

《为何摩苏尔的胜利对伊拉克至关重要？》

Iraq will announce imminently a final victory in the nearly nine-month offensive to retake Mosul from ISIL jihadists, a US general said Saturday, as celebrations broke out among police forces in the city.

The defeat would be the biggest yet for ISIL three years since it seized Mosul in a lightning offensive, swept across much of the country's Sunni Arab heartland and proclaimed a "caliphate" straddling Iraq and Syria.



Iraqi children, who fled the fighting in the Old City of Mosul, sit in a vehicle in the city's western industrial district awaiting to be relocated, July 8, 2017. /VCG Photo

"An announcement is imminent," Brigadier General Robert Sofge told AFP by phone.

"I don't want to speculate if it's today or tomorrow but I think it's going to be very soon," he added.

The jihadists that remain in Mosul are fighting to the death in a tiny area of just two blocks of the Old City next to

the Tigris, Sofge said, and those that remain are "desperate."

Epic milestone

A final victory in Mosul would mark an epic milestone for the Iraqi security forces, who had crumbled in the face of an ISIL onslaught across Iraq in 2014.

The Iraqi forces launched their campaign to recapture Mosul on October 17, 2016, and since then ISIL has gone from holding the entire city to being trapped between security forces and the Tigris River on its western side.

Backed by a ferocious aerial bombing campaign by a US-led international coalition, the offensive has turned much of the city to rubble and forced tens of thousands of people to flee.



Smoke billows following an air strike in the Old City of Mosul as Iraqi government forces battle ISIL jihadists, July 8, 2017. /VCG Photo

Slowing the advance toward the final holdouts, diehard ISIL fighters have placed booby traps and bombs in structures they occupied, but their efforts to keep the Iraqi troops at bay look to be coming to an end.

"The enemy has strung IEDs (improvised explosive devices) all over the place, in every place, in every closet, in one case under a crib," said Sofge.

Sofge said some jihadists were trying to blend in with fleeing civilians by shaving their beards and changing their clothes, others were playing dead then detonating explosive vests as Iraqi forces close in.

Women had blown themselves up amid throngs of displaced civilians.

"They are doing as much damage as they can during these final moves," Sofge said.

Iraq's Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS), which has spearheaded the assault, said the jihadists now only held a band of territory 100-150 meters deep and 300 meters wide.

"The end of the battle is near, I would say two days, but it could go on," said CTS commander Abdel Ghani al-Assadi.



An Iraqi Special Operation Forces soldier fires at an ISIL militant in the Old City district in Mosul, Iraq, where heavy fighting continues, July 8, 2017. /VCG Photo

'Celebration and pride'

"They deserve every bit of a celebration and pride and sense of accomplishment that a military force can feel," Sofge said, offering a "congratulations in advance in a great battle."

"This fight in Mosul is not like anything modern militaries have done in our life time. You have to go back to World War II to find anything that's even close." Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declared on Twitter late last month that "we are seeing the end of the fake (IS) state".

That claim came after Iraqi forces retook what remained of Mosul's Great Mosque of al-Nuri and the adjacent Al-Hadba ("The Hunchback") minaret.



Iraqi Federal Police celebrate in the Old City of Mosul, Iraq, July 8, 2017. /VCG Photo

ISIL leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared himself "caliph" at the mosque in his only public appearance in 2014.

But ISIL blew the two landmarks up on June 22, in what Abadi said was "an official declaration of defeat."

In Mosul on Saturday, jubilant interior ministry forces – whose mission has been declared over – were seen flashing V-for-victory signs and posing for selfies in front of each other holding up ISIL's notorious black flag upside down.

Victory imminent, but at what cost?

Others were not celebrating as the fighting continued, and distraught women and children emerged covered in dust and clutching what few belongings they could carry.

Abdullah al-Obeidi, an Iraqi political expert, said ISIL militants have been defeated, but their defeat was "never without heavy cost."

According to the statistics provided by the United Nations, about 100,000 civilians were trapped in the Old City before the start of offensive. They are often used as human shields, as militants often hide among the civilians and launch deadly attacks to repel the advancing government forces.



Iraqi women and children, who fled the fighting in the Old City of Mosul, arrive in the city's western industrial district to be relocated, July 8, 2017. /VCG Photo

An AFP team saw more than 60 women and children in tears having lost loved ones in the crossfire, coalition bombing, jihadist shelling and sniper fire.

Hungry and haggard, they said they had spent months being held as human shields by the jihadists.

The city's basic infrastructure has also been hard hit, with six western districts almost completely destroyed and initial repairs expected to cost more than one billion US dollars, the United Nations said.

The recapture of Mosul will not however mark the end of the threat posed by ISIL, which holds territory elsewhere in Iraq and is able to carry out frequent bombings in government-held areas.

(Source: AFP, Xinhua, Reuters)

