
US CLAIMS DAESH WEAKENED IN IRAQ, SYRIA

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A top US military commander for Iraq and Syria has claimed that successful military campaigns by the allied forces have weakened the DAESH terrorist group by killing 45,000 of its militants in the last two years.

Lieutenant General Sean MacFarland, the outgoing commander of the US-led coalition fighting DAESH in Iraq and Syria, told a Pentagon press briefing that the number of the terror groups combatants had fallen as a result of international military efforts against the group.

He said if the 25,000 killed under his watch are added to the 20,000 DAESH fighters who were killed prior to his arrival, then the total number of fighters taken off the battlefield reaches 45,000.

DAESH is losing ground to US-led military forces in both Iraq and Syria, General MacFarland said, adding that "It is difficult to determine accurate numbers of the terrorist group." The US military estimates the number of active DAESH fighters is currently between 15,000 to 20,000.

"The enemy is in retreat on all fronts," MacFarland stated, also saying that US-backed local forces in both Iraq and Syria have been gaining ground and the flow of foreign fighters to DAESH has sharply fallen in Iraq and Syria.

The US commander said, "All I know is when we go some place, it's easier to go there now than it was a year ago. And the enemy doesn't put up as much of a fight."

MacFarland said Syrian opposition forces are on the brink of defeating DAESH in Manbij, Syria. The city, he said, is largely in their hands and pockets of enemy resistance are shrinking daily.

"I don't give it very long before that operation is concluded, and that will deal a decisive blow to the enemy," he said.

Asked how long it will take, he said possibly a week or two, but noted that there are still a lot of enemy foreign fighters there battling hard to keep control of the city.

MacFarland said that Iraqi forces are in a position to begin retaking the northern city of Mosul. But he added that the US still has quite a bit of work to do at the Qayyarah Air Base in northern Iraq before it can be used as a hub for the battle to retake Mosul.

President Barack Obama authorised the deployment of 560 more US troops to Iraq to help

transform the air base into a staging area for an eventual battle to oust DAESH from Mosul. The group has held Mosul since June 2014 and has used it as a headquarters.

The US troops will include engineers, logistics personnel, security, and communications forces. Some teams of US forces have been in and out of the base to evaluate it and the work that must be done, but officials say large numbers of troops have not yet arrived.

Despite his optimism over the course of the fighting against the group, MacFarland says DAESH is still a threat: "Military success in Iraq and Syria will not necessarily mean the end of DAESH."

"We can expect the enemy to adapt, to morph into a true insurgent force and terrorist organization capable of horrific attacks like the one here on July 3 in Baghdad and those others we've seen around the world."

Source: TRTWorld and agencies

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