
IRAQ SECURITY FORCES ACCUSED OF EXECUTIONS AS TROOPS PAUSE MOSUL ADVANCE

-

11.11.2016

CBS, 10 Nov 2016

Iraqi troops fired automatic weapons at positions held by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS, in and around the northern city of Mosul on Thursday, but did not advance as they regroup and clear neighborhoods once occupied by the jihadis.

In Mosul proper, where troops have a foothold in a sliver of territory in the citys east, the special forces control the Zahra neighborhood, once named after former dictator Saddam Hussein, military officials said.

They have taken at least half of the Aden neighborhood and clashes were still ongoing there, while the regular armys ninth division is stationed in east Mosuls Intisar neighborhood, they added, speaking to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because they werent authorized to brief reporters. Skirmishes also continued in the citys southern outskirts.

Col. John Dorrian, a spokesman for the U.S.-led forces operating the key air campaign against ISIS, said that advancing troops and aircraft have destroyed some 70 tunnels the jihadis had been using to launch surprise attacks from inside densely populated areas.

Theyve set up elaborate defenses, and we have to assume theyll do anything among the civilian population because they dont care about anyone, he said, noting that airstrikes had hit hundreds of ISIS positions in the three-week old Mosul campaign.

Iraqi troops are converging from several fronts on Mosul, the countrys second largest city and the last major ISIS holdout in Iraq. Kurdish peshmerga forces are holding a line outside the city in the north, while Iraqi army and militarized police units approach from the south, and government-sanctioned Shiite militias are guarding the western approaches.

The offensive has slowed in recent days as the special forces, the troops who have advanced the farthest, push into more densely populated areas of the city's east, where they cannot rely as much on airstrikes and shelling because of the risk posed to civilians who have been told to stay in their homes.

Over 34,000 people have been displaced in the fighting and are settling in camps and host communities in nearby provinces. Troops are trying to screen the crowds for potential ISIS fighters attempting to sneak out among the civilians, and some have admitted to meting out what they consider swift justice, by executing them.

On Thursday, Amnesty International issued its latest report on the abuses of security forces, urging the government to investigate and stop cases of arbitrary detention, forced disappearances and ill-treatment of prisoners. The London-based rights organization said it visited villages near the Shura and Qayara areas outside Mosul, where it says up to six people were extrajudicially executed in late October over suspected ties to ISIS.

Men in Federal Police uniform have carried out multiple unlawful killings, apprehending and then deliberately killing in cold blood residents in villages south of Mosul, said Amnestys Lynn Maalouf. In some cases the residents were tortured before they were shot dead execution-style.

The battlefield in that area has moved further north toward Mosul. Forces there are at the town of Hamam al-Alil, said Brig. Firas Bashar, the spokesman for Nineveh operations command.

To the northeast, about 8 miles from the city, peshmerga continued to take territory in the town of Bashiqa, believed to be largely deserted except for dozens of ISIS fighters. They've had the town surrounded for weeks, and have assaulted it with mortar and artillery fire.

At an area church in territory freshly freed from the militants grip, priests rang bells for the first time in two years on Wednesday as the peshmerga worked to secure the town.

We are so happy at the liberation, said the Rev. Elkhoury Alfaran Elkhoury at the Mart Shoomy Church in Bahzani, a village near Bashiqa.

They want to give a message to the world, and that message is damage, their message is destruction, their message is death, he said, highlighting damage to the church made by the jihadis while they occupied the area.

In New York, the U.N. said the progress meant that the days were numbered for the self-styled caliphate declared by ISIS from Mosul in 2014.

This liberation operation marks the beginning of the end of the so-called Daesh caliphate in Iraq, the U.N. envoy for the country told the Security Council on Wednesday, using the groups Arabic acronym.

Jan Kubis said that the U.N.s humanitarian agencies were preparing to shelter even more of the tens of thousands of displaced people as winter approaches. He also warned that reconciliation and restoration of confidence in the government was necessary if the victories against ISIS are to be lasting.

In Baghdad, meanwhile, bombings killed at least ten people and wounded 38 others, according to police and medical officials, who spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief reporters.

The capital has seen near-daily bombings since the Mosul operation began, but no large-scale attacks. ISIS frequently targets Iraqs security forces and Shiite majority as part of its campaign to destabilize the country.

Kaynak/Source: