

# *More Private Contractors Following U.S. Troops to Iraq*

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Washington, December 25 (RHC)-- The U.S. government is preparing to increase the number of American private contractors in Iraq to support the growing number of U.S. troops deploying to the country to "train and assist" Iraqi forces battling the ISIL terrorists.

A senior U.S. official said preparations to boost the presence of contractors is part of President Barack Obama's effort to roll back ISIL terrorists who threaten the Iraqi government, according to Reuters.

The number of contractors that will deploy to Iraq depends on several factors, including how far U.S. troops are from American diplomatic facilities and how widely dispersed they are, the U.S. official said. "It is certain that there will have to be some number of contractors brought in for additional support," said the senior official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

There are roughly 1,800 private contractors now working in Iraq for the U.S. State Department. The contractors are responsible for everything from security to vehicle repair and food service.

The presence of U.S. private contractors in Iraq, particularly private military companies, has been controversial since a series of violent incidents during the U.S. occupation. In September 2007, mercenary guards from Blackwater security firm shot at Iraqi civilians, killing 17 and wounding 20.

Meanwhile, there are now about 1,750 "non-combatant" U.S. troops in Iraq and an additional 1,300 were ordered to deploy there by U.S. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel last week. Obama and other senior officials have repeatedly said that American troops would not engage in combat operations against ISIL militants.

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