
ISLAMIC STATE: KURDISH PESHMERGA TROOPS WARN OF TOUGH FIGHT AHEAD AS US BOOSTS IRAQ TROOPS

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Kurdish forces battling against Islamic State in Iraq have told the ABC the militants have used chemical attacks and spy drones in a war they warn will get tougher even with more US troops in the country.

The United States is sending another 560 troops to Iraq, an escalation that brings the official number of American military personnel in Iraq to 4,647, according to the New York Times.

The announcement, which comes after the Iraqi army recaptured an airfield at Qayyarah, south of Mosul, was made by US Defence Secretary Ash Carter during a visit to Baghdad.

"This contingent will help the Iraqis establish a logistical springboard for their offensive on Mosul, which Prime Minister Abadi reaffirmed to me he wants to accomplish this year," Mr Carter said.

Establishing the air base will address a major problem facing the Iraqi forces □ a long supply line from their centre in Baghdad, through more than 300 kilometres of desert to the Mosul front line.

While IS has been pushed out of major towns along the route, including Tikrit, the army remains vulnerable to roadside bombs and hit-and-run attacks.

The air base will also make it easier to launch strikes against IS fighters in support of advancing Iraqi troops.

Kurdish Peshmerga forces, who hold large tracts of land to the east of the airbase, warn the fight will get much tougher as the Iraqi army approaches Mosul.

Lieutenant Colonel Srud Barzani told the ABC: "If you need [to] do anything you can do [it], but you must pay a lot of blood [for] Mosul."

The Peshmerga have been securing land abandoned by the Iraqi army when it fled the IS advance in 2014.

Last year they suffered a mustard gas attack on a combat outpost just 25 kilometres east of the Qurayyah airbase.

"They [shot] 15 mortars with a chemical mustard gas in this place. We are in this room, 11 injured, eight of them they have a very bad situation □ burns on the body," Lieutenant Colonel Barzani said.

A few weeks ago, Kurdish forces killed five IS suicide bombers who had launched a surprise attack on their positions.

In an effort to hide from sophisticated thermal imaging equipment, IS fighters have been issued homemade camouflage suits lined with insulation from hot water heaters.

The Kurds say IS has also been fielding its own spy drones: cheap Chinese-made remote-controlled planes, fitted with a camera modified to beam the images back to the controller on the ground.

The area south of Mosul is dotted with Sunni Arab villages where many locals welcomed IS after years of neglect or abuse at the hands of the Shiite dominated Iraqi army.

Some who have fled say IS has worn out its welcome. Others warn they have changed the communities that hosted them and the hatred of the Iraqi army will persist.

Mr Carter congratulated the army on its recent victory over IS in Fallujah and other cities.

But Lieutenant Colonel Barzani warns Mosul presents a challenge of a different magnitude.

"You know Fallujah is a small town. Mosul is a very, very big town and a lot of IS are in this place. And [there are] a lot of big officers in the old Iraqi army [of] Saddam's regime," he says.

Kaynak/Source: