

# PUK joins condemnation of Erbil talks on normalizing ties with Israel

Three main Kurdish political parties, including the ruling Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), have condemned a controversial meeting held in Erbil that called for the normalization of ties between Iraq and Israel.

A Sunni Arab party has also suspended its leader for taking part in the event.

More than 300 Iraqis, including many Sunni tribal leaders, attended the 24 September [conference](#) which called on Iraq to join four other Arab countries in establishing ties with Israel.

The KRG has already sought to distance itself from the meeting, while the federal government strongly condemned it and issued arrest warrants for a number of people who were in attendance.

The region's Interior Ministry initially said the meeting took place without its knowledge, but in a later statement it accused some of the organizers of "diverting" the course of the conference from its original aim.

The Kurdistan Region Presidency also said it was neither "informed" about the conference nor its content.

## **Why it matters**

*Relations with Israel is a political taboo in much of the Middle East and wider Islamic world and strongly rejected by hardline pro-Iranian Iraqi Shiite militants as well as diehard Sunni groups. Hosting such a controversial meeting, therefore, is likely to invite more trouble for the Kurdistan Region which has been facing increasing security challenges. The region has become the target of regular drone attacks this year, which Erbil blames on pro-Iran Shiite militia groups, while Iran has ramped up its threats against the Kurdistan Region for hosting Iranian Kurdish rebel groups. The question on the minds of many, then, is why the KRG gave approval to the meeting and what it hopes to gain from it?*

## **PUK condemnation**

The PUK's Political Bureau "categorically condemns these meetings, whether held in the Kurdistan Region or in Iraq", according to a statement published by Sulaimaniyah-based, *Spee Media* on 26 September. PUK outlets did not carry the statement.

The PUK also expressed support for the "just cause of Palestine" and said that Iraqi foreign policy can only be decided by the federal government as dictated by Iraq's constitution.

"The PUK condemns any efforts to tamper with foreign policy and the principles of Iraq, and which seek to disturb the country's stability and peace and create a crisis," the statement added.

## **Party leader questions KRG**

Kurdistan Justice Group (KJG) leader Ali Bapir questioned the Kurdish authorities' claim that they did not know about the meeting, *Khandan* website reported yesterday.

Addressing an election rally today in Sulaimaniyah, Bapir said: "If the KRG knew about it, it is a disaster, and if they did not know about it, it is an even bigger disaster."

The head of the Kurdistan Islamic Union's Leadership Council, Hadi Ali, described the event as "a very bad activity, which will further create and complicate issues for the region," *Kurdiu* website reported yesterday.

## **Sunni party suspends leader**

Separately, the Sunni Sons of Iraq Awakening today suspended its leader, Wisam Al-Hardan, for participating in the meeting, *Baghdad Today* website reported.

The party assigned Hardan's deputies Muhammad Ali Sulaiman and Muaid Ibrahim to run the party temporarily, the political body of the party announced at a news conference today.

Yesterday, Baghdad's Karkh Investigative Court issued [arrest warrants](#) for Hardan and a number of other Sunni politicians who attended the meeting.