

U.S. Army General Denies 'Boots on the Ground' in Iraq



Washington, October 24 (RHC)-- A high-ranking U.S. military official has insisted the United States does not have combat troops in Iraq, after an American soldier was killed during a purported hostage rescue operation.

"U.S. forces are not in Iraq on a combat mission and do not have boots on the ground," Lieutenant General Sean B. MacFarland said on Friday. MacFarland is the commander of the Combined Joint Task Force -- Operation Inherent Resolve, a force established by the U.S.-led coalition to fight against Daesh (ISIL) terrorists.

On Thursday, U.S. special operations forces attempted to rescue a group of Kurdish hostages in Iraq, according to Pentagon spokesman Peter Cook. Around 70 hostages were successfully rescued during the operation, but one U.S. soldier lost his life during the mission.

U.S. officials said that the hostage rescue was not part of the 3,500-troop American mission in Iraq to train and advise Iraqi forces in the fight against the ISIL terrorists, claiming the operation was part of a separate counter-terrorism mission.

The US special operations member who died on Thursday was the first American killed since Washington began its military campaign against Daesh in August 2014.

U.S. ground troops have rarely, if ever, participated directly in combat operations against Daesh terrorists. The U.S. has largely limited its role to "training" and "advising" Iraqi and Kurdish forces and conducting airstrikes against ISIL.

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