
CANADA EXTENDS IRAQ MISSION BY 2 YEARS, 200 TROOPS INVOLVED

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The 200-strong contingent of Canadian troops helping train Iraqi soldiers in the fight against Islamic State will stay in place until end-March 2019, two years longer than previously planned, officials said on Thursday.

Canada will also make a Hercules transport plane available to the U.S-led coalition fighting the militants, Defense Minister Harjit Sajjan and Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland said in statement. The extension had been widely expected.

Critics of the mission fear the troops could be involved in combat, despite a promise by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau that the soldiers would only use their weapons in self-defense, because they are there solely in an advisory role.

Last November, military officials said the Canadian troops in Iraq clashed several dozen times with Islamic State militants.

Canada is a member of the U.S.-led, 65-state international coalition fighting the Islamic State since the group emerged in 2014 to proclaim an Islamic Caliphate spanning a third of Iraq and Syria.

The declaration by Canada came as Iraq declared it took over the city of Mosul, ISs previously-proclaimed capital. But a few other pockets are still held by the extremist group in the provinces of Kirkuk, Anbar and the areas between Salahuddin and Diyala.

Kaynak/Source: