

# Iraqis push toward ISIS-held Mosul in long-awaited offensive

Backed by U.S. airstrikes, artillery bombardments

KHAZER, Iraq (AP) — The long-awaited offensive to retake Mosul from the Islamic State group began Monday with a volley of U.S.-led coalition airstrikes and heavy artillery bombardments on a cluster of villages along the edge of Iraq's historic Nineveh plain east of the militant-held city.

Iraq's Kurdish peshmerga fighters led the initial assault, advancing slowly across open fields littered with booby-trapped explosives as plumes of black and orange smoke rose overhead — the opening phase of an unprecedented campaign expected to take weeks if not months, and involve more than 25,000 troops.

By the end of the day Kurdish forces had retaken some 80 square miles, according to the president of Iraq's Kurdistan region. Peshmerga commanders on the ground estimated the offensive retook nine villages and pushed the frontline with IS back five miles.

But the forces' hold appeared fragile and the gains largely symbolic. Some of the villages were so small they comprised no more than a few dozen homes, and most were abandoned.

And though some troops were less than 20 miles from Mosul's edges, it was unclear how long it would take to reach the city itself, where more than 1 million people still live. Aid groups have warned of a mass exodus of civilians that could overwhelm refugee camps.

Iraq's second-largest city, Mosul fell to IS in the summer of 2014 as the militants swept over much of the country's north and central areas. Weeks later the head of the extremist group, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, announced the formation of a self-styled caliphate in Iraq and Syria from the pulpit of a



AP Photo  
Kurdish security forces take up a position as they fight overlooking the Islamic State-controlled in villages surrounding Mosul, in Khazer, about 19 miles east of Mosul, Iraq, Monday.

Mosul mosque. If successful, the liberation of the city would be the biggest blow yet to the Islamic State group. After a string of victories by Iraqi ground forces over the past year, IS now controls less than half the territory it once held, and Iraqi Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi has pledged the fight for Mosul will lead to the liberation of all Iraqi territory from the militants this year.

Al-Abadi announced the start of the operation on state television before dawn Monday, launching the country's toughest battle since American troops withdrew from Iraq nearly five years ago.

"These forces that are liberating you today, they have one goal in Mosul, which is to get rid of Daesh and to secure your dignity," al-Abadi said, addressing the city's residents and using the Arabic acronym for IS. "God willing, we shall win."

In Washington, Defense Secretary Ash Carter called the Mosul operation "a decisive moment in the campaign" to defeat IS. The U.S. is providing airstrikes, training and logistical support, but insists Iraqis are leading the campaign. On Monday, Pentagon press secretary Peter Cook said a small number of U.S. troops were serving as advisers to Iraqi and peshmerga forces on

the outskirts of Mosul.

More than 25,000 Iraqi and Kurdish troops will be involved in the operation, launching assaults from five directions, according to Iraqi Brig. Gen. Haider Fadhil. The troops include elite Iraqi special forces who are expected to lead the charge into the city, as well as the Kurdish forces, Sunni tribal fighters, federal police and state-sanctioned Shiite militias.

In a political deal between the country's Kurdish region and the central government, it was agreed that Kurdish forces would advance first, bringing the villages they retake under their regional control, according to Iraqi special forces Lt. Col. Ali Hussein.

Once the Kurdish forces advance far enough, the Iraqi special forces will move to the new front and pick up the fight.

Speaking at a news conference just a few miles from the frontline, the Kurdistan region's President Massoud Barzani called the Mosul operation a "turning point in the war against terrorism," but said there was not yet a plan for governing the region after the fight. Political and military officials in the Kurdistan region have previously said the peshmerga will not withdraw from any territory they retake.

Saud Masoud, a soldier

with Iraq's special forces watched the frontline on the horizon Monday while waiting for orders to advance. Originally from the Christian village of Bartella, the outskirts of which were obscured by plumes of smoke, he said he personally didn't want his hometown to become part of the country's Kurdistan region, but he understood why Iraqi leaders struck the deal.

"People are tired of the situation, very tired honestly, so everyone including myself is willing to compromise," he said.

As airstrikes and heavy artillery pounded the squat, dusty buildings, the area — historically home to religious minorities brutally oppressed by IS — was almost completely empty of civilians, thus allowing air power to do much of the heavy lifting.

Lt. Col. Mohammad Darwish said the main roads and fields were littered with homemade bombs and that suicide car bomb attacks slowed progress.

The IS-run news agency, Aamaq, said the group carried out eight suicide attacks against Kurdish forces and destroyed two Humvees belonging to the Kurdish forces and Shiite militias east of the city.

Kurdish forces confirmed at least one such attack. Hisham Kazar, a Kurdish peshmerga fighter said one of his relatives died Monday as the Mosul operation got underway when a suicide car bomber rammed the Humvee he was riding in.

The operation so far hasn't run into what is expected to be one of its most significant obstacles: Mosul's civilian population of more than a million people. The United Nations said Monday that the largest wave of displaced people is expected to begin next week as Iraqi forces enter territory where thousands are living.

# U.S. policing leader apologizes for historical racial abuse

SAN DIEGO (AP) — The president of one of the largest police organizations in the United States on Monday apologized for historical mistreatment of minorities, calling it a "dark side of our shared history" that must be acknowledged and overcome.

The reaction from leaders of the Black Lives Matter movement was mixed, saying words needed to be backed by actions, while the head of an officers' union in Minnesota said there was no need to apologize.

Terrence Cunningham, president of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, said at the group's annual conference that police have historically been a face of oppression, enforcing laws that ensured legalized discrimination and denial of basic rights. He was not more specific.

Cunningham said today's officers are not to blame for past injustices. He did not speak in detail about modern policing, but said events over the past several years have undermined public trust.

"While we obviously cannot change the past, it is clear that we must change the future," Cunningham said. "We must forge a path that allows us to move beyond our history and identify common solutions to better protect our communities."

"For our part, the first step in this process is for law enforcement and the (International Association of Chiefs of Police) to acknowledge and apologize for the actions of the past and the role that our profession has played in society's historical mistreatment of communities of color," he said.

# Russia sets brief cease-fire for Aleppo as strikes kill 36

BEIRUT (AP) — Russian and Syrian forces will halt hostilities for eight hours in the eastern districts of Aleppo, Russia's military announced on Monday, a day on which opposition activists said their airstrikes killed at least 36 people, including several children, in and around the divided city.

The two militaries will observe a "humanitarian pause" between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. on Oct. 20 to allow civilians and militants safe passage out of the city, Lt. Gen. Sergei Rudskoi of Russia's general staff said in Moscow. Militants, the wounded and sick would be allowed to evacuate to the neighboring rebel-held province of Idlib.

U.N. humanitarian officials have pleaded with combatants to observe weekly 48-hour cease-fires to allow humanitarian relief into the city's besieged eastern districts, but Russian and Syrian forces have only escalated their aerial and ground assault on the rebel-held areas in recent weeks. The airstrikes have claimed hundreds of lives, wounded many, flattened apartment buildings and laid waste to the already crippled medical sector.

Russia's U.N. Ambassador Vitaly Churkin told reporters at U.N. headquarters in New York that the eight-hour pause was a unilateral halt to fighting. A 48-hour or 72-hour cease-fire "will require some sort of mutual arrangement," he said.

