

**Debate Pack**

1 February 2024

CDP-0025 (2024)

By Philip Loft (subject  
specialist),  
Julie Gill (compiler)

---

# Relationship between the UK and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

<b>1</b>	<b>Summary</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Background</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Press and media articles</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Government statements on Gov.UK</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>PQs</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Other Parliamentary material</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Further reading</b>	<b>25</b>

# 1 Summary

A Westminster Hall debate on the relationship between the UK and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq is scheduled for Wednesday 7 February 2024, from 9:30-11:00am. The debate will be led by Jack Lopresti MP.

# 2 Background

Iraqi Kurdistan is an autonomous region of northeastern Iraq, bordering Syria, Turkey, and Iran. In 2017, the region [held a disputed referendum](#), in which the population voted for independence. The Iraqi, US and UK Governments [backed a continuing federal Iraq](#). Ongoing tensions with the federal government [include over the region's borders and oil fields](#), which represent most of the regional government's revenues.

In 2023/24, [Turkey has also been conducting military strikes](#) against Kurdish groups it says are linked to terrorist activity in the country, and in 2024 [Iran attacked a site which it claimed is linked to Israel](#) (Iran-affiliated groups also have a [history of targeting Kurdish groups](#) in the region). These actions have drawn criticism from the Iraqi Government.

The UK Government supports the territorial integrity of Iraq and in 2023 [discussed with the Iraqi Kurdistan regional government](#) issues such as corruption, climate change, and security. It has [called for Turkey to avoid escalation](#) but says it recognises its security interests in Iraq.

This debate pack provides information on the history of Iraqi Kurdistan, recent military activity in the region by Turkey and Iran, ongoing tensions between the regional and federal government in Iraq, and UK Government statements and diplomatic work relating to the region.

## 2.1 Iraqi Kurdistan: background

### Establishment of Kurdish autonomous region in Iraq

The Kurds are a non-Arab, predominantly Sunni-Muslim people, who are concentrated in an area covering parts of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran. Estimates place their number at 25 to 35 million, making them the fourth largest ethnic group in the Middle East. Kurds live as a minority group in these

states, despite attempts to gain statehood in the past (see the Council on Foreign Relations article, [The Kurd's long struggle with statelessness](#)).<sup>1</sup>

Iraqi Kurds have lived in an autonomous region since the early 1990s, although that autonomy was strengthened and codified in the 2005 Iraqi constitution that followed the removal of Saddam Hussein from power. Kurdish autonomy in Iraq had developed in the 1990s as a result of a no-fly zone being established to create a 'safe haven' for civilians from Saddam's regime, which had violently suppressed the Kurdish population.<sup>2</sup>

Iraqi Kurdistan borders Syria and Turkey to its north and west and Iran to its east. Both Iran and Turkey have occasionally launched military operations against Kurdish groups that they consider to be supporting terrorist activity in their countries (see below). The emergence of Islamic State/Daesh in 2014 and its capturing of Mosul and Sinjar also saw Kurdish forces fight alongside Iraqi forces and an international coalition to repel the group.<sup>3</sup>

## 2017 independence referendum

In 2017, Iraqi Kurdistan held a referendum on independence, in which 92% of voters backed independence on a turnout of 72%. The vote was non-binding and opposed by the Governments of Iraq, Iran, and Turkey.<sup>4</sup> The UK Government did not support independence, stating in 2018 that it supports a federal Iraq in which the Kurds participate fully:

The UK Government supports a strong Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) within a strong and unified Iraq. We underline consistently to the Federal Government of Iraq and to the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) the importance of upholding the rights of the Kurdish population in Iraq, as set out in the 2005 Iraqi Constitution. Moreover, we make clear at every opportunity, to both the Federal Government and the KRG, the importance of Kurdish political leaders and Members of Parliament playing a central role in the Iraqi Council of Representatives in Baghdad and in the national political affairs of Iraq. Kurdish political participation is not only vital for safeguarding Kurdish interests, but also for ensuring the unity, stability and success of Iraq as a whole.<sup>5</sup>

In post-2003 Iraq, a convention has developed for the presidency to be held by a Kurdish politician.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> [Who are the Kurds?](#), BBC News, 15 October 2019 and C. Riches and J. Palmowski, 'Kurdistan' in a Dictionary of World History, 2021

<sup>2</sup> Human Rights Watch, [Campaign of extermination against the Kurds](#), 1993

<sup>3</sup> [Iraqi Kurdistan profile- timeline](#), BBC News, 31 October 2017 and [Iraqi Kurdistan profile](#), BBC News, 25 April 2018

<sup>4</sup> [92% of Iraqi Kurds back independence from Baghdad \[...\]](#), France 24, 27 September 2017

<sup>5</sup> [Government response to the Foreign Affairs Committee report on Kurdish aspirations and the interests of the UK](#), 10 April 2018, 'Iraq'

<sup>6</sup> Commons Library research briefing, [Iraq in 2022: Forming a government](#), November 2022, p3

## Tensions with the federal government

The Kurdish regional government and the Iraqi federal government contest the boundaries of the Kurdish autonomous region, including its oil fields. Following the collapse of the Iraqi army in the region in the wake of Islamic State/Daesh in 2014, Kurdish forces were able to occupy the Kirkuk oil fields. However, following the disputed referendum in 2017, they were retaken by Iraqi government forces. The UN has sought to mediate.<sup>7</sup>

The Kurdish autonomous government have criticised federal control of the region's energy exports and called for new national legislation.<sup>8</sup> Oil exports from Iraqi Kurdistan to Turkey have been paused since late March 2023 as arbitration takes place.<sup>9</sup> Oil constitutes 80% of the region's budget.<sup>10</sup>

