

Maliki plans more Basra-like offensives

by UPI

BAGHDAD -- Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki promises more offensives like last week's Basra battle even after reports that hundreds of Iraqi forces deserted the fight. More than 1,000 soldiers and policemen were reported to have refused to fight or abandoned their posts during the inconclusive Basra assault, a senior Iraqi official told The New York Times. Iraqi military officials said the group included dozens of officers, including at least two senior field commanders, casting doubt on the U.S.-trained security forces. Maliki mentioned as possible targets for offensives Baghdad neighborhoods associated with Shiite cleric Moqtada Sadr's Mehdi Army militia, the Los Angeles Times said. Mentioned were Sadr City, Shula and Amiriya among other neighborhoods. The six-day Basra standoff ended when Sadr told his followers to put down their weapons. "Basra was a prisoner," Maliki said. "Now it's liberated and its people are in joy."

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