraq Rejects Concessions to Kurds Over Referendum

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) – Iraq has roundly rejected a senior Kurdish official’s suggestion to postpone a planned Sept. 25 referendum on independence in return for financial and political concessions from Baghdad, a London-based paper says.

The suggestion made on Sunday by Mala Bakhtiar, executive secretary of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) Politburo, came as a Kurdish delegation wrapped up a week-long visit to Baghdad to sound out proposals from the two sides.

In an interview with Reuters, Bakhtiar said the delegates wanted to know “what thing would Baghdad be prepared to offer to the Kurdish region” in return for postponing the referendum, the news agency reported.

A terse statement issued by Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi rejected the remarks, stressing that the “unrealistic” proposals had never been raised in negotiations between the two sides, the pan-Arab Al Quds Al Arabi daily reported.

The Kurdish delegation, headed by Rozh Nuri Shawaiys, reportedly held talks with Prime Minister Abadi, President Fuad Masum, and other Iraqi leaders as well as ambassadors of the United States, Iran and Turkey in Baghdad.

The visit came after U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson formally asked



*Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi is seen in this file photo.*

Massoud Barzani, president of the autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), to postpone the referendum.

Bakhtiar said Baghdad should help the Kurds overcome a financial crisis and settle debts allegedly owed by their government and agree to settle the issue of disputed regions, such as the oil-rich area of Kirkuk in order to postpone the vote.

“We don’t accept to postpone the referendum with nothing in return and without fixing another time to hold it,”

he said.

The statement by the Iraqi prime minister said Bakhtiar’s remarks were his personal views and did not reflect the negotiations between the two sides.

“The Reuters correspondent, quoting the head of the political office of the Kurdish Patriotic Union, has published some claims which are false and unrealistic, and have never been raised in talks with the Kurdish delegation in Baghdad,” it said.

“Moreover, Mala Bakhtiar was not a member of the delegation and was not

present during the talks,” added the statement, a copy of which the London-based newspaper said it had received.

The Iraqi government has rejected the planned referendum as “unilateral” and unconstitutional. Turkey, Iran and Syria, which together with Iraq have sizable Kurdish communities, also oppose an independent Kurdistan.

Last week, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu warned that plans by the leadership in Iraq’s Kurdish region to hold a referendum on independence could lead to civil war.

## Raqqah Families Make Daring Escapes From Daesh Stronghold



*Smoke rises after an air strike during fighting between members of the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces and Daesh terrorists in Raqqah, Syria, August 20, 2017.*

RAQQAH (Dispatches) – As Shawakh al-Omar huddled with 16 relatives in a single room in house in Daesh’s Syrian stronghold Raqqah, a mortar round

slammed into the home next door, killing four people and shaking the building.

The 57-year-old decided they should make a run for it.

“We didn’t even have time to bury the neighbors’ bodies, we just left,” he said, sitting with daughters and grandchildren on dusty ground at a displaced people’s camp near the town of Tabqa, nearly 50 km (30 miles) west, a day later.

Omar said the family was joined by almost the entire neighborhood, who decided to flee at the same time during the night as fighting between the terrorists and U.S.-backed forces intensified.

“When we got to the main road, bullets from Daesh militants started flying by -- they were trying to stop us leaving,” he said.

The family is one of hundreds who have made daring escapes from Daesh terrorists inside Raqqah as the U.S.-backed so-called Syrian Democratic Forces closes in on the group in the city center.

Thousands of people have had to move many times even after fleeing to Raqqah’s outskirts as the terrorists counter-attack and raid nearby, and the U.S.-led coalition’s bombardments continue.

Many try to camp out near Raqqah before heading reluctantly for camps where the Red Cross describes “inhumane living conditions”, including lack of clean water and insufficient medical services. The United Nations says at least 200,000 people have fled Raqqah in recent months, and that up to 20,000 civilians remain trapped inside.

Another family, squatting in a home in the city’s western outskirts, described their escape by boat across the Euphrates River that runs south of the city several weeks ago, after the final assault in a months-old offensive to seize Raqqah from Daesh terrorists began.

“The whole neighborhood decided to flee together, I’m talking about hundreds of people,” Abdul Hassan Ibrahim said in Sbahiya neighborhood.

“Many got into boats or swam across the river -- we were 10 in a small boat, and had to cling onto the sides and duck underwater to avoid the bullets” being fired by terrorists, he said.

## Qatar Denies Blocking Saudi Arabian Flights for Hajj

QATAR (Dispatches) - Qatar denies having banned Saudi flights from landing in the emirate to take pilgrims to the annual Hajj in the kingdom.

The flag carrier Saudi Arabian Airlines claimed on Sunday that one of its airliners had been prevented from touching down at Hamad International Airport in Doha.

An official source in the Qatar Civil Aviation Authority on Monday dismissed the claim as “baseless,” the state-run QNA news agency reported.

Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates cut their diplomatic ties and transport links with Qatar on June 5, accusing it of sponsoring terrorism. Doha rejects the claim.

Last week, Riyadh announced that it would open its borders with Qatar to allow Muslim pilgrims’ access to Mecca to observe their Hajj rituals.

At the time Qatar hailed the move, but stressed that it was politically motivated and voiced concerns about the safety of its citizens in Saudi Arabia during the annual Hajj pilgrimage.

The announcement was made some time after the kingdom along with several of its allies cut all ties with Doha over alleged connection to terrorism and extremism. Qatar has denied all such claims.