In September 2023, violent protests occurred in disputed Kirkuk. As noted in European Council on Foreign Relations analysis, the area's "unresolved status is a looming disruptor" to Iraqi and Kurdish governance.<sup>11</sup>

## Elections due in Iraqi Kurdistan

Elections were due to be held to the Kurdistan regional parliament in October 2022 (the previous elections being held in 2018). However, these were postponed due to disagreement over constituency boundaries.<sup>12</sup> In 2023, Iraq's supreme court said the postponement is unconstitutional, but no further steps have been taken.<sup>13</sup> Elections were most recently expected to be held in February 2024, but in January these were postponed further.<sup>14</sup>

In June 2023, the UK Government called for the elections to be held as soon as possible:

The UK Government supports a democratic Kurdistan Region within a peaceful and prosperous Iraq. Parliamentary elections in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) were due in October 2022, and we continue to press the Kurdistan Regional Government to reschedule these elections to take place as soon as possible. The Minister of State for the Middle East, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon visited Iraq, including the KRI, in March and emphasised to senior figures in the Kurdistan Regional Government the importance the UK places on democracy in the KRI. Our Ambassador in Baghdad and Consul General in Erbil

---

<sup>7</sup> International Crisis Group, [Reiving UN mediation on Iraq's disputed internal boundaries](#), December 2017

<sup>8</sup> [Iraqi Kurdistan Government denies taking control of oil fields in Kirkuk](#), Al-Monitor, 16 May 2022

<sup>9</sup> [Iraqi Kurdish losses reach \\$2 billion ahead of talks on resuming oil exports](#), Reuters, 14 June 2023

<sup>10</sup> Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, [Trilateral agreement necessary to resolve Turkey-Iraq oil dispute](#), 22 September 2023

<sup>11</sup> European Council on Foreign Relations, [Iraq's persistent fault line: The dangers of escalating tensions in Kirkuk](#), 2 October 2023

<sup>12</sup> [Iraqi Kurdish MPs rule out parliamentary elections in November](#), The New Arab, 25 April 2023

<sup>13</sup> [Iraqi Kurdistan 2022 parliament extension unconstitutional, supreme court rules](#), Reuters, 30 May 2023

<sup>14</sup> Washington Institute, [Renewing the KRG's opposition parties for 2024 parliamentary elections](#), 8 January 2024

continue to raise this issue in public and private, most recently in meetings with the leaders of political parties, the President, Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister in May.<sup>15</sup>

## 2.2

## 2023/24 Violence in Iraqi Kurdistan

### Turkish military actions

The [Kurdistan People's Congress \(formerly the Kurdistan Workers' Party, PKK\)](#), has waged an insurgency since 1984 against the Turkish state, seeking greater cultural and political rights and an autonomous or independent Kurdish state. The PKK is proscribed as a terrorist organisation by the UK, United States and the European Union. Turkey has been conducting military action against the PKK in northern Iraq since the 1980s as part of its larger campaign against the group in Syria and Turkey.<sup>16</sup>

In October 2023, the Turkish armed forces launched a series of attacks on PKK sites in Iraq alongside the People's Defense Unit (YPG) in Syria, which forms part of the wider US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). The Turkish Government launched these in response to a suicide bombing in Ankara on 1 October, which it says was carried out by attackers from northeastern Syria. The PKK has claimed responsibility for the attack.<sup>17</sup> Turkish attacks against Kurdish armed groups have continued in 2024, with recent operations in response to attacks on Turkish military bases in Iraq.<sup>18</sup>

The Iraqi President has criticised the air strikes and presence of Turkish bases in the Kurdistan region.<sup>19</sup> In response to a July 2023 parliamentary question, the Minister for the Middle East, Lord Ahmad, said the UK "recognises Turkey's legitimate security interest in Syria and Iraq" and regularly engaged with Turkey on regional security issues and to encourage restraint from activity that leads to regional instability.<sup>20</sup>

### Iranian missile attack, January 2024

During the Israel-Hamas conflict, Iran-affiliated groups have launched attacks on US forces in the region and against Israel.

---

<sup>15</sup> PQ 187388 [[Iraq: Elections](#)], 8 June 2023

<sup>16</sup> Commons Library, [Turkey under Erdoğan: Recent developments and the 2023 elections](#), p19 and Washington Institute for Near East Policy, [Turkey's war in northern Iraq: By the numbers](#), 28 July 2022

<sup>17</sup> [Turkey says bombers came from Syria, eyes cross-border targets](#), Reuters, 4 October 2023; [Turkey suicide bombing updates: PKK claims responsibility, says report](#), Al-Jazeera, 1 October 2023

<sup>18</sup> [Turkey bombs Kurdish militants in Syria and Iraq](#), Politico, 13 January 2024

<sup>19</sup> [Iraq rejects Turkish strikes in Kurdistan region, seeks resolution](#), New Arab, 2 October 2023

<sup>20</sup> PQ HL9366 [[Turkey: Armed forces](#)] 28 July 2023

In January 2024, Iran launched a missile strike against what it said was an “Israel spy base” near Kurdistan’s capital city, Erbil. Local authorities said four civilians were killed and six injured, and Iraq recalled its ambassador from Iran, saying the strikes were a “blatant violation” of Iraqi sovereignty. The United States and United Kingdom also criticised the Iranian action.<sup>21</sup>

These are not the first Iranian attacks in Kurdistan. In 2022, as part of its response to the protests that followed the death of Iran-Kurdish Mahsa Amini in September 2022, Iran’s government accused Kurdish groups of fermenting unrest and launched several drone and missile attacks against Kurdish opposition groups in Iraq. Iran-affiliated Popular Mobilization Units in Iraq have also targeted Kurdish groups and infrastructure.<sup>22</sup>

