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Turkey-Kurdish Regional Government Relations After The U.S. Withdrawal From Iraq: Putting The Kurds On The Map?



Synopsis

The withdrawal of U.S. combat forces from Iraq at the end of 2011 left behind a set of unresolved problems in the relationship between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), and the Federal Government in Baghdad – notably relating to the disputed boundaries of the KRG, and the extent of its autonomy. Tensions have since been compounded by the discovery of significant quantities of oil and gas in the KRG area, and Erbil's pursuit of an energy policy independent of and in opposition to Baghdad. Turkey, uneasy with the increasingly sectarian and authoritarian flavor of the Shia-dominated government in Baghdad, has since moved closer to the KRG, not least with respect to energy issues. This has deepened Turkish-Iraqi tensions still further. Added to the mix is the increasingly sectarian stand-off in the region as a whole, in large measure as a consequence of Syrian developments, which has further pitted Ankara against Baghdad and its ally, Iran; and the emergence of a bid for autonomy by Syria's Kurds, which has complicated the stance of both Ankara and Erbil towards Syria and towards each other. Washington is in danger of being left behind by the fast-paced events in the region, while the ethnic Kurds of the region may be approaching a decisive moment in their long struggle for self-determination.

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