

(WASHINGTON)--- Congressman Allen West (R-FL) released this statement today after meeting with leaders of the Kurdistan Regional Government Delegation; including Fuad Hussein, Chief of Staff to President Masoud Barzani, Falah Bakir, head of the KRG Dept. of Foreign Relations, Ashti Hawrami, Minister of Natural Resources and Qubad Talabani, the KRG Representative to the U.S:

"As a 22-year United States Army Veteran who served in Iraq and worked alongside the Kurdish people, I can tell you by experience that the Kurdish people and the Kurdistan government are now and have always been a strong ally to the United States. Their region in the Northern part of Iraq has been continually under attack, and now as United States troops are set to withdraw from Iraq, the Kurds are concerned for their physical and economic security, and rightfully so, as regional powers are poised to play a central role in the Iraqi government.

According to Mr. Hussein, the Obama Administration has told the Kurds they are 'special friends.' It is time for the Administration to define what that relationship means and what if anything the United States is willing to do to help secure a safe and prosperous Kurdistan.

Some of the Kurdistan government concerns, include: What is America's strategic, long-term vision for Iraq? How will the Regional influences affect the Kurdistan region? and What kind of influence can the Kurds have in Iraq when only three percent of the Iraqi military currently is Kurdish?

The solutions to these questions are reachable. First and foremost, Kurdistan must be respected and included as part of the Iraqi constitution. The United States must also work to help develop more economic opportunities in Kurdistan, including greater United States participation in the oil and gas sector. Another important solution includes encouraging Iraq to examine Federalism as part of its government structure, and to create a central government that shares power with different area's of the country.

The Kurdish people are the largest ethnic group in the world without a country. They are pro-American and have proven to be a strong ally to the United States during the war in Iraq. America owes it to the Kurds to make sure they are treated with respect and included during this transition. As President Obama met with Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki today, the Kurds also want their voice heard. The Kurdistan government is asking us loud and clear, to not

forget about their people during this time of great uncertainty. The consequences of a divided Iraq could be disastrous."

*For pictures of the meeting, click [here](#).*