## 2.3

## UK Government approach

### Foreign Affairs Committee report, 2018

In 2018, the Commons Foreign Affairs Committee published a report, [Kurdish aspirations and the interests of the UK](#). The inquiry took place in the context of fighting with Islamic State/Daesh and the 2017 independence referendum. The Committee raised the “significant risk” of tension between Iraq’s federal government and Kurdistan’s autonomous government, recommended the UK Government assess the degree of corruption and state of democracy in the Kurdistan region, and the violence committed by Iran-aligned Shia militias.<sup>23</sup>

The UK Government said it was working diplomatically to improve relations between the two governments and was willing to challenge the Kurdish autonomous government on media freedom, corruption and democracy.<sup>24</sup>

### UK Government activity in 2023

The UK Government says it is continuing to support stability in Iraqi Kurdistan and to support its negotiations with the Iraqi federal Government.<sup>25</sup>

In March 2023, the Minister for the Middle East, Lord Ahmad, visited Kurdistan to discuss digital reforms as well as climate change, human rights, and security.<sup>26</sup> In August 2023, Security Minister, Tom Tugendhat, visited the

---

<sup>21</sup> [US condemns Iran for ‘reckless’ missile strikes on northern Iraq](#), BBC News, 16 January 2024: PQ 9775 [[Iran: Kurds](#)], 19 January 2024

<sup>22</sup> Fikra Forum, [Iran’s pressure campaign on Iranian Kurds continues](#), 13 September 2023

<sup>23</sup> Foreign Affairs Committee, [Kurdish aspirations and the interests of the UK](#), HC 518, 11 February 2018, section 2

<sup>24</sup> [Government response to the Foreign Affairs Committee report on Kurdish aspirations and the interests of the UK](#), 10 April 2018, ‘Iraq’

<sup>25</sup> PQ 200201 [[Iraq: Kurds](#)], 17 October 2023

<sup>26</sup> Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), [Lord Ahmad strengthens the UK-Iraq partnership](#), 3 March 2023

region to discuss organised crime, including immigration, crime, human trafficking and narcotics.<sup>27</sup>

As of 13 June 2023, there were 154 British military personnel deployed in the Kurdistan region of Iraq under [Operation Shader](#) and [Operation Inherent Resolve](#) (which target Islamic State/Daesh in Syria and Iraq).<sup>28</sup>

The UK Government also says journalists and political activists “continue to face intimidation and indefinite detention” and that “conservative norms and discriminatory laws harm women and girls and the LGBT+ community”.<sup>29</sup> The Iraq section of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office’s [Human rights and democracy report 2022](#), July 2023, provides more information.

The UK also supports the Iraqi Kurdistan region as part of its international aid budget and conflict, stability, and security fund (CSSF), including through the UK’s [Iraq crisis response and resilience programme](#)

---

<sup>27</sup> Home Office, [Security Minister visits Iraq to strengthen security partnership](#), 23 August 2023

<sup>28</sup> PQ 188914 [[Iraq: Kurds](#)], 19 June 2023

<sup>29</sup> PQ 196422 [[Iraq: Kurds](#)], 11 September 2023

### 3

## Press and media articles

The following is a selection of press and media articles relevant to this debate.

Please note: the Library is not responsible for either the views or accuracy of external content.

[\*\*Khor Mor attacks directly impact Kurdistan Region citizens, says Dana Gas\*\*](#)

Rudaw

Julian Bechocha

31 January 2024

[\*\*KRG seeking to increase representations abroad, says PM Barzani\*\*](#)

Rudaw

28 January 2024

[\*\*Sources confirm Iraq did send complaint letter to UNSC\*\*](#)

Rudaw

25 January 2024

[\*\*UK 'strong partner' of Kurdistan Region, says PM Barzani\*\*](#)

Kurdistan 24

Spindar Mohammed

21 January 2024

[\*\*Aim of attacks on Erbil is to destabilize KRG: UK ambassador\*\*](#)

Rudaw

21 January 2024

[\*\*Mary Glendon MP: My call for solidarity with our allies in Iraqi Kurdistan\*\*](#)

Northumberland Gazette

19 January 2024

[\*\*Kurdish identity of disputed areas at risk: Kurdish official\*\*](#)

Rudaw

10 November 2023

[\*\*Peshmerga Reforms: Navigating Challenges, Forging Unity\*\*](#)

Foreign Policy Research Institute

Myles B Caggins III

31 October 2023



**Iran says deal agreed with Iraq for disarming, relocation of Kurdish rebels**

Al Jazeera

Maziar Motamedi

28 August 2023

**UK hopes for sustainable solution to Kurdistan Region oil exports: Consul**

Rudaw

9 May 2023

**UK to maintain 'advice and support' for Kurdistan Region to counter missiles, kamikaze drones**

Kurdistan 24

4 February 2023

## 4

# Government statements on Gov.UK

### Second UK-Iraq Strategic Dialogue, 2023: joint communiqué

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

4 July 2023

The UK and the Republic of Iraq agreed a joint communiqué during the UK-Iraq Strategic Dialogue, held in London on 3 to 4 July 2023.

### Lord Ahmad strengthens the UK-Iraq partnership

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

3 March 2023

Lord Tariq Ahmad, Minister of State for the Middle East, visited Iraq, including the Kurdistan region, from 28 February to 2 March 2023.

