
IRAQ FORCES 'FOIL IS ATTEMPT TO FLEE TO SYRIA'

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Iraq's pro-government forces were thwarted an Islamic State attempt to flee from their Tal Afar bastion on Monday, according to a security spokesman. Tags: Iraq, Mosul, Islamic State, Popular Mobilisation,

Iraq's pro-government forces have thwarted an attempt by around 200 militant fighters to flee their bastion of Tal Afar towards Syria, west of the city of Mosul, a security spokesman said on Monday.

Forces from the Hashed al-Shaabi (Popular Mobilisation), a paramilitary organisation, said the Islamic State group used tanks in their bid to break out of Tal Afar.

"The attack by the Daesh (IS) terrorist gangs started at around 7:00 pm (1600 GMT on Sunday), the fighting lasted around six hours," their spokesman Ahmed al-Assadi told AFP.

The forces have been deployed in desert areas west of Mosul since federal forces launched a massive operation to retake the city from IS on October 17.

Their main goals are to retake Tal Afar, a Turkmen-majority city which is still held by IS, and to prevent the militants from being able to move men and equipment between Mosul and their strongholds in Syria.

"This was an attempt by Daesh to open a breach, flee to the Syria border and ex-filtrate some leaders and fighters," Assadi said.

However, earlier reports suggested Iraq's Popular Mobilisation Forces were forced to withdraw from several fronts, after the Islamic State group launched attacks that left dozens of pro-government fighters dead.

He said that forces received support from army aviation helicopters when IS attacked them, and added that the fighting left around 50 IS members killed and 17 of their vehicles destroyed.

Assadi did not provide a casualty figure for the Hashed al-Shaabi following the attack, which took place around 20 kilometres (12 miles) southwest of Tal Afar.

IS launched one of the most violent counter-attacks of its kind in months, an Iraqi military official said earlier, adding that the militant group attempted to regain control of a strategic route leading to Syria.

The attacks which began in the afternoon, targeted three areas and lasted till dawn, he added.

The latest developments come just days after two suicide bombings in the eastern half of the Iraqi

city of Mosul, including one that hit a popular restaurant, killed at least five people on Friday and wounded over a dozen others, Iraqi military and medical officials said.

Along with four people killed in the restaurant blast, at least 15 were wounded, Iraqi military and security officials said.

Meanwhile, three soldiers were among those wounded in the attack on a checkpoint.

The Islamic State group, which still firmly controls western Mosul, a more densely populated urban area, claimed responsibility for the attacks.

Iraqi forces declared eastern Mosul liberated from IS weeks ago, allowing for a semblance of normalcy to slowly return to that part of the city. However periodic attacks and shelling by IS still occurs.

The massive operation to retake Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, from IS was launched in October.

Since then Iraqi forces have slowly clawed back large parts of the city, however increasingly desperate militants have attempted to increase their attacks behind battle lines.

Kaynak/Source: