

Defense Secretary Mattis: U.S. will stay in Iraq a while

By LOLITA C. BALDOR
Associated Press

BAGHDAD — U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said Monday he believes U.S. forces will be in Iraq and in the fight against Islamic State militants for a while, despite some rocky times between the two nations.

Speaking at the end of a day of meetings in Baghdad with military commanders and Iraqi political leaders, Mattis said he is open to any request from his military commanders to aid the battle to retake Mosul and launch a major battle to oust IS from the base of its so-called caliphate in Raqqa, Syria. He would not provide details.

Despite President Donald Trump's past threats to take Iraq's oil and his attempt to impose a travel ban that includes Iraqi citizens, Mattis said his meetings with Iraqi leaders underscored the partnership the U.S. has with the Iraqis.

He said there's no doubt that "the Iraqi people, the Iraqi military and the Iraqi political leadership recognize what they're up against and the value of the coalition and the partnership, in particular with the United States."

His optimistic words come on the heels of his earlier declaration that the U.S. does not intend to seize Iraqi oil, distancing himself from comments made by President Donald Trump that has rattled Iraq's leaders.

Trump's oil threat and his inclusion of Iraq in the administration's travel ban have roiled the nation and spurred local lawmakers to pressure al-Abadi to reduce cooperation with Washington.

"I think all of us here in this room, all of us in America have generally paid for our gas and oil all along, and I'm sure that we will continue to do that in the future," Mattis told reporters traveling with him. "We're not in Iraq to seize anybody's oil."

Trump brought up the prospect during the campaign, and he mentioned it again late last month during a visit to the CIA. He told the gathering there that, "To the victor belong the spoils," and added, "maybe you'll have another chance" to take the oil.

Despite those tensions, Mattis and Lt. Gen. Stephen Townsend, the top U.S. commander in Iraq, described an enduring partnership



U.S. Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis, center, is greeted by U.S. Ambassador Douglas Silliman as he arrives at Baghdad International Airport on an unannounced trip Monday. Mattis said Monday the United States does not intend to seize Iraqi oil, shifting away from an idea proposed by President Donald Trump that has rattled Iraq's leaders.



Iraqi police forces fire shots at Islamic State militant positions from a hillside outside the town of Abu Saif, Monday.

between the U.S. and Iraq. "I imagine we'll be in this fight for a while and we'll stand by each other," Mattis said.

Townsend, who was standing by Mattis, declined to say how long the U.S. will stay in Iraq. But, he said, "I don't anticipate that we'll be asked to leave by the government of Iraq immediately after Mosul." He added, "I think that the government of Iraq realizes their very complex fight, and they're going to need the assistance of the coalition even beyond Mosul."

Townsend also acknowledged that U.S. forces are now operating closer and deeper into the fight with Iraq units as the battle to retake western Mosul entered its second day.

He said the change began in recent months during the successful fight to take back eastern Mosul, and is now

happening more often. U.S. special operations forces have been working with the Iraqis, offering advice and assistance but initially they were only at the headquarters' level.

More recently they have been moving closer to the battlefield, working with brigade, battalion and sometimes smaller units. But they are generally with command and control units, not in combat on the front lines.

"We embedded advisers a bit further down into the formation," Townsend said.

Mattis' unannounced one-day stop in Iraq was his first as Pentagon chief and the first visit to the warzone by a senior member of the Trump administration. It comes as Mattis and his military leaders are nearing the end of a 30-day review of the Islamic State fight. He must send Trump a strategy to accelerate the battle in the

next seven days.

Senior U.S. military officers said Monday that the fight in the more urban, heavily populated areas of western Mosul will require more precision airstrikes and probably smaller bombs that can take out a building or group of militants and leave surroundings intact.

Lt. Gen. Jeff Harrigan, the top Air Force commander in the Middle East, said troops responsible for calling in airstrikes are closer to the fight and can move forward with Iraqi units. They also have greater authority now to speak directly to pilots in the aircraft overhead, allowing them to launch strikes more quickly, he said.

Military leaders, said Harrigan, realized they could be more responsive now because the troops have built up trust with their Iraqi partners.

While Mattis and Townsend wouldn't talk about any future changes or accelerants in the war fight, various military options have been discussed in recent months. Among them: putting more troops in Iraq and Syria and boosting military aid to Kurdish fighters backed by the U.S.-led coalition.

More specifically, officials have talked about expanding efforts to train, advise and enable local Iraqi and Syrian forces, increasing intelligence and surveillance, and allowing U.S. troops to move forward more frequently with Iraqi soldiers nearer the front lines.

Trump taps military strategist as national security adviser

PALM BEACH, Fla. (AP) — President Donald Trump has tapped Army Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster, a prominent military strategist known as a creative thinker, as his new national security adviser, replacing the ousted Michael Flynn.

Trump announced the pick Monday at his Palm Beach, Florida, club and said McMaster is "a man of tremendous talent and tremendous experience."

Sitting next to Trump for the announcement, McMaster said he was honored to take on the role and added that he looks forward to "doing everything that I can to advance and protect the interests of the American people."

The president's choice further elevates the influence of military officers in the new administration. Trump, who has no military or foreign policy experience, has shown a strong preference for putting generals in top roles. In this case, he tapped an active-duty officer for a post that's sometimes used as a counterweight to the Pentagon. McMaster, who wore his uniform for the announcement, joins Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly, both retired generals, in Trump's inner circle of national security advisers.

The White House said Monday McMaster plans to remain on active military duty.

He will take on the challenge of leading a National Security Council that has not adjusted smoothly to Trump's leadership. The president suggested he does not trust holdovers from the Obama administration and complained about leaks to reporters.

His decision to put his top political adviser on the senior committee of the National Security Council drew sharp criticism. On Friday, the head of the council's Western Hemisphere division was fired after he criticized Trump's policies and his inner circle of advisers.

Trump said Monday that retired Army Lt. Gen. Keith Kellogg, who had been his acting adviser, will now serve as the National Security Council chief of staff. He also said he would be asking John Bolton, a former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, to work with them in a "somewhat different capacity."

McMaster is viewed as soldier-scholar and creative thinker. He has a doctoral degree in history from the University of North Carolina and has been heavily involved in the Army's efforts to shape its future force and its way of preparing for war.



McMaster

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Chrissy Woollard has joined John Cimmiyotti as a new Financial Advisor for Raymond James Financial Services in the Pendleton office. Chrissy has been with Raymond James for 9 years and currently she holds a series 7 & 66 and Life, Health, Variable insurance licenses. Chrissy graduated from the University of Wyoming with a BS in Science and a minor in Business. Chrissy is a native of Pendleton and a Pendleton High School graduate. Chrissy enjoys helping individuals, families and businesses to attain their financial goals. **Chrissy can be contacted by calling the local office at 541-276-9184.**

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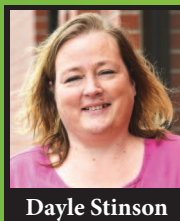
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