## 5

## PQs

### Iran: Kurds

19 Jan 2024 | 9775

#### **Asked by: Wayne David**

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if he will raise the missile attack by Iran on Iraqi Kurdistan on 15 January 2023 at the United Nations Security Council.

#### **Answered by: David Rutley | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

We stand with the Kurdistan Regional Government in condemning these attacks and will continue to support the sovereignty and security of Iraq, including the Kurdistan Region. We continue to work together with international partners on this to agree the best way forward to deal with Iran's destabilising activities across the region. A decision on whether to raise this at the United Nations Security Council will be made in due course.

### Kurds: Foreign Relations

19 Jan 2024 | 9774

#### **Asked by: Wayne David**

To ask the Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, if the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs will meet the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government at the World Economic Forum in Davos.

#### **Answered by: David Rutley | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

The Foreign Secretary met with Masrour Barzani, Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government, at the World Economic Forum in Davos.

### Business Questions

18 Jan 2024 | 743 c1037

#### **Mary Glendon**

Hon. Members who visited Iraqi Kurdistan with the all-party parliamentary group on the Kurdistan region in Iraq know that it is a firm ally against extremism, and they will be disgusted that the Iranian regime has targeted the capital, Irbil, with missiles, killing a prominent businessman, his baby daughter and others in a vile and illegal act. May we have a debate in Government time on how the Government can best assist our allies and support Iraq's complaint at the United Nations about Iranian aggression? Could the Leader of the House prompt the Foreign Secretary to discuss the issue with the Kurdish Prime Minister in Davos?

**Penny Mordaunt | Leader of the House of Commons**

I will certainly make sure that the Foreign Secretary has heard what the hon. Lady has said. She will know that the next Foreign Office questions are on 30 January, and she may also wish to raise it then. I thank her for shining a spotlight on that particularly brutal attack. Again, it is highly consistent with the Iranian regime's standard operating procedure in many places around the world.

**Islamic State: Military Intervention**

**19 Dec 2023 | 6341**

**Asked by: James Wild**

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what (a) diplomatic and (b) military contribution the UK is making to the Global Coalition Against Daesh.

**Answered by: James Heappey | Ministry of Defence**

The UK remains committed to the Global Coalition Against Daesh and is the second largest contributor to Operation INHERENT RESOLVE.

As part of this military contribution, the UK provides support and funding for a range of initiatives across the region, including providing training, mentoring and professional military education to the Iraqi Security Forces. The UK has trained over 111,000 members of Iraqi Security forces, including over 21,000 of the Kurdish Peshmerga.

The UK also leads the Coalition's counter-Daesh communications activity, working with Government and civil society partners.

**Iraq: Press Freedom**

**18 Oct 2023 | 201399**

**Asked by: Zarah Sultana**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what representations his Department has made to the (a) Kurdistan Regional Government and (b) Government of Iraq on (i) the imprisonment of Kurdish journalists Sherwan Sherwani and Guhdar Zebarito and (b) levels of press freedom in those regions.

**Answered by: David Rutley | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

The UK Government remains committed to pressing the case for improvements in the human rights situation in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) and to advocating for human rights for all, including in relation to freedom of expression and the freedom for journalists to do their jobs free from harm. The UK Government, through our Consulate General in Erbil, takes a close interest in the treatment of journalists and human rights activists in the KRI, and we are closely monitoring the cases of Sherwan Sherwani and

Guhdar Zebari. We have raised our issues about the case of Guhdar Zebari in public and in private with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) at the highest levels, and a representative from the British Consulate General attended his trial. We have always been clear that journalists and political activists should be free to operate without undue interference from security forces or fear of indefinite detention.

**[Iraq: Kurds](#)**

**17 Oct 2023 | 200201**

**Asked by: Wayne David**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether his Department has taken steps to provide economic support to the Kurdistan Regional Government in the last 12 months.

**Answered by: David Rutley | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

The UK supports a secure, stable and thriving Kurdistan Region in Iraq (KRI) within a peaceful and prosperous Iraq. Through our diplomatic engagements, we continue to encourage all parties to work together to resolve outstanding regional issues. The importance of our strong and strategic partnership with the KRI was further reinforced during visits by the Minister of State for the Middle East, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon in March, and Security Minister Tom Tugendhat in August this year. Through various funding mechanisms, including Official Development Assistance, and the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund, the UK continues to support efforts to tackle underlying drivers of instability across Iraq and KRI.

**[Iraq: Kurds](#)**

**16 Oct 2023 | 199914**

**Asked by: Jack Lopresti**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what information his Department holds on the (a) political and (b) fiscal relationships between the regional and federal governments in the Kurdistan region and Iraq; and if he will make a statement.

**Answered by: David Rutley | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

The UK supports a secure, stable, and thriving Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) within a peaceful and prosperous Iraq. Ministers and senior UK officials have advocated repeatedly for unity and increased cooperation within the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). We continue to encourage cooperation between Baghdad and Erbil to resolve outstanding issues where they exist, including around budget, salary payments, security cooperation and the oil and gas sector. The UK is supporting Iraq as it undertakes the bold

long-term reforms needed to put Iraq's economy and society on a stable long-term footing.

**Kurds: Foreign Relations**

**16 Oct 2023 | 199872**

**Asked by: Wayne David**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of the UK's bilateral relationship with the Kurdistan Regional Government.

**Answered by: David Rutley | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

The UK supports a secure, stable and thriving Kurdistan Region in Iraq (KRI) within a peaceful and prosperous Iraq. Through our diplomatic engagements, we continue to encourage all parties to work together to resolve outstanding regional issues. The importance of our strong and strategic partnership with the KRI was further reinforced during visits by the Minister of State for the Middle East, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon in March, and Security Minister Tom Tugendhat in August this year. Through various funding mechanisms, including Official Development Assistance, and the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund, the UK continues to support efforts to tackle underlying drivers of instability across Iraq and KRI.

