

U.S. sends troops to Iraq to enhance security for American personnel

-, 17.06.2014, 02:15 Time

USPA News - The United States has deployed around 275 U.S. troops to Iraq to provide additional support and security for American personnel at diplomatic facilities, the White House said on late Monday as militants from an al-Qaeda splinter group closed in on Baghdad. U.S. President Barack Obama, in a letter to members of Congress, said the deployment of American troops began on Sunday to provide support and security for U.S. personnel at various locations in Iraq.

"This force is deploying for the purpose of protecting U.S. citizens and property, if necessary, and is equipped for combat," Obama said. Obama sent Monday's letter under the War Powers Resolution, which requires the president to notify Congress after committing armed forces to military action. "This action has been directed consistent with my responsibility to protect U.S. citizens both at home and abroad, and in furtherance of U.S. national security and foreign policy interests," the president said. "This force will remain in Iraq until the security situation becomes such that it is no longer needed," Obama added. White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest said the forces will provide assistance to the U.S. State Department in connection with the temporary relocation of some employees from the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad to the U.S. Consulates in Basra and Erbil and to the Iraq Support Unit in Amman, Jordan. "These U.S. military personnel are entering Iraq with the consent of the Government of Iraq," Earnest said. "The U.S. Embassy in Baghdad remains open, and a substantial majority of the U.S. Embassy presence in Iraq will remain in place and the embassy will be fully equipped to carry out its national security mission." Approximately 170 of the American troops arrived in the Iraqi capital of Baghdad on Sunday in a number of teams, said Pentagon Press Secretary Rear Admiral John Kirby. He said the remaining 100 service members were being moved "into the region" to provide airfield management, security, and logistics support, if required. "All of these forces are trained to integrate with existing U.S. Embassy security teams or operate as a stand alone force as directed," Kirby said. "The safety of personnel serving in diplomatic missions abroad is among our highest priorities. The presence of these additional forces will help enable the State Department to continue their critical diplomatic mission and work with Iraqis on challenges they are facing." Monday's news of the troop deployment came as the U.S. government announced it is willing to talk to Iran - as well as other regional players - on the deteriorating situation in Iraq. "These engagements will not include military coordination or strategic determinations about Iraq's future over the heads of the Iraqi people," a senior official at the U.S. State Department said, speaking on condition of anonymity. The official made the comments after a trilateral meeting between the European Union (EU), the United States, and Iran at Palais Coburg in Vienna, Austria. "We will discuss how ISIL threatens many countries in the region, including Iran, and the need to support inclusivity in Iraq and refrain from pressing a sectarian agenda," the official added. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS), an offshoot of al-Qaeda, now controls a substantial amount of territory in both eastern Syria as well as western and central Iraq. By Monday evening, after taking the city of Tal Afar in northern Iraq earlier in the day, militants were less than 100 kilometers (62 miles) from Baghdad.

Article online:

<https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-2317/us-sends-troops-to-iraq-to-enhance-security-for-american-personnel.html>

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Official Federal Reg. No. 7442619