

## Major military operation targets al-Qaida

by UPI

BAQUBA, Iraq - The U.S. and Iraqi military on Tuesday launched a major offensive targeting the al-Qaida terrorist network in Iraq.

A total of 2,000 troops were in the area of Baquba in the Diyala province and 10,000 soldiers were involved overall in the operation.

"Task Force Lightning commenced Operation Arrowhead Ripper today in a large-scale effort to eliminate al-Qaida in Iraq terrorists operating in Baquba and its surrounding areas," a military statement said, the BBC reported.

The goal of the operation is "to destroy the al-Qaida influences in this province and eliminate their threat against the people," U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Mick Bednarek told the BBC.

The U.S. military reported that 22 militants were killed early in the offensive.

Military officials said many insurgents moved to the Diyala province because of increased security measures in Baghdad. It has been the scene of increasing violence.

In some cases, Iraqi soldiers were joined by members of the 1920s Revolutionary Brigade, a Sunni Arab group that recently severed its ties with al-Qaida.

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