**Iraq: Kurds**

**16 Oct 2023 | 199871**

**Asked by: Wayne David**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions his Department has had with the (a) Federal Government of Iraq and (b) Kurdistan Regional Government on the implementation in (i) Kirkuk and (ii) other disputed territories of Article 140 of the 2005 Iraqi constitution.

**Answered by: David Rutley | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

The UK regularly engages with leaders of Federal Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), including during the recent visit of the Security Minister, Tom Tugendhat, in August. Following the incident in Kirkuk the British Embassy in Iraq met a range of Iraqi counterparts and continues to encourage cooperation between Baghdad and Erbil to resolve outstanding issues. The UK supports all efforts to ensure a secure, stable and thriving KRI exists within a peaceful and prosperous Iraq. The British Consulate General Erbil regularly meets with stakeholders from the disputed territories to understand the situation on the ground and how the disputed nature of these areas is causing challenges for Iraqi citizens. The UK hopes to see provincial

council elections go ahead peacefully on 18 December, following the unrest in early September.

### [Iraq: Kurds](#)

16 Oct 2023 | 199869

**Asked by: Wayne David**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent diplomatic steps his Department has taken to help encourage the resolution of disputes between the federal government in Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government.

**Answered by: David Rutley | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

The UK supports a secure, stable and thriving Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) within a peaceful and prosperous Iraq. Ministers and senior UK officials have advocated repeatedly for unity and increased cooperation within the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). We continue to encourage cooperation between Baghdad and Erbil to resolve outstanding issues where they exist, including around budget, salary payments, security cooperation and the oil and gas sector. The UK is supporting Iraq as it undertakes the bold long-term reforms needed to put Iraq's economy and society on a stable long-term footing.

### [Iraq: Violence](#)

22 Sep 2023 | 199305

**Asked by: Jack Lopresti**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of the implications for his policies of the role of Shia militia groups in recent disturbances in Kirkuk.

**Answered by: David Rutley | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

The UK regularly engages with leaders of Federal Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), including during the recent visit of the Security Minister, Tom Tugendhat in August. Following the recent incident in Kirkuk the British Embassy in Iraq has met a range of Iraqi counterparts and continues to encourage cooperation between Baghdad and Erbil to resolve outstanding issues. The UK supports all efforts to ensure a secure, stable, and thriving KRI exists within a peaceful and prosperous Iraq.

### Iraq and Turkey: Pipelines

15 Sep 2023 | 198073

**Asked by: Jack Lopresti**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, whether he has made a recent assessment of whether the oil pipeline between the Kurdistan Region in Iraq and Turkey will be re-opened.

**Answered by: David Rutley | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

The UK supports a secure, stable, and thriving Kurdistan Region in Iraq (KRI) within a peaceful and prosperous Iraq. Through our diplomatic engagements, we continue to encourage all parties to work together to find a satisfactory and speedy resolution, noting the importance of oil exports via the pipeline to the health of the economy of the KRI and to Iraq.

It would not be appropriate, given the ongoing negotiations between the governments of Iraq and Turkey regarding the pipeline, for HMG to speculate on any timelines for its reopening.

### Iraq: Kurds

19 Jun 2023 | 188914

**Asked by: Jack Lopresti**

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many service personnel are deployed in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq; and on what duties.

**Answered by: James Heappey | Ministry of Defence**

As of 13 June 2023, there were 154 UK Service personnel deployed to the Kurdistan region of Iraq. Those personnel are deployed under Op SHADER and provide mobility support and force protection to the Counter-DAESH coalition activity under Operation Inherent Resolve.

### Iraq: Elections

8 Jun 2023 | 187388

**Asked by: Nadia Whittome**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions his Department has had with Kurdish authorities on the scheduling of parliamentary elections in the Kurdish region of Iraq.

**Answered by: David Rutley | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

The UK Government supports a democratic Kurdistan Region within a peaceful and prosperous Iraq. Parliamentary elections in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) were due in October 2022, and we continue to press the



Kurdistan Regional Government to reschedule these elections to take place as soon as possible. The Minister of State for the Middle East, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon visited Iraq, including the KRI, in March and emphasised to senior figures in the Kurdistan Regional Government the importance the UK places on democracy in the KRI. Our Ambassador in Baghdad and Consul General in Erbil continue to raise this issue in public and private, most recently in meetings with the leaders of political parties, the President, Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister in May.

### **Iraq: Political Prisoners**

**8 Jun 2023 | 187387**

#### **Asked by: Nadia Whittome**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what recent discussions his Department has had with Kurdish authorities on the release of (a) Sherwan Sherwani, (b) Guhdar Zebari and (c) other political prisoners in the Kurdish region of Iraq.

#### **Answered by: David Rutley | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

The UK is committed to pressing the case for improvements in the human rights situation in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), and we consistently raise our issues about restrictions on freedom of expression, in particular the conviction and sentencing of journalists and political activists. During his visit to the KRI in March the Minister for the Middle East, Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon raised concerns over restrictions on media freedom with senior figures in the Kurdistan Regional Government. Our Ambassador in Baghdad, and our Consul General in Erbil, also raise these issues regularly with senior figures in the Kurdistan Regional Government, including the Prime Minister and President, and meet Kurdish journalists and members of civil society to discuss their concerns.

### **Iraq: Islamic State**

**17 May 2023 | HL7612 [corrected]**

#### **Asked by: Lord Alton of Liverpool**

To ask His Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to engage the government of Iraq on the topic of safety and security in Sinjar following the resettlement of Daesh-affiliated families and suspected Daesh perpetrators to Sinjar.

