

Was Israel wrong to support Kurdish independence?

Erbil is now paying the price for its mistake.

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Israel was alone in its support for the Iraqi Kurdish referendum in September, and it has since become evident that KRG President Masoud Barzani miscalculated in deciding to hold the vote then. The Kurds overestimated both US support for their independence movement and their own internal solidarity, while underestimating the intensity and near unanimity of the international community's opposition to Kurdish independence.

Erbil is now paying the price for its mistake, as the federal government has retaken much of the disputed territory that the Peshmerga has controlled since 2014 and Baghdad closed KRI airspace. So did Jerusalem commit a strategic error in supporting Barzani's secessionist agenda? It is true that Israel could suffer negative consequences as a result of the Kurds' failed bid for independence. The PUK and Gorran parties, rivals of Barzani's KDP, stand to gain from Barzani's misstep and the ensuing crisis, and they are far more oriented toward Iran and against Jerusalem. The rise of pro-Iranian forces in a previously friendly environment could make Israel's reported use of KRI territory for intelligence collection and operations significantly more difficult.

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