

Coalition forces to leave Anbar

by UPI

BAGHDAD -- A U.S. commander of the multi-national forces in Iraq said one-third of the U.S. soldiers in Anbar province could be moved out by spring. "We'll see forces start to rotate out pretty soon," U.S. Marine Brig. Gen. John Allen told USA Today. "We'll be significantly smaller this time next year." The move is an indication of progress made against al-Qaida and the capability of Iraqi forces to secure the region, not a reflection of increased political pressure, officials said. Some of the redeployments may be to other areas in Iraq, while some soldiers could return to the United States as their combat tours expire and Iraqi forces take over control, USA Today said. Critics worry shifting political alliances on the ground could result in destabilization after coalition forces leave. "We should recognize that what has emerged is a tactical alliance of convenience," Michael Eisenstadt of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy told USA Today. The redeployment is part of a broader shift to return U.S. combat levels to pre-surge levels by next summer, the newspaper said. The western Iraqi province, which shares borders with Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Syria, and includes the city of Fallujah. The area has been the site of fierce fighting and more than 200 U.S. troops were killed in battle there from August 2006 through February 2007.

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