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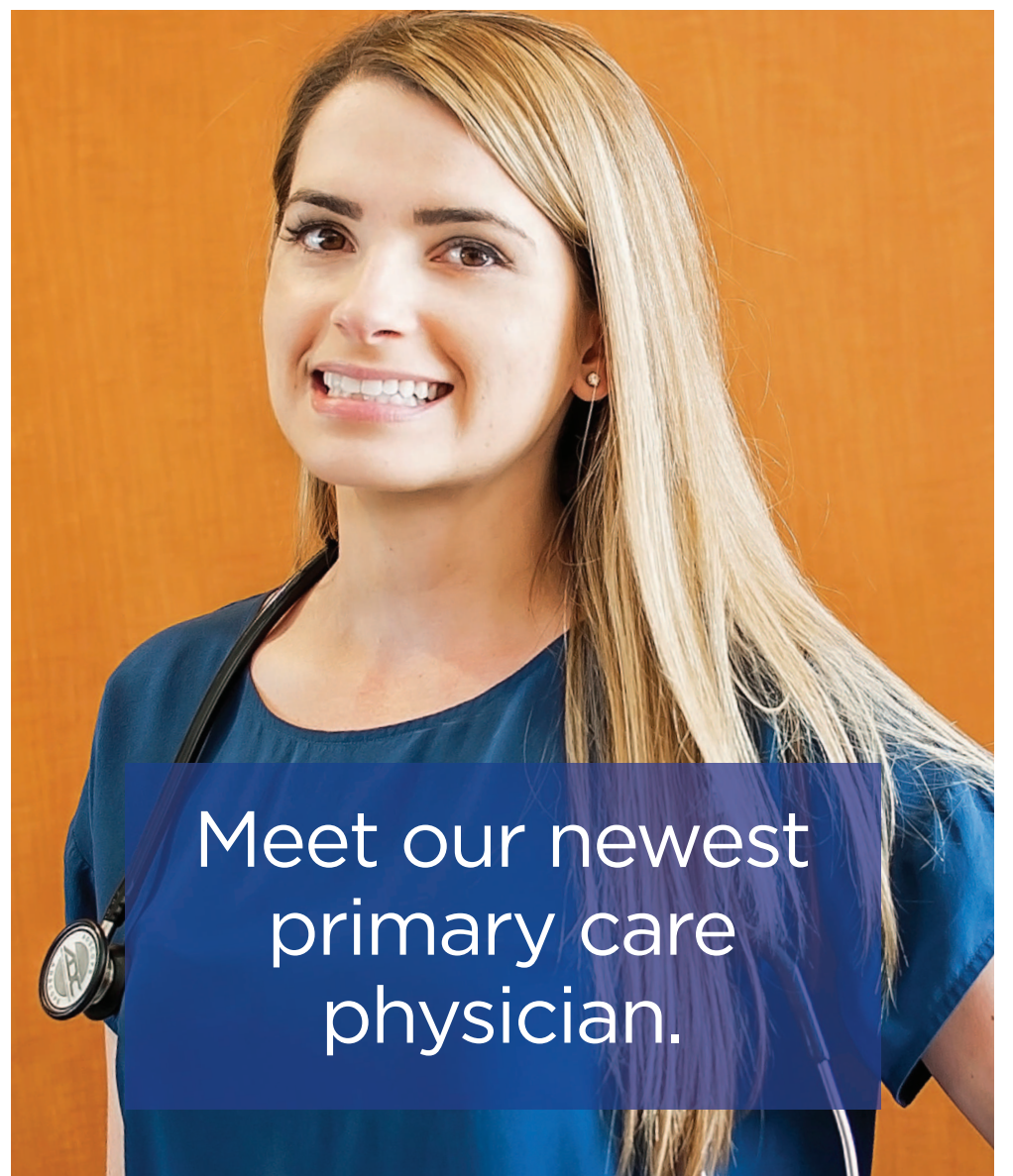
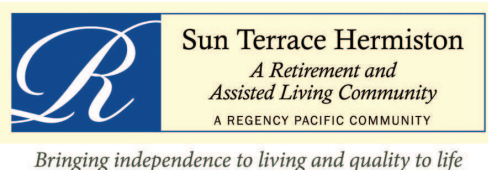
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