
IRAQ TROOPS ORDERED TO PAUSE MOSUL ADVANCE

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Iraqi troops south of Mosul paused their advance on Wednesday for 48 hours, a decision commanders said was aimed at ensuring a coordinated military offensive to retake Islamic States last major bastion in the country.

Iraqi military officials ordered a pause so an Iraqi army division operating south of Mosul could make up ground. The division had been delayed in the first two days of the offensive, moving only about half a mile along the 35-mile route to Mosul, said an officer with the governments Emergency Response Division. It wasnt clear why the division was delayed, the officer said.

Iraqs parliament votes to oust Defense Minister Khaled al-Obeidi, citing charges of corruption. Mr. Obeidi denies the allegations. The development casts doubt on the Iraqi militarys preparedness for the planned Mosul offensive, though Mr. Obeidi had said his role in operational decisions was less significant than most Iraqis assumed.PHOTO: HADI MIZBAN/ASSOCIATED PRESS

The U.S says it will send an additional 600 troops to Iraq as part of the buildup for the offensive, after the Pentagon requests more advisers to assist the Iraqi military. The new deployment increases the number of U.S. forces on the ground in Iraq to some 5,000.PHOTO: SAUL LOEB/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE/GETTY IMAGES

Iraqi forces moving toward Mosul along one southern front progressed quickly Monday, the first day of the offensive. But the push slowed Tuesday, as forces still miles outside Iraqs second-largest city regrouped and rested before resuming efforts to encircle it.

The officer said that in two days of fighting to clear villages west of the Mosul-Baghdad highway, his forces had encountered 10 suicide car bombers deployed by Islamic State, and intercepted and destroyed seven. The other three exploded but didnt cause casualties.

Although the Sunni Muslim extremist group is still formidable, the officer added, it is employing simpler and fewer defenses than it used in previous battles in the city of Fallujah and elsewhere in Iraq.

So far, this is far easier than Fallujah, he said.

The U.S.-led coalition reiterated support for the Iraqi plan and sought to quash the notion that operations had stalled.

Im not telling the Iraqis to rush to Mosul, Maj. Gen. Gary Volesky, a top American general in Iraq, said Wednesday. He added that the Iraqis shouldnt go so fast that they give combat opportunity to the enemy.

Southeast of Mosul, Kurdish fighters known as Peshmerga also slowed their advance.

Our order is to protect these villages, Gen. Dedawan Khorshid, head of operations, said near the town of Khazer, about 20 miles southeast of Mosul.

Photos: Families Flee as Soldiers Liberate Iraqi Towns From ISIS

Dozens of people escape across the front line south of Mosul, as Iraqi soldiers and Kurdish Peshmerga forces launch an effort to recapture the city from Islamic State

Black smoke from burning oil wells fills the sky on the road to Qayyarah military base in Iraq on Tuesday.

Dozens of women and children reach safety near the village of Bashmana on Wednesday, as Iraqs Emergency Response Division, a part of the countrys security forces, advance toward Mosul in an effort to recapture it from Islamic State.

Kurdish forces known as Peshmerga reclaim the town of Shaquli from Islamic State on Wednesday.

A woman embraces a relative after reaching safety near the village of Bashmana, Iraq, on Wednesday.

The view from a vehicle on the road to Qayyarah military base in Iraq on Tuesday. Civilians have begun to repopulate the recently liberated villages nearby.

Soldiers from Iraqs Emergency Response Division stock up on rockets Wednesday near the village of Bashmana, where the Iraqi military holds a forward operating position.

Peshmerga fighters after they reclaimed the town of Shaqli from Islamic State on Wednesday.

An Iraqi woman named Hind holds her two-month-old baby, Zahara, after escaping Islamic State territory on Wednesday. She said that a neighbor had come to her house and told her that Iraqi security forces were nearby and that they should try to escape; Hinds husband stayed behind. I can't believe I'm going to be safe again, she said, weeping.

In the town of Shaqli, Peshmerga troops carried heavy weapons.

Soldiers from the Emergency Response Division prepare for fleeing refugees.

Kurdish Peshmerga forces in Shaqli after reclaiming it from Islamic State.

After reaching safety near the village of Bashmana, dozens of Iraqi women and children receive water handed out by Iraqi security forces.

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Dozens of women and children reach safety near the village of Bashmana on Wednesday, as Iraqs Emergency Response Division, a part of the countrys security forces, advance toward Mosul in an effort to recapture it from Islamic State.

The Peshmerga were consolidating their gains, coordinating with Iraqi forces and demining Kurdish villages formerly controlled by Islamic State, according to Gen. Khorshid.

Islamic State fighters are sowing mines like seeds, he said.

In the town of Shaqli, Peshmerga troops settled in, their armored vehicles sprouting heavy weapons parked behind freshly made berms.

Some fighters took selfies alongside an abandoned Islamic State truck bomb. The vehicle had approached the front line, then the driver jumped out without detonating the explosives, the Peshmerga said. Meanwhile, warplanes screeched overhead, and the occasional military vehicle rumbled past, kicking up clouds of dust.

Were waiting for orders, said Qahraman Said Hamed, 38, his face grimy from manning a heavy machine gun during the push earlier this week.

So far, he said, the offensive to retake Mosul from Islamic State, which has held the city for more than two years, was proceeding more easily than expected.

Theyre not like they used to be, he said of the jihadists. Theyre getting weaker now. Theyre in defensive positions and just trying to protect themselves.

Kaynak/Source: