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## ITALIAN DEFENCE MINISTER IN IRAQ FOR MOSUL DAM TALKS

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Italian Defence Minister Roberta Pinotti made an unannounced visit to Iraq on Monday to discuss logistics for deploying 450 troops near the front line with Islamic State to protect workers carrying out repairs to the Mosul dam.

Pinotti met in Baghdad with Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, according to a statement from his office. She later travelled to Erbil, the Kurdish regional capital 115 km (70 miles) east of Mosul dam, Italian defence forces said.

Italy has about 750 soldiers in Iraq, mostly training Iraqi army and police in Baghdad and Erbil, but the new troops will be deployed not far from Islamic State-held Mosul, less than 20 km away from the dam, in a potential combat zone.

The Iraqi government signed a \$296-million (£205.7 million) contract in February with Italy's Trevi Group to make badly needed upgrades to the 3.6-km-long (2.2-mile) Mosul dam, which has suffered from structural flaws since it was built in the 1980s.

A delegation from Trevi visited the dam in March to begin preparing a nearby site to host the engineers and soldiers, which a source said could take up to six months to complete.

Islamist insurgents seized the dam in August 2014, leading to fears they might blow it up and unleash a wall of water on Mosul and Baghdad that could kill thousands of civilians. Kurdish Peshmerga fighters recaptured the dam two weeks later with the help of U.S. and Iraqi government forces.

A U.S. government briefing paper released in late February said the 500,000 to 1.47 million Iraqis living in the highest-risk areas along the Tigris River "probably would not survive" the impact of a

flood unless they were evacuated. Iraqi authorities have played down the threat, estimating only a one in 1,000 chance of failure.

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Kaynak/Source: