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## IRAQ DISPUTES NUMBER KILLED IN BATTLE AGAINST ISIS

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Irbil, Iraq (CNN)Iraq's military has disputed UN figures indicating that nearly 2,000 Iraqi troops were killed across the country in November, saying the number was "not accurate and much exaggerated."

Iraq's Joint Operation Command did not give CNN any numbers Saturday, saying it was not obliged to publish casualty figures while the battle against ISIS was ongoing.

But it warned in a statement that "the dissemination of false and fabricated news" could help ISIS as the extremist group seeks to stop Iraqi forces retaking Iraq's second-largest city, Mosul, and surrounding areas.

The UN Assistance Mission for Iraq, which released its figures Thursday, said in a statement Saturday it had taken note of the Iraqi military's criticism and would not publish military casualty figures again unless they could be better substantiated.

"UNAMI acknowledges that the military figures were largely unverified," it said, using an acronym for the mission.

"Owing to the fact that places where conflict is taking place, and where military casualties are likely to arise, are inaccessible and there are few reliable, independent sources available by which statistics can be verified, UNAMI has been relying on a variety of sources, including open sources, to compile military casualty statistics.

"Previous requests by the Mission to the relevant Government Ministries for verification of military casualty figures have not received a response."

Thursday's UN mission news release said the toll for November included Iraqi army, police in combat, Kurdish Peshmerga fighters and allied militias.

'Rigorous' checks on civilian death figures

The release also gave figures for civilian deaths, with more than 900 reported killed and another 930 wounded in November by terrorism, violence or armed conflict across Iraq.

The UN mission defended that data Saturday, saying civilian casualty figures are "subjected to a rigorous methodology based on a range of sources, triangulation of sources and assessment of credibility, among other things."

"The Mission's methodology is conservative, in that civilian casualty figures do not include many of the reports received by the Mission that do not meet verification criteria, and hence should be considered as minimums."

Another 76,000 people have been displaced by the fighting, according to the UN refugee agency.

And at least half a million people caught in the crossfire inside Mosul now have no access to running water, the United Nations told CNN on Wednesday.

#### Street battles

Iraqi forces have entirely surrounded Mosul. More than six weeks into the battle, their focus is now on consolidating recent gains before pressing forward with the offensive.

Iraqi counterterrorism forces continued to battle ISIS militants in the streets of eastern Mosul on Saturday.

A sliver of 23 neighborhoods on the eastern side has been recaptured, but Iraqi forces must still wrest many more areas from ISIS' control before troops reach the Tigris River, which divides the city.

Mosul's western side is more heavily populated, with smaller streets and older infrastructure, making it an even more difficult battlefield.

Video footage published by the Iraqi federal police Saturday showed its forces providing humanitarian support to displaced people in the town of al-Athba, about 15 kilometers (9 miles) south of Mosul.

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Kaynak/Source: