
IRAQI FORCES GO IT ALONE IN ISLAMIC STATE RAIDS

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Iraq's security forces have advanced to a point where U.S. special operations forces "hardly ever" accompany them on raids against fighters with the Islamic State terror group, according to a top coalition official.

"The operations are increasingly done without us physically present with them," Brigadier General James Glynn, deputy commanding general of the special operations joint task force for Operation Inherent Resolve, told Pentagon reporters Tuesday during a briefing from Baghdad.

"The advice and assistance we provide them is in the planning and in the postoperational aspect of exploiting what they've gotten when they have captured the individual who they are looking for," Glynn said.

Coalition officials estimate there are now fewer than 1,000 IS fighters left in Iraq and Syria, many of them seeking refuge in a part of Syria known as the Middle Euphrates River Valley, which extends from Raqqa, Syria, to the Iraq border.

Officials have been equally cautious about proclaiming any final victory over IS, noting the terror group and its predecessor, al-Qaida in Iraq, have been resilient, willing to bide their time as they regain strength.

Change in focus

As a result, coalition officials say Iraqi forces have been working to maintain the pressure on the terror group's remnants, switching their focus from reclaiming territory to hunting down what is left of Islamic State's fighting force.

"There are still remnants of ISIS who reside in a cellular structure, who seek to bring instability to local areas, in particular population centers" Glynn said, using an acronym for the terror group.

The goal of Iraqi security forces, he added, was "to not allow those elements to form into a network or something that could form into an insurgency ... to lock them down where they are and give them no alternatives other than to be captured or killed."

Coalition officials have said they fully expect IS will try to establish a viable insurgency. But so far, that type of pushback has yet to materialize.

"There's no indicator of any coordination," Glynn said of the various IS cells still in Iraq, some of which have been trying to hide among civilians in Iraq's cities and towns, while others have fled to more mountainous areas.

On Monday, at least 31 people were killed and dozens more wounded in a double suicide bombing in Baghdad's Tayran Square. No group has yet claimed responsibility, but Glynn said that was the type of disruptive attack officials are worried about.

Kaynak/Source: