

Defense Secretary Commends Iraqi Forces, Announces New Accelerants to Combat ISIL in Visit to Iraq

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Secretary of Defense Ash Carter met today in Baghdad with Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al Abadi and other Iraqi leaders, commending them for recent progress in the fight against ISIL, including the capture of a strategic airfield near the town of Qayyarah that will aid operations to free Mosul.

"With the retaking of Qayyarah West airfield, the Iraqi Security Forces have once again demonstrated a serious will to fight," Carter said. "I congratulate them on their recent successes and reaffirm that the United States, along with our coalition partners, will continue to do all we can to support Iraq's effort to serve ISIL a lasting defeat."

In his meetings with Iraqi leaders, coalition commanders and U.S. troops, Carter also discussed the next steps in the military campaign. In light of Iraqi Security Forces recent advances, Carter announced that the United States, in close coordination with the Iraqi government, will deploy an additional 560 troops to Iraq to build on that momentum.

The additional troops will provide a range of support for Iraqi Security Forces, including infrastructure and logistical capabilities at the airfield near Qayyarah. As the campaign shifts toward Mosul, more than 250 miles from the Iraqi capital, the airfield will become a vital springboard for the ISF offensive into Mosul. Coalition forces will also continue to provide enabler support to Kurdish Peshmerga as they converge on Mosul from Iraq's north.

President Obama approved the additional forces on Carter's recommendation after consulting with Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Joseph Dunford, U.S. Central Command commander Gen. Joseph Votel, and the commander of Operation Inherent Resolve, Lt. Gen. Sean MacFarland.

"At every step in this campaign, we have generated and seized additional opportunities to hasten ISIL's lasting defeat," Carter said. "These additional U.S. forces will bring unique capabilities to the campaign and provide critical enabler support to Iraqi forces at a key moment in the fight."

In his meeting with the prime minister, Carter also expressed his condolences for the recent tragic bombing in Baghdad. He said the United States is prepared to bolster its support for Iraqi government efforts to protect Iraqi civilians from ISIL terror attacks. U.S. forces already share intelligence and with their Iraqi counterparts. Carter said he is

directing the Joint Improvised-Threat Defeat Agency, which leads the department's efforts to counter improvised explosive devices, to provide additional assistance that could enhance security in Baghdad.

Carter's visit comes as the international coalition has intensified pressure on ISIL in both Iraq and Syria. In addition to the capture of the airbase at Qayyarah, Iraqi forces backed by coalition air power and other support recently freed the city of Fallujah from ISIL's control after previous gains in Ramadi, Hit and Rutbah. In Syria, local forces backed by the coalition have surrounded the city of Manbij, a hub for the flow of ISIL foreign fighters. Carter said the U.S. is also prepared to step up its efforts to help vetted Syrian forces willing to take on ISIL.

To ensure ISIL's defeat is truly lasting, the secretary stressed throughout the visit the need for economic aid and reconstruction efforts to keep pace with progress in the military campaign. He closed his trip to Iraq, his fourth as secretary of defense, by thanking U.S. troops for their dedication, sacrifice and willingness to keep America safe.