

## **US lays out plan to take back Mosul, Raqqa from ISIS**

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**FORT CAMPBELL:** Defense Secretary Ash Carter laid out broad plans Wednesday to defeat Islamic State militants and retake the group's key power centers in Iraq and Syria. And he announced that a special commando force has now arrived in Iraq.

Speaking to troops from the 101st Airborne Division who will soon deploy to Iraq, Carter also said he would meet in Paris next week with his defense counterparts, mainly from Europe, and will challenge them to bring more capabilities to the fight.

He said he will be meeting with defense leaders from France, Australia, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, and "will not hesitate to engage and challenge" them to get them to do more.

"Each of these nations has a significant stake in completing the destruction of this evil organization, and we must include all of the capabilities they can bring to the field," he said.

Some contributions the U.S. has requested already are special operations forces, fighter jet and reconnaissance aircraft, weapons and munitions, training and other combat support.

Carter's broader message signaled the completion of a military plan to help Iraqi and Kurdish Peshmerga forces retake Mosul in northern Iraq and to assist the Syrian moderate forces oust Islamic State militants from their headquarters in Raqqa.

He described operations that would send Iraqi forces from the south and Peshmerga forces from the north to encircle and cut off Mosul. But he warned that taking it back will not be quick or easy, and he offered no timelines.

Carter announced in December that the U.S. would deploy about 200 special operations forces to Iraq to better capitalize on intelligence and put more pressure on the enemy.

"The specialized expeditionary targeting force I announced in December is now in place and is preparing to work with the Iraqis to begin going after ISIL's fighters and commanders, killing or capturing them wherever we find them, along with other key targets," Carter said, using an acronym for Islamic State.

His speech offered an upbeat assessment of the anti-IS campaign, saying that coalition-backed forces, supported by the airstrikes, are taking back territory and going after the groups finances. This week airstrikes hit an Islamic State cash center in Mosul.

Military leaders have said that the militants have lost 40 percent of the territory they once held in Iraq, and 20 percent of their territory in Syria. The effort has been aided by strong support from Kurdish troops in northern Iraq, as the U.S. worked to build up Iraqi Army forces.

The Iraqi forces struggled for months to retake Ramadi, but backed by airstrikes and other logistical support they were finally able to drive IS from the city last month.

His remarks came a day after President Barack Obama's State of the Union speech, expanding on the message that the U.S. must build and work with local forces in Iraq and Syria to have lasting success. He said the U.S. must not

"Americanize" the conflicts because that would allow militants to accuse the West of occupying the country.

The ongoing U.S. effort, however, has come under fire from members of Congress and critics who say it's a failed strategy that isn't aggressive enough and should involve a more robust military presence to both defeat IS, and protect fleeing refugees, particularly along the Turkey and Syria border.

About 500 troops from the 101st Airborne headquarters group will deploy at the end of February. About 1,300 members of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team will deploy to Iraq in late spring.

The brigade will be training Iraqi and Peshmerga forces.

Carter's speech comes in the wake of recent attacks, including a suicide bombing at a shopping mall this week in Baghdad that killed 18 people.

Abadi described the attack as a "desperate attempt" by militants after they lost control of the key western city of Ramadi, the capital of Anbar province. Iraqi forces drove the extremists out of Ramadi last month, but Islamic State still controls much of northern and western Iraq.

- AP