

Pro-Kurdish US lawmaker to head key House committee

Previously, Rep. Eliot Engel (D, New York) backed legislation authorizing the direct US provision of arms to the Peshmerga. (Photo: Tom Williams/CQ Roll Call)

WASHINGTON DC (Kurdistan 24) - On January 3, when the new US Congress takes office, Rep. Eliot Engel (D, New York) will become the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee.

Engel is a long-time supporter of the Kurds. In 2014, he pressed the Obama administration as to “why the Kurds, as a distinct people, aren’t entitled to the same rights of self-determination the Palestinians enjoy.”

The following year, Engel backed legislation authorizing the direct US provision of arms to the Peshmerga.

And two years after that, Engel supported the Kurdistan independence referendum, issuing a statement on September 25, the day of the vote, in which he affirmed, “For decades, the Kurdish people have endured campaign after campaign of atrocities, so it’s no wonder that they seek self-determination to protect themselves in the future.”

After Iraq attacked Kirkuk the next month, in a military operation engineered by Qasim Soleimani, head of the Quds Force of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, Engel strongly [criticized](#) the administration’s neutral stance.

Engel later [spoke](#) with Kurdistan 24, explaining, “I am very sympathetic to the Kurds,” whom he repeatedly described as US allies.

Rep. Eliot Engel: Kurd are entitled to their own country



“Personally, just speaking for me, I think the Kurds are entitled to a country, a nation of their own,” he said.

Engel has been the Foreign Affairs Committee’s “ranking member”—the most senior figure from the minority party. Because his party took the House of Representatives in Tuesday’s elections, Engel will become committee chairman in January.

As head of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Engel will have the authority to determine the topics of committee hearings and call for testimony from individuals whose knowledge and expertise he considers valuable.

Thus, he will play a key role in setting the foreign policy agenda of the next US Congress.

“I think it’s very positive,” Kathryn Porter, the President and founder of the Leadership Council for Human Rights and a long-time friend of the Kurdish people, told Kurdistan 24.

“I look forward to working with him to find better ways to help the Kurds,” she said.

Porter, who describes herself as a political independent “with close friends on both sides of the aisle,” also explained that Nancy Pelosi (D, California), who was House Minority Leader and will, most likely, be elected by the Democrats as Speaker of the House, was also “extremely helpful on the Kurds,” and “I know she will be again.”

Thus, it seems that the next House of Representatives will be more sympathetic to Kurdish aspirations than the previous one. However, partisan divisions in Washington are now very strong, and Kurds can only hope that at least on foreign policy issues, the two sides will be able to find some *modus vivendi*.

President Donald Trump and his National Security Adviser, John Bolton, are [both](#) extremely supportive of the Kurds—significantly more so than their predecessors. If bipartisan cooperation is possible on Kurdish issues, perhaps a way can be found to overcome the bureaucratic sclerosis that, so far, has continued to insist on preserving a US posture that subordinates Erbil’s interests and concerns to those of Baghdad.

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