

# *NATO to increase troops in Iraq*

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**Jennie Carignan (R), the incoming commander of NATO's Iraq mission, is greeted by Dany Fortin, the outgoing commander of NATO's Iraq mission, during the handover ceremony in Baghdad. (Photo: AFP)**

Brussels, February 20 (RHC)-- NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg says the number of NATO troops in Iraq would increase eightfold, claiming that the move is intended to fight terrorism and ensure that the Daesh terrorist group does not return.

“Today, we decided to expand NATO’s training mission in Iraq,” Stoltenberg said at a Thursday press conference, adding that the “size of our mission will increase from 500 personnel to around 4,000.” He

said training activities will include more Iraqi security institutions and areas beyond Baghdad.

“We will do this in incremental and in, what should I say, and based on demand from the Iraqi authorities. But there are several bases already in Iraq that we can use. Partly bases where NATO Allies already operate under the umbrella of the U.S. Global Coalition to Defeat Daesh and partly other Iraqi bases,” Stoltenberg stated. Some 2,500 U.S. troops are already stationed in Iraq. Back in January 2020, the Iraqi Parliament voted to demand that U.S. troops leave the country.

The vote came after the US assassination of Iran's legendary commander General Qassem Soleimani and his Iraqi trenchmate Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis in a drone strike in Baghdad on January 3, 2020. The two commanders were key figures in the final defeat of Daesh in Iraq in 2017.

The U.S. assassination led to the incremental growth of anti-American sentiments in Iraq and other regional countries. However, the new American government which has announced a review of whether changes need to be made to US military deployments worldwide appears to get entrenched in Iraq.

One sign is an abnormal rise in the number of attacks on U.S. troops across Iraq, which Washington usually uses as a justification to keep its forces in other countries. Last week, Russia's Sputnik news agency said Western intelligence services and Daesh commanders had held a series of meetings to coordinate their future plans.

Lebanon's al-Mayadeen TV also reported last month that the U.S. military had transferred Daesh prisoners to the Iraqi-Syrian border in order to provide a pretext for its continued presence in the region and for future attacks.

Meanwhile, a number of Iraqi lawmakers warned of Washington's interference in the domestic affairs of the Arab country, especially in the upcoming parliamentary election as well as military and security issues in Iraq.

They called for an end to the U.S. interference in Iraq's domestic affairs, IRNA reported on Friday. They also cited illegal and diplomatic actions by the U.S. embassy in Baghdad, including its fear-mongering among Iraqi citizens, and called on the Iraqi government to stop such illegal actions.

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