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## **IRAQ MAY OPERATE AGAINST ISLAMIC STATE INSIDE SYRIA - EXPERT**

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BAGHDAD, April 4 (Reuters) - Iraq may carry out special forces operations against Islamic State militants in neighbouring Syria to stop them infiltrating back into Iraq, an expert close to the Baghdad government said on Wednesday.

While troops could be dropped into Syria, the plan did not at this stage involve sending ground forces over the border, Hisham al-Hashimi, who advises several governments on Islamic State, including Iraqs, told Reuters.

Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declared victory in Iraq over the jihadist group in December, but on Sunday he described the militants presence in Syria as a real danger.

With Baghdad on good terms with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, Abadi stressed that any operations would be limited.

Our plan is to move from fighting terrorism in Iraq in Iraq to fighting terrorism in the region ... We are not trespassing over our border or attacking neighbouring countries, he told a news conference, adding that the plan was being discussed by the Iraqi military leadership.

Last year Iraqi warplanes carried out at least one strike on Islamic State targets inside Syria, in coordination with the U.S.-led anti-Islamic State coalition and with the approval of the Syrian government.

Iraq also good relations with Iran and Russia, Assads main backers in the seven-year Syrian civil war, while it receives at the same time strong support from the coalition.

Abadi declared the victory five months after U.S.-backed Iraqi forces dislodged Islamic State militants from Mosul, their de facto capital in the north of the country.

This put an end to the cross-border caliphate they declared in 2014 but Islamic State continues to carry out ambushes, assassinations and bombings across Iraq.

Special forces from a number of countries already operate in Syria, including the United States, Russia and Iran. Turkey has also sent in ground forces to push Kurdish fighters away from its border. (Reporting by Maher Chmaytelli; editing by David Stamp)

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