#### **Answered by: Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

Our diplomatic missions are in regular contact with Government of Iraq and Kurdistan regional Government authorities on the safety and security of the communities located in Sinjar. The UK Government provides funding support to the Directorate of Yazidi Affairs and during my [Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of

Wimbledon] recent visit to Iraq I met with Yazidi communities and leaders to hear their experiences and reiterate UK support.

Our "Building Peace and Security in Iraq" (BPSI) programme will support those affected by the protracted displacement crisis and includes both returnees and local communities, who face many of the same problems. The UK continues to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the Government of Iraq as it works to rebuild from Daesh and deliver a more peaceful and hopeful future for its citizens, not divided along sectarian lines of old.

### **Iraq: Kurds**

**31 Jan 2023 | 130041**

#### **Asked by: Alexander Stafford**

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs, what assessment he has made of bilateral relations between the UK and the Kurdistan Region in Iraq.

#### **Answered by: David Rutley | Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office**

The UK remains committed to strong relations with the Kurdistan Regional Government and Federal Government of Iraq and we want to see a strong and successful Kurdistan region within a thriving Iraq. We have a close and strategic partnership with the Kurdish Regional Government who continue to be a close ally in the fight against Daesh. In April 2022, the Prime Minister of the Kurdish Region of Iraq, Masrour Barzani, came to the UK on an official visit, meeting with the Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary and other Cabinet Ministers.

## 6 Other Parliamentary material

### 6.1 Debates

#### [Kurdistan Region in Iraq](#)

**06 Mar 2019 | 655 cc446-60WH**

Jack Lopresti: Motion that this House has considered bilateral relations with the Kurdistan region in Iraq

#### [Kurdistan Region in Iraq](#)

**04 Jul 2017 | 626 cc35-58WH**

Jack Lopresti: Motion that this House has considered the Kurdistan region in Iraq

### 6.2 Early Day Motions

#### [Arrests and detentions in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq](#)

**EDM 457 (session 2021-22)**

**20 September 2021**

**Patrick Grady**

That this House notes with concern reports by Amnesty International and others that authorities in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq have subjected numerous journalists, activists and protestors to arbitrary arrests and forceable disappearances in a series of crackdowns beginning in March 2020; understands that among those detained is Sherwan Ameen, who graduated from the University of Glasgow's School of Education with a Master's in Teaching Adults in 2015, and who was among a number of teachers arrested for protesting that they had not been paid; further understands that he had been held without charge for almost a year until 6 September when he was charged with High Treason, which carries the death penalty, and that a trial has been set for October 6; calls on the Foreign Secretary to urgently raise this case and the wider situation with counterparts in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq; and supports the calls of Amnesty International for an end to the crackdown on freedom of speech, the immediate release of all those who have been arbitrarily detained, and for the authorities to refrain from using vague and ill-defined laws to curtail the rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly in the region.

**30th anniversary of Sir John Major's safe haven in and no-fly zone over the Kurdistan Region**

**EDM 1677 (session 2019-21)**

**22 March 2021**

**Robert Halfon**

That this House recognises the importance for relations between the UK and the Kurdistan Region in Iraq of the 30th anniversary of Sir John Major pioneering a safe haven and no-fly zone over Iraqi Kurdistan; believes that that has saved many Kurds from the genocidal vengeance of Saddam Hussein, provided a golden opportunity to form the institutional foundations of the modern Kurdistan Region that would probably not exist otherwise and gifted the world a decent, religiously pluralistic, and tolerant Kurdistan that has proved a vital ally in resisting Daesh and extremism; further recognises that Sir John's advocacy of a safe haven in a few hectic weeks in March to April 1991 was a fitting response to the pleas of Iraqi Kurds marooned in the sanctuary of the freezing mountains and in neighbouring countries following their legitimate uprising against a dictator who committed genocide against them in the late 1980s; praises the outcry and organised generosity of the British public who sent tons of provisions to the Kurdistanis and who, together with astute lobbying by Kurdistanis in the UK, provided the moral pressure that enhanced Sir John's far-reaching actions, which were joined by countries including France and the USA; thanks all British and other military personnel who participated in the 12-year operation to protect Kurdistanis; and proudly marks this milestone as an example of moral and pragmatic statesmanship combined with public concern and Kurdistanis appeals for international action.

**Religious freedoms in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq**

**EDM 1503 (session 2019-21)**

**22 February 2021**

**Robert Halfon**

This House warmly welcomes the visit in March by His Holiness The Pope to Iraq and the Kurdistan Region where he will lead Holy Mass at the football stadium in Erbil; fully recognises that the Kurdistan Region enjoys considerable religious and ethnic diversity, that its Ministry of Endowment and Religious Affairs upholds the political, civil, social, cultural, and economic rights of minorities, and that the region has also provided a safe haven for refugees and Internally Displaced People (IDP) of many faiths from Syria and Iraq, including individuals fleeing religious persecution across the wider Middle East; further recognises that Kurdistanis law, passed at the height of the war against Daesh, enshrines fundamental freedoms of thought, religion, speech, and culture, mandates the KRG to guarantee equality for all groups, and criminalises religious discrimination; notes peaceful co-existence between Muslims, Christians, Yezidis, Jews, Sabie Mandani, Zoroastrians, and Bahais, that religious leaders are frequently consulted by ministers and

government officials, and that the 111 strong Kurdistan Parliament includes a list of five Turkmen representatives, five Chaldean, Assyrian, and Syriac representatives, and one Armenian representative; acknowledges that the KRG has allocated lands and built three churches and one cultural centre at its own expense for the Christian community in Erbil, that there are 135 different churches and 92 religious shrines in the region, and that there are public holidays on all religious occasions; and proudly commends the Kurdistan Region on its record and aspirations on religious freedom as exemplary in the Middle East.

