

KDP-PUK Conflict in Baghdad: A Ticking Time Bomb for Kurdistan Region

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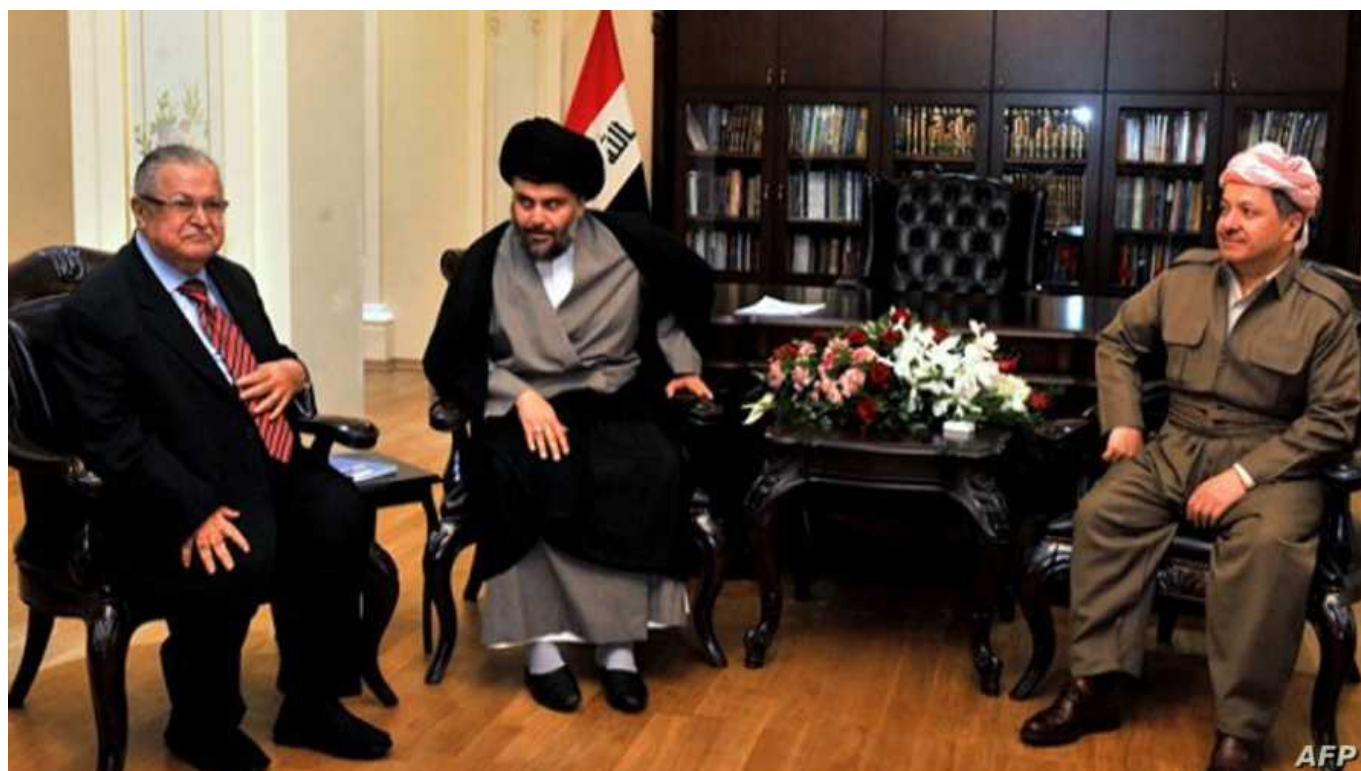
Summary : While Kurdish ambitions have aspired to be a pivotal force in post-2003 Iraq, they have struggled to retain control and influence in Baghdad

The evolving panorama of recent political events accentuates the significance of Kurdish representation in Baghdad and the consequent amplification of threats toward the Kurdistan Region. While Kurdish ambitions have aspired to be a pivotal force in post-2003 Iraq, they have struggled to retain control and influence in Baghdad. This contention finds its genesis in a complex amalgamation of internal discord, international meddling, and splintered Kurdish representation in Baghdad. A thoughtful reflection on these historical missteps is integral to strengthening the Kurds' foothold in Baghdad.

Kurdish Influence Through Iraq's Presidency

Traditionally, Iraq's Presidency is perceived as a mainly symbolic position with limited sway. However, the magnitude of its impact in shaping Iraq's foreign and domestic policies is indisputable. This role was clearly showcased when the late President Jalal Talabani refrained from signing Saddam Hussein's execution order, thereby distancing the Kurds from the resultant turmoil. Equally, Talabani's advocacy for a security agreement with the United States in 2008 was crucial in formulating Iraq's policy direction. The potential resignation of President Barham Salih in response to the October protests exerted significant pressure on the Shiite parties, deterring them from proposing a "very pro-Iranian" candidate.

Yet, this presidential role has also precipitated substantial hurdles for the Kurds and the Kurdistan Region, particularly when divergent opinions emerged between the KDP and the PUK. This discordance came into sharp relief when Talabani, after previously aligning with President Barzani and Al-Sadr, withdrew his support for Al-Maliki's impeachment, a move that ultimately led to the suspension of the Kurdistan Region's budget allocation.



Talabani, Sadr and Barzani's Meeting in Erbil

The competition for the presidency between the PUK and the KDP exacerbated the conflicts between Erbil and Baghdad, with the negative repercussions percolating down to the daily lives of the Kurdistan Region's residents.

The current Iraqi President has the authority to postpone signing the budget for a crucial 45-day period for revisions, a significant span considering the immediate requirement for budget ratification by the Shiite population and the administration. This duration could be exploited by the Kurds to either pressurize the Iraqi Prime Minister to amend these

clauses, as he promised, or utilize it to cultivate a more robust Kurdish lobby within the Iraqi parliament.

Kurdish Influence in Iraq's Parliament

The division of Shiite representatives in the Iraqi parliament between the Sadr and the coordination framework initially seemed to enhance the Kurdish representation. However, internal rifts among the Kurds and inattention to the budget's fine details, particularly from PUK and KDP MPs, compromised their opportunity to capitalize on this division which has left the Kurdistan Region at considerable risk. A heightened focus on Kurdistan-related provisions resulted in the overlooking of critical matters such as Article 16 of the budget, fuel taxes, humanitarian assistance designated for Somalia, Comoros, and Palestine, funds for post-ISIS cities reconstruction, and clauses for the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) and service projects which could have been used to pass other articles related to the Kurds.

The persistent discord between the PUK and KDP echoes beyond Iraq, bearing international implications. These repercussions involve swift political changes and statements from both parties, such as the KDP's threats to withdraw from the Running the State Coalition and the PUK's heightened engagements and mutual interests with pro-Iranian factions and the coordination framework. These unfolding events pose significant threats to the stability of the Kurdistan Region within the Middle East.

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