On Sunday, Saudi Arabian Airlines said that it has not been able to schedule

flights from Doha’s Hamad International Airport.

“Qatari authorities have not allowed the aircraft to land as it did not have the right paperwork, although the paperwork was filed days ago,” said the state-run Saudi Press Agency.

“Saudi Arabian Airlines Director General Saleh al-Jasser has said that the airline has thus far been unable to schedule flights to transport Qatari pilgrims from Hamad International Airport in Doha,” it added.

Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates cut their diplomatic ties and transport links with Qatar on June 5, accusing it of sponsoring terrorism.

The boycotting countries also closed their airspace to flag carrier Qatar Airways. The airline has stopped using the airspace of those countries ever since, rerouting flights and using alternative paths, including through Iranian skies.

The Saudi-led embargo has had an economic impact on Qatar. Trying to make up for lost revenue, Doha has said it would allow the citizens of 80 countries to travel to the country visa free.

Doha says it would press the sanctioning countries to compensate for the economic damages arising from the embargo, but has also said it has enough financial resources at its disposal to weather the bans.

## Zionist Teens Attack Off-Duty Troops for ‘Looking Like Arabs’

AL-QUDS (Dispatches) – Zionist teenagers had reportedly attacked two off-duty troops only because they believed the soldiers were Arabs, the police said on Monday.

A police statement said a 16-year-old boy was caught and arrested on suspicion he was part of a group

that assaulted the troops.

The incident took place in a public park in Pardes Hana, a town in central parts of the occupied territories, on Friday night. The troops, who were on weekend vacation and dressed in civilian clothes, were sitting there with a

young female friend and another 17-year-old male friend.

They told the police that the attackers hit them with a hookah pipe and other blunt objects before fleeing the scene.

The victims sustained injuries in their heads and faces and needed

hospital care.

Father of one of the victims told Hebrew-language Ynet news site that the families were appalled by the attack.

Hate crimes against Arab citizens of the occupied territories are frequently reported.

### General ...

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“It is always on the agenda to carry out a joint operation with Iran against those terror organizations which pose a threat,” Erdogan told reporters in Istanbul before a trip to Jordan.

During the visit by General Baqeri, Iran made a “surprise proposal” to Ankara to launch a joint operation against militants in northern Iraq’s Kandil and Sinjar regions, the Turkish newspaper *Turkiye* reported on its front page on Monday.

Erdogan confirmed that the two countries’ military chiefs discussed how to work against terrorists.

“The work will continue because you know that the PKK terror organization has a foot in Iran,” he said.

“They always cause harm to Iran and to us. We work because we believe that if the two countries cooperate, we can reach a conclusion in a much shorter period of time,” he said.

“I hope that we will get a successful result there,” he added, without offering further details on the timing or scope of the operation.

The PKK is designated as a terror group by Turkey, the European Union and the United States.

The Turkish army has been waging a relentless campaign in the last months to eradicate the PKK, and occasionally launches air raids against the group’s bases in northern Iraq.

### Second ...

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One of the injured sailors, Operations Specialist 2nd Class Navin Ramdhun, posted a Facebook message telling family and friends he was OK and awaiting surgery for an arm injury.

He told The Associated Press in a message that he couldn’t say what happened: “I was actually sleeping at that time. Not entirely sure.”

The Singapore government said no crew were injured on the Liberian-flagged *Alnic*, which sustained damage to a compartment at the front of the ship some 7 meters above its waterline. There were no reports of a chemical or oil spill.

Singapore sent tugboats and naval and coast guard vessels to search for the missing sailors and Indonesia said it sent two warships. Malaysia said two ships as well as aircraft from its navy and air force were helping with the search, and the USS *America* deployed *Osprey* aircraft and *Seahawk* helicopters.

There was no immediate explanation for the collision, and the Navy said an investigation would be conducted. Singapore, at the southernmost tip of the Malay Peninsula, is one of the world’s busiest ports and a U.S. ally, with its naval base regularly visited by American warships.

The collision was the second involving a ship from the Navy’s 7th Fleet in the Pacific in two months. Seven sailors died in June when the USS *Fitzgerald* and a container ship collided in waters off Japan.

The *Fitzgerald*’s captain was relieved of command and other sailors were being punished after the Navy found poor seamanship and flaws in keeping watch contributed to the collision, the Navy announced last week.

An investigation into how and why the *Fitzgerald* collided with the other ship was not finished, but enough details were known to take those actions, the Navy said.

President Donald Trump has expressed concern for the McCain’s crew.

Trump returned to Washington on Sunday night from his New Jersey golf club. When reporters shouted questions to him about the McCain, he responded, “That’s too bad.”

About two hours later, Trump tweeted that “thoughts and prayers” are with the McCain’s sailors as search and rescue efforts continue.

The 154-meter destroyer is named after U.S. Sen. John McCain’s father and grandfather, who were both U.S. admirals. It’s based at the 7th Fleet’s homeport of Yokosuka, Japan. It was commissioned in 1994 and has a crew of 23 officers, 24 chief petty officers and 291 enlisted sailors, according the Navy’s website.

McCain said on Twitter that he and his wife, Cindy, are “keeping America’s sailors aboard the USS John S McCain in our prayers tonight - appreciate the work of search & rescue crews.”

Though Liberian flagged, the *Alnic* is owned by a Greece-based shipping company *Stealth Maritime Corporation S.A.* through a subsidiary registered in the Marshall Islands.