### [Kurdistan region in Iraq](#)

**EDM 1061 (session 2019-21)**

**23 October 2020**

**Robert Halfon**

That this House notes reports from the APPG on the Kurdistan Region in Iraq on a virtual delegation to meet Kurdistan leaders; fully acknowledges the crucial role of the Peshmerga in resisting the so-called Islamic State, that Kurdistan's model of peaceful co-existence and equality are vital in continuing efforts to eradicate extremism, and that this is a vital UK interest; stresses the profound impact of covid-19 on oil revenues, which have fallen dramatically and may fade further as a proportion of the region's income; further notes Kurdistan's need to reform its public services and increase income from agriculture, tourism, and light industry with a bigger private sector and tackling corruption; wishes the KRG and the Iraqi Government the best in resolving their long-standing differences through the full implementation of Iraq's federal constitution; believes that the APPG's recommendations to the UK Government accord with its policy of supporting a strong Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in a unified Iraq; further believes that the UK Government should organise an official trade mission to encourage investment by private companies and public institutions; recognises the central importance of universities to the new economy; commends the suggestion that the UK Government send experts to Kurdistan to assess higher education and make recommendations for reform; endorses the APPG's recommendation for skills transfer to Kurdistan MPs; and urges the Foreign Secretary to visit Kurdistan as soon as possible and organise an official visit by the KRG leadership to London to advance bilateral relations.

### [Recognition for the Kurdistan Region of Iraq](#)

**EDM 848 (session 2019-21)**

**7 September 2020**

**Robert Halfon**

That this House regrets that the recent BBC documentary, Once Upon a Time in Iraq, barely mentioned the experience of the Kurds and the Kurdistan Region in Iraq, although it contains about a sixth of the population of the country and was one of the principal victims of the Baathist regime before

2003; agrees with Bashar Warda, the Chaldean archbishop of Erbil, that minority communities such as the Christians and the Yezedis feel voiceless and being airbrushed out of a major BBC documentary is wounding and damaging; notes that the BBC does not claim the documentary is a definitive history of the Iraq War or its people and believes, however, that such large omissions give a misleading impression of the dynamics of Iraqi politics and Kurdistan's vital role in helping stabilise Iraq's democratic process after 2003, as well as sheltering persecuted religious groups and over a million internally displaced people and refugees from Syria; further believes that Kurdistan's perspectives and information on its democratic aspirations, religious pluralism, gender equality, and reforming Iraq could have better provided viewers with a more nuanced picture; and urges the BBC to commission a documentary on the experience of Kurdistan to give its viewers a more comprehensive picture of Iraq.

### [Situation in the Kurdistan Region in Iraq](#)

**EDM 409 (session 2019-21)**

**29 April 2020**

**Robert Halfon**

That this House warmly congratulates the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq, as it lifts the lockdown, for its concerted measures that have so far contained the spread of coronavirus in a population of about 6 million people to 347 cases and four deaths; notes that the KRG carries 70 per cent of the burden of the nearly \$1 billion annual cost for providing basic services to over a million internally displaced people and refugees from Syria, many in camps, and who account for one fifth of the population; further recognises that sharp decreases in oil prices present grave difficulties given that Kurdistan and Iraq rely so heavily on oil revenues; hopes that the Iraqi government and the KRG can soon reach a long-term agreement on oil and revenue-sharing; and urges the caretaker government in Baghdad not to proceed with plans to cut federal subventions to the Kurdistan Region.

### [32nd anniversary of the chemical weapons attack on Halabja](#)

**EDM 295 (session 2019-21)**

**13 March 2020**

**Robert Halfon**

That this House marks the 32nd anniversary of one of the worst incidents of mass murder by chemical weapons when the town of Halabja in the Kurdistan Region in Iraq was attacked by Saddam Hussein's war planes on 16 March 1988; notes that the use of chemical weapons caused agonising death, often in minutes, of 5,000 men, women and children as well as injuring over 10,000 and in many cases inflicting life-long and debilitating illnesses; further notes that the attack on Halabja was accompanied by a wider campaign of genocide known as the Anfal in which about 180,000 Kurds were murdered and thousands of villages razed to the ground in an act of destruction with

continuing harm to the agricultural bedrock of the Kurdistan Region; applauds the decision in February 2013 of the UK parliament to formally recognise the Anfal genocide and the decision of the UK government to mark Anfal each year; believes that remembrance is vital not only to mark the memories of those who were murdered, many of whom have yet to be unearthed from so far hidden mass graves, but also to challenge the mentality in parts of Iraq towards the equality of the Kurds; and expresses its full solidarity with the Kurds in Iraq as they seek to overcome their tragic history and forge pluralism and prosperity in a pan-Iraqi context while being key allies in the continuing fight against extremism and bigotry.

