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**SENIOR OFFICIALS DOWNPLAY TRUMP PLAN TO KEEP TROOPS IN IRAQ TO 'WATCH IRAN'**

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By Katie Bo Williams

Senior Trump administration officials are working to contain the fallout after President Trump said he wanted American troops in Iraq to watch Iran, in a Sunday interview that some Baghdad watchers say could imperil the U.S. military presence there.

On Tuesday, the top general in the Middle East, Gen. Joseph Votel, sought to downplay the presidents remarks, insisting to the Senate Armed Services Committee that the military mission in Iraq remains focused on the defeat of ISIS.

I think the government of Iraq understands the relationship with the view that we have on Iran and understands our concerns with Iran and the variety of destabilizing activities that they conduct around the region, said Votel, who leads U.S. Central Command. But having said that, our mission, our military mission on the ground remains very focused on the reason that the government of Iraq asked us to come there.

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