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Iraq's Offensive Near Mosul Collapsing in the Face of Mass Desertions

By Jason Ditz
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Less than a week ago, Iraqi officials were touting a new military offensive against some villages near Mosul as a major sign of progress in the war against ISIS, and their success in taking three villages was proof of ISIS being “in retreat.”

Today that offensive is stalled outright, on the brink of collapse, as low morale has many Iraqi troops leaving their positions, with Kurdish officials who were involved in the fighting saying the army “have no will to fight.”

The Kurds are in a position to know, as they hold a checkpoint between the villages and Shi'ite territory, and have been stopping deserters en masse, detaining those they can but ultimately watching as their key allies ditch the battle.

US officials are downplaying the concerns, insisting that the Iraqi troops are performing up to expectations. Locals are complaining that the troops showed up, looted their villages, and then just left, insisting they are no better than ISIS.

Looting and sectarian unrest are old problems, however, and the real problem is that this force of thousands of Iraqi troops is supposed to be the one taking over the heavily guarded city of Mosul. If they can't even handle the villages, that Mosul offensive is far, far out of reach.