### **Bilateral relations with the Kurdistan region in Iraq**

**EDM 94 (session 2019-21)**

**22 January 2020**

**Robert Halfon**

That this House applauds the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) for upholding its integrity in a delicate geopolitical position through adroit management of regional and international relations; supports its efforts to improve relations with the federal government in Baghdad through fully implementing the federal constitution; believes that Kurdistan's quest for good relations with its neighbours while freely choosing allies facilitates vital investment, trade, and capacity-building expertise; recognises that this bolsters reforms to diversify their economy, improve public services, and boost a vibrant private sector and civil society; further believes that such reforms encourage greater accountability, transparency, and participation by youth and women; proudly notes that the KRG identifies the UK as a partner of choice and commends the UK/KRG Reform Partnership to, for instance, professionalise and unify the Peshmerga; commends the Peshmerga and the KRG for successfully maintaining internal security and stability and exemplary religious moderation, tolerance and pluralism that defies extremism, which remains potent despite major territorial losses by the so-called Islamic State; agrees with the KRG that withdrawing UK, US and other troops from Iraq would be unwise and that Iraq should not be a battlefield for others; suggests that the KRG's position and experience enables it to better interact with relevant actors to de-escalate tensions and makes the KRG a vital interlocutor for UK foreign and security policy; and urges the UK Government at the earliest opportunity to invite the KRG leadership on an official visit to meet the Prime Minister and others and consolidate these bilateral relations.

**Effect of Turkish military action on the Kurdistan Region in Iraq**

**EDM 8 (session 2019-19)**

**14 October 2019**

**Mary Glendon**

That this House believes that Turkey's attack on northern Syria is a humanitarian disaster and Turkey should withdraw immediately and negotiate before more innocent people are killed, injured, and displaced; fears that Turkey's actions could effectively Arabise Kurdish lands in Syria forever and represent ethnic cleansing; notes that the attack presents a clear and present danger to the people, security, economy, and even existence of the neighbouring Kurdistan Region in Iraq, which sees itself as a partner of the UK and other Western countries; believes that many thousands of Syrian Kurdish civilians will seek safety in the Kurdistan Region, whose government has already prepared three refugee camps in Duhok where up to 300,000 Syrians have lived since the start of the Syrian civil war in 2011; notes the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) commendable generosity towards refugees and about 1.5 million Iraqi citizens who fled to Kurdistan after the capture of Mosul in 2014, and most of whom remain in Kurdistan; further notes that this placed great strains on Kurdistan public services; urges the UK to do more to assist the KRG; believes that chaos and conflict in Syria will help revive Daesh as a danger to the KRG; and that this necessitates concerted assistance from the UK and others who should recognise that the Kurds remain vital allies in resisting Daesh fascism and for common values of democracy, tolerance, and pluralism whose defence in the Kurdistan Region needs to be a major UK priority.

**New President of the Kurdistan Region in Iraq**

**EDM 2481 (session 2017-19)**

**12 June 2019**

**Mary Glendon**

That this House warmly congratulates Nechivan Barzani on his election by Parliament and his inauguration as President of the Kurdistan Region in Iraq; wishes him the best in uniting the Kurdistan Region, advancing economic and political reform, and further improving relations with the federal government in Baghdad through the full implementation of the Iraqi federal constitution and the finalisation of the status of disputed territories as well as building even better bilateral relations with the UK; and hopes that he and colleagues will be able to pay an official visit to the UK in the near future to meet the Prime Minister.



## 7

## Further reading

[UK-Iraq development partnership summary July 2023](#), Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office policy paper, 17 July 2023

[The crisis of representation in the Kurdistan region of Iraq \(PDF\)](#), Clingendael report, 19 April 2023

[Explainer: Article 140, Iraq Constitution 2005](#), Presidency of the Kurdistan Region - Iraq

[APPG Kurdistan](#) (Website of the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Kurdistan)

[All-Party Parliamentary Group on the Kurdistan Region in Iraq](#) (membership)

[All-Party Parliamentary Group for Kurdistan in Turkey and Syria](#) (membership)

[Bilateral relations with the Kurdistan region in Iraq](#), Commons Library debate pack, CDP-2019-0056, 1 March 2019

[Kurdistan region in Iraq](#), Commons Library debate pack, CDP-2017-0129, 30 June 2017

### Disclaimer

The Commons Library does not intend the information in our research publications and briefings to address the specific circumstances of any particular individual. We have published it to support the work of MPs. You should not rely upon it as legal or professional advice, or as a substitute for it. We do not accept any liability whatsoever for any errors, omissions or misstatements contained herein. You should consult a suitably qualified professional if you require specific advice or information. Read our briefing '[Legal help: where to go and how to pay](#)' for further information about sources of legal advice and help. This information is provided subject to the conditions of the Open Parliament Licence.

### Sources and subscriptions for MPs and staff

We try to use sources in our research that everyone can access, but sometimes only information that exists behind a paywall or via a subscription is available. We provide access to many online subscriptions to MPs and parliamentary staff, please contact [hoclibraryonline@parliament.uk](mailto:hoclibraryonline@parliament.uk) or visit [commonslibrary.parliament.uk/resources](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/resources) for more information.

### Feedback

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publicly available briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated to reflect subsequent changes.

If you have any comments on our briefings please email [papers@parliament.uk](mailto:papers@parliament.uk). Please note that authors are not always able to engage in discussions with members of the public who express opinions about the content of our research, although we will carefully consider and correct any factual errors.

You can read our feedback and complaints policy and our editorial policy at [commonslibrary.parliament.uk](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk). If you have general questions about the work of the House of Commons email [hcenquiries@parliament.uk](mailto:hcenquiries@parliament.uk).

The House of Commons Library is a research and information service based in the UK Parliament. Our impartial analysis, statistical research and resources help MPs and their staff scrutinise legislation, develop policy, and support constituents.

Our published material is available to everyone on [commonslibrary.parliament.uk](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk).

Get our latest research delivered straight to your inbox. Subscribe at [commonslibrary.parliament.uk/subscribe](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/subscribe) or scan the code below:



 [commonslibrary.parliament.uk](https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk)

 [@commonslibrary](https://twitter.com/commonslibrary)