
IRAQI FORCES CONTINUE TO ADVANCE AGAINST ISIS IN MOSUL

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A top Iraqi commander said on Sunday that troops were continuing to advance toward the center of Mosul, pushing back Islamic State fighters, but hindered by sniper fire and suicide bombings as well as concern over the safety of civilians.

Maj. Gen. Sami al-Aridi told The Associated Press that his special forces were searching homes in areas retaken from IS, looking for militants and vehicles rigged to be used in suicide bombings.

Another Iraqi army commander, Brig. Gen. Haidar Fadel, said a suicide car bomber attempted to drive his vehicle toward troops in the city's Tahrir neighborhood, but was shot dead and his explosives-laden car detonated at a safe distance. However, Fadel said the car exploded close to a house, causing it to cave in.

Four civilians were killed and four others were wounded, Fadel said.

The troops fighting their way toward Mosul's center from the city's eastern side laid siege to the Al-Zohour neighborhood. The arrival of the troops at the neighborhood's fringes prompted hundreds of civilians to emerge from their homes waving white flags and seek safety behind army lines.

"The biggest hindrance to us is the civilians," declared al-Aridi of the special forces. "We are soldiers who are not trained to carry out humanitarian tasks."

The Iraqi military began the campaign one month ago to retake Mosul, Iraq's second largest city and the last major urban center in the country still held by the militants. The campaign has been slow, with IS putting up stiff resistance. Most gains thus far have been made by the special forces operating in the section of Mosul east of the Tigris river. The campaign is being assisted by airstrikes from the U.S.-led military coalition.

IS captured Mosul in the summer of 2014 as part of a blitz that placed nearly a third of Iraq under the militants' control.