



Top General Hopeful on Iraq

Posted GMT 1-21-2007 18:1:55

Tallil Air Base, Iraq (AP) -- The top U.S. commander in Iraq predicted Friday that some of the extra troops President Bush is sending could make an impact and start returning home by late summer, an optimistic note in contrast to skepticism of the plan back home.

Gen. George Casey said security in the war zone should gradually improve during the next three months as the 21,500 added troops build up in Baghdad and in Anbar province. However, the plan's success depends on the Iraqi government fulfilling its own pledges of adding troops and taking an aggressive approach to sectarian militias and death squads, he said.

Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has failed to deliver on such promises before.

"I think it's probably going to be the summer, late summer, before we get to the point where the people in Baghdad feel safe in their neighborhoods," Casey told reporters at a news conference with Defense Secretary Robert Gates.

Asked when he thought some of the extra U.S. troops could be pulled back, Casey replied, "I believe the projections are late summer, but the first troops are just arriving," so nothing is sure.

Sounding his optimistic note, he said, "You're going to see some progress gradually over the next 60 to 90 days."

Gates, making his second trip to Iraq since he took over for Donald Rumsfeld on Dec. 18, headed home after a day-long visit that was not announced in advance. Gates and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, just back from the Middle East, were to meet with Bush on Saturday morning at the White House to report on their trips.

Gates' trip came as the Bush administration begins a new phase in the war including the troop buildup, which has sparked opposition in Congress and among the general public. Congress is to take up nonbinding legislation opposing the buildup this week.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., said Friday that Bush is rushing new troops to Iraq and betting that Congress won't cut off funds once they're in battle. She said the war should not be "an obligation of the American people in perpetuity."

"The president knows that because the troops are in harm's way, that we won't cut off the resources. That's why he's moving so quickly to put them in harm's way," Pelosi said on ABC's "Good Morning America."

Deputy White House press secretary Dana Perino called the comments "poisonous."

"Speaker Pelosi was arguing, in essence, that the president is putting young men and women in harm's way for tactical, political reasons. And she's questioning his motivations, rather than questioning his policies," Perino said at the White House.

The first extra troops have just arrived in Baghdad. Four other brigades are to arrive between now and May, assuming the Iraqis follow through on their commitment to bring three additional Iraqi army brigades into Baghdad and to allow raids against all illegal militias.

By Robert Burns

The Los Angeles Times contributed to this report.