
IRAQI PARLIAMENT VOTES TO OUST DEFENSE MINISTER

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Iraqs parliament voted Thursday to oust Defense Minister Khaled al-Obeidi citing corruption charges, even as Iraqi forces pushed to retake a town important for the push on Mosul, the last major stronghold of Islamic State in the country.

The minister was required by law to step down immediately after the vote. Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, who appointed Mr. Obeidi in 2014, said the vote was legal. The Defense Ministry also confirmed he had been voted out from his position.

Parliament is legally capable of giving and then cancelling authority from anyone in the executive side of government, Mr. Abadis spokesman said. This is what happened today.

The ouster of the Iraqi defense minister marks a new political twist in a protracted military campaign to reclaim some of Iraqs biggest cities from Islamic State.

Mr. Obeidi had led the campaign against Islamic State since the terror group swept across Iraq in 2014, seizing roughly a third of the country. It has in recent months suffered a series of defeats on the battlefield.

Mr. Obeidi denies the allegations of corruption against him.

Finally, those who have driven Iraq to its current situation have won, read a post on his official Facebook page, blaming lawmakers for the countrys problems. May the Iraqi people and the army forgive me, since I tried to fight corruption with all possible means. But it seems that corrupt ones are stronger, their voices louder and their acts more effective.

Thursdays vote for removal came after a weekslong fight between Mr. Obeidi and parliament speaker Salim al-Jabouri over mutual allegations of corruption, which both deny. It is the latest

distraction faced by Iraq's parliament, which this spring faced walkouts and sit-ins by members during mass antigovernment protests, with some members exchanging blows.

The U.S.-led military coalition backing Iraqi forces in the fight against Islamic State said it was too early to determine whether Mr. Obeid's exit would impact the start of the planned offensive to retake Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city and Islamic State's last major stronghold in the country.

It's a matter for the Iraqi people and the government of Iraq, said Col. John Dorrian, its spokesman in Baghdad.

The move came as Mr. Abadi said Iraqi forces had secured the town of Qayara, adjacent to a major air base recaptured from Islamic State in early July and used by Iraqi and U.S. forces.

The victory continues a string of victories against Islamic State in the country's north, as the military inches toward Mosul.

This means [progress] toward the big target [] Mosul city and Nineveh province and rescuing its people from the gangs' oppression, Mr. Abadi said in a statement, referring to Islamic State. He has said Islamic State will be defeated in the country by the end of the year.

The U.S.-led coalition said Iraqi forces continued to clear the area.

Days after the air base was taken last month, U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter said he would deploy 560 American troops there to help provide logistical and infrastructure support to Iraqi forces, including Kurdish Peshmerga fighters operating to the north and east of Mosul.

The victory follows the retaking of Fallujah, a major Islamic State stronghold and command center in Anbar province, earlier this year. But while the militants are squeezed on the battlefield, they have increasingly relied on guerilla-style suicide attacks targeting civilians in Baghdad and other cities across the country.

An Islamic State-claimed truck bomb rocked a busy commercial district in the capital in July, killing nearly 300 people in the worst terror attack in the country in more than a decade.

Kaynak/Source: