

US Troops in Iraq Adopt New Role

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WASHINGTON: Some of the 98,000 U.S. military forces in Iraq already have made the transition from security to stability operations ahead of the September deadline, American military commanders said.

In accordance with an agreement brokered between Baghdad and Washington, the drawdown to 50,000 U.S. troops before September will happen as the American mission shifts from its current role as a partner of Iraqi security forces to primarily one of training and advising.

But on the heels of what has been touted as a "historic" parliamentary election in Iraq this week -- months before the drawdown milestone -- U.S. forces in some instances have begun to change missions, said Maj. Gen. Terry A. Wolff, commander of U.S. Division Central.

"We're pretty close to what that will look like already," Wolff, whose area of operations includes Baghdad and the western Iraqi province of Anbar, told Pentagon reporters in a news conference.

What allows U.S. forces to pivot from accompanying Iraqi units in joint operations and providing aerial and intelligence support upon request to a role that centers on training, advising and assisting is the evolution of Iraq's indigenous forces, the general said.

Since his previous rotation in Iraq in 2006 and 2007, Wolff said, Iraqi security forces have passed tests of their quality "with flying colors." He cited security during the March 7 election in which attacks reportedly killed some 38 people across the country but failed to close any polling sites or dissuade any of the estimated 12 million Iraqis -- about 62 percent of the electorate -- who cast ballots.

"I worked helping to train the [Iraqi security forces] on my last rotation," Wolff recalled. "It was an army of about 110,000. Well, it's grown to about double that. It was a police of barely 150,000; it's nearly triple that. And so the Iraqi security forces demonstrated on Sunday that they're up to the task."

"I'm pretty confident that they can continue to secure the government of Iraq and the Iraqi people," he continued. "There's no doubt in my mind that they can do that exceptionally well. And as the next government settles in, they're more than up to the task, and they demonstrated that."

Asked about the Iraqi army's progress since reports in 2006 of disloyalty, unreliability and a lack of professionalism in the ranks, one defense official said the Iraqi forces have "matured beyond our wildest expectations" - echoing the resilience Wolff described today.

"I kind of liken them sometimes to a boxer," he said. "They're very robust, they take a jab, once in while they take a body blow, but they rarely get knocked down any more."

Gen. Raymond T. Odierno, the top U.S. commander in Iraq, said the United States already has shifted from performing counterinsurgency operations to... **Continued Page 9**



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