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**SPARKS FLY BETWEEN TURKEY, IRAQ AS BATTLE LOOMS TO OUST ISIL FROM MOSUL**

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The leaders of Turkey and Iraq exchanged sharp words as they prepare for a military operation to oust Islamic State militants from the terror groups last major redoubt in Iraq.

The latest salvo came from Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, in response to a demand from Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi that Turkey withdraw its troops from Iraq, where they've been training a multi-ethnic force to participate in the looming battle.

"You are not my interlocutor. You are not at my level. You are not my equivalent. You are not of the same quality as me," Erdogan said, referring to al-Abadi in a speech to Muslim religious leaders from the Balkans and Central Asia. "Your screaming and shouting in Iraq is of no importance to us. You should know that we will go our own way," Erdogan said, according to the Associated Press.

The disagreement is about 2,000 Turkish troops based at a camp named Bashiqa in northern Iraq, where Turkey has been training Sunni Muslim Iraqi Arabs and Kurdish Perhmerga forces for a role in liberating Mosul. Thousands of Islamic State fighters have been digging in for months in the city of about 1 million people, which they've controlled since sweeping across Iraq in 2014.

Turkey's parliament two weeks ago voted to extend its troop deployment in Iraq to combat terrorist organizations, according to Reuters. That description is broad enough to encompass the Islamic State and Kurdish militants that Turkey hopes to block from gaining power because they're linked to a separatist movement Turkey has been fighting at home.

Iraq's Shiite-led government wants its forces to lead the offensive and condemned the vote.

"We have asked the Turkish side more than once not to intervene in Iraqi matters and I fear the Turkish adventure could turn into a regional war," al-Abadi warned on Oct. 5 in comments broadcast on state TV. "The Turkish leadership's behavior is not acceptable and we don't want to get into a military confrontation with Turkey."

The U.S. State Department on Tuesday urged Turkey to respect Iraq's wishes.

All of Iraq's neighbors need to respect Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity, State Department spokesman John Kirby said. We call on both governments to focus on their common enemy, our common enemy, which is Daesh, Kirby said, referring to the Islamic State group by its Arab acronym.

The campaign to retake Mosul is an Iraqi operation, Kirby said.

The Iraqi-Turkish spat could hinder preparations for the long-expected showdown, which President Obama's special envoy for U.S. operations against the Islamic State said last week was ready to launch.

We now have all the pieces in place to get (the Islamic State) out of Mosul, the envoy, Brett McGurk, told reporters in a briefing Friday.

The preparations include assembling more than 30,000 fighters including Kurdish Peshmerga, Iraqi Security Forces, about 14,000 local tribal fighters from Nineveh province and local police, McGurk said. The preparations also include a game plan for humanitarian assistance, displaced people and governance, he said.

We worked very hard and had very close cooperation with our partners in Erbil in the Kurdistan Regional Government and (Kurdish) President Massoud Barzani and the Government of Baghdad to agree on the overall disposition of forces — where everybody would go, what they will do, McGurk said.

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