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YOUR WEEK IN REVIEW | October 24, 2016

US Commander Warns of ISIS Retaliating With Terror Attacks in the West

In a news media interview last week shortly after the beginning of the Iraqi offensive to retake Mosul, Major General Gary Volesky, the commander of the Land Forces Component of the US-led coalition in Iraq, expressed concern that in retaliation for losing Mosul, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) could conduct terrorist attacks in the West. He said military planners are worried that this could be a way that ISIS leadership seeks to deflect attention from its military setbacks. In another video briefing for reporters, he said that ISIS leaders have been detected leaving Mosul as the Iraqi offensive began.

Major General Volesky's warning about ISIS attacks in the West echoes the concerns expressed recently by other senior counterterrorism officials. Last month, FBI Director James Comey said in testimony to a Senate committee that as ISIS is crushed by a coalition military campaign, "there will be a terrorist diaspora sometime in the next two to five years like we've never seen before." In a statement in June for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, CIA Director John Brennan said that as the pressure on ISIS mounts, "we judge that it will intensify its global terror campaign to maintain its dominance in the global terrorism agenda." In Europe, Rob Wainwright, the Director of Europol, said last week that increased military pressure on ISIS "indeed might lead to an increased reflex response by the group in Europe."

Iraqi Forces Advance on Mosul, as ISIS Conducts Diversionary Attacks

In intense fighting last week, Kurdish Peshmerga forces and Iraqi army units, supported by US military personnel, advanced toward Mosul from the east, south, and north (photo shows forces from Iraq's elite Counterterrorism Service), with Kurdish forces reporting that they are within 6 miles of the city. Iraqi units continued liberating villages over the weekend. ISIS has mounted stiff resistance in some places, deploying suicide car-bombers against advancing Iraqi army and Kurdish formations. US military personnel are conducting airstrikes and providing artillery support, in addition to logistical, intelligence, and other support, according to the US-led coalition. The first US military death in the operation occurred on October 20, when Chief Petty Officer Jason Finian, age 34, was killed while he and other Navy SEALs were advising an Iraqi unit, according to the US-led coalition. ISIS is conducting diversionary attacks in other parts of the country, with a major assault on Kirkuk, a Kurdish-controlled city in northeastern Iraq, on October 21, and three suicide car-bombings in the far western city of Rutbah on October 23. The heaviest fighting is likely to occur in the future, when Iraqi forces actually enter the city of Mosul.



Syria: Fighting Resumes in Aleppo as Russian Ceasefire Ends

Airstrikes conducted by either Russian or Syrian aircraft on October 23 appeared to end a brief unilateral Russian ceasefire in the northern Syrian city of Aleppo. Shortly after the strikes against rebel-held eastern neighborhoods, pro-government fighters resumed ground attacks and shelling against rebel positions. Last week, Russian officials announced that pro-regime airstrikes would halt between October 20 and 22, and that Russia would allow humanitarian aid to eastern Aleppo and the evacuation of civilians and opposition fighters. No humanitarian aid was actually delivered, and a UN spokesman said there were no evacuations. Many residents of eastern Aleppo reportedly did not use the evacuation routes because they feared they would be arrested by regime security forces.



International talks in Geneva last week, intended to renew a "cessation of hostilities" in Syria, appeared to make little or no progress.

Contact Information

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