

THE LAST WRITTEN DRAFT – DELIVERED ON 23RD SEPTEMBER

Dear President Barzani,

I am writing on behalf of the United States to express our profound respect for you and for the people of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. Together, over decades, we have forged a historic relationship, and it is our intention and commitment that this relationship continues to strengthen over the decades to come. Over the past three years, in particular, our strong partnership and your brave decisions to cooperate fully with the Iraqi Security Forces turned the tide against ISIS. We honor and we will never forget the sacrifice of the Peshmerga during our common struggle against terrorism.

Before us at this moment is the question of a referendum on the future of the Kurdistan Region, scheduled to be held on September 25. We have expressed our concerns. These concerns include the ongoing campaign against ISIS, including upcoming operations in Hawija, the uncertain regional environment, and the need to focus intensively on stabilizing liberated areas to ensure ISIS can never return. Accordingly, we respectfully request that you accept an alternative, which we believe will better help achieve your objectives and ensure stability and peace in the wake of this necessary war against ISIS.

This alternative proposal establishes a new and accelerated framework for negotiation with the central Government of Iraq led by Prime Minister Abadi. This accelerated framework for negotiation carries an open agenda and should last no longer than one year, with the possibility of renewal. Its objective is to resolve all issues outstanding between Baghdad and Erbil and the nature of the future relationship between the two. We would also seek to address your immediate fiscal and security needs.

Mr. President, we recognize your frustrations over the past decade, and, indeed, the historic wrongs suffered by the Kurdish people in Iraq since 1921. We accept the essential need to find an agreed way forward that can address the needs and requirements of all the races, creeds, and ethnicities in this ancient land. This is essential for the stability of your region, and protection of our own national security interests. For all of these reasons, it is the policy of the United States under the administration of President Trump to do everything in our power to help you and the central government resolve these outstanding issues, and ensure that our full weight and authority stand behind this new framework for negotiation.

Furthermore, we are prepared to help facilitate U.N. Security Council endorsement, as soon as possible, to further support this process, and the full participation of the United Nations, and our critical partners, such as the U.K. and France. This is a rare opportunity that we respectfully ask you accept as an alternative to the currently scheduled referendum, which we believe would carry serious consequences – and even, perversely, set back your objectives.

Given the history of the Kurdish people, we understand that you would envision this proposed dialogue as a last chance. We believe, however, that it is a chance worth taking – particularly in the wake of your historic victories against ISIS, unprecedented cooperation between Iraqi Security Forces and the Kurdish Peshmerga, and strong international support. **At the end of this process, of course, should the talks not reach a mutually acceptable conclusion or fail on account of lack of good faith on the part of Baghdad we would recognize the need for a referendum.**

In exchange for our commitment to help support this serious framework for dialogue – as an alternative to delay the scheduled referendum – we ask for your commitment on the following points:

First, negotiation with Baghdad remains the basis for reaching an understanding and finding a common agreement on the future relationship between the Kurdistan Region and the Government of Iraq. Whether this means a truly functioning federalism or some other formula confederation, or independence, , it must be reached through a peaceful negotiation.

Second, the Kurdistan Region and the Kurdish Peshmerga would continue to remain key partners within our International Coalition to Defeat ISIS, maintaining appropriate Coalition support, as you continue the historic coordination with the Iraqi Security Forces. The United States would plan to accelerate our own efforts to support Joint Security Mechanisms, particularly in territories, such as Sinjar, that remain unstable after ISIS. We must work jointly together to ensure stability in these sensitive areas.

Third, the boundaries of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region would be identified through negotiations with Baghdad, consistent with the process outlined in Article 140. The United States would support, together with the UN, and in cooperation with the Government of Iraq, an accelerated process to resolve these issues within the set time-frame as described above.

Fourth, we expect that you will continue to exert efforts to cooperate with the current Government of Iraq, led by Prime Minister Abadi, including participation in the 2018 national elections, and exert a positive influence in Baghdad when it comes to forming a new government after those elections. Your statesmanship and leadership will be essential during this post-ISIS period for the entire region.

Parallel to the frame work for negotiation, we will support and facilitate resolving the following issues within one year:

1. Implement meaningful power and revenue sharing arrangements.
2. Implementation of Article 140.
3. To resolve other issues such as Peshmerga, civil aviation, diplomatic representation, etc.

We believe this letter and your courageous decision to accept this alternative sets the foundation for a historic opportunity between the United States, the Kurdistan Region, and the Government of Iraq in the wake of our shared sacrifice and victories against ISIS. On behalf of the United States, President Donald J. Trump, and our entire National Security Team, we are honored to work with you.

Respectfully,

Rex Tillerson