
NO BIG CHANGE SEEN TO U.S. TROOP LEVELS IN IRAQ AFTER MOSUL - GENERAL

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A senior U.S. general said on Tuesday the fight was "far from over" in Iraq despite the recapture of Mosul from Islamic State militants and he saw no major reduction in U.S. troop numbers after the fall of the city.

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declared victory over Islamic State in Mosul on Monday, marking the biggest defeat for the Sunni militant group since its lightning sweep through northern Iraq three years ago.

Iraqi security forces still have to clear Islamic State fighters from a number of Iraqi towns including Tal Afar and Hawija.

"This fight is far from over. So I wouldn't expect to see any significant change in our troop levels in the immediate future because there's still hard work to be done by the Iraqis and the coalition," Lieutenant General Stephen Townsend, the head of U.S.-led coalition forces fighting Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, told a news briefing.

The campaign to retake Mosul from the militants was launched last October by a 100,000-strong alliance of Iraqi government units, Kurdish Peshmerga fighters and Shi'ite militias, with a U.S.-led coalition providing key air and ground support.

Townsend said he expected there to be a coalition presence in Iraq even after Islamic State militants were eventually defeated in the country, with the Iraqi government, the United States and other coalition governments interested in keeping a force.

"I think it is in the final decision-making stages," Townsend said, although he expected the footprint to be smaller.

There are about 5,600 U.S. troops in Iraq, according to the Pentagon.

Islamic State also faces pressure in its operational base in the Syrian city of Raqqa, where U.S.-backed Syrian Kurdish and Arab forces have seized territory on three sides of the city.

Townsend said that with the fall of Mosul, the coalition could increase resources, including surveillance and air strike support, to help retake Raqqa, although the changes would not be significant.

Kaynak/Source: