

Government focus of Iraqi efforts

by UPI

WASHINGTON -- A Bush administration official said he remains positive about developments in the Iraqi government as leading generals postulate on troop redeployments in 2008. Brett McGurk, the senior director for Iraq and Afghanistan for the Bush administration, said that Iraqi legislation allowing former Baath officials to participate in the government is a major milestone in solidifying the central government of Iraq. "The de-Baathification reform law is moving its way through the parliamentary process, which is very complicated," McGurk said in Wednesday's Washington Times. "It's had its second reading. It needs one more. I think we'll see that law pass." Tensions between Shiites and Sunni's pose a challenge to the Iraqi government as the Sunni-led Baath Party once dominated Iraq and mistreated the minority represented Shiites, who now hold the majority in the central government. The increased focus on the Iraqi central government comes as the 30,000 U.S. troop surge is credited with a relative lull in violence there. U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates suggested in September the U.S. military would return troop levels to presurge levels by the end of 2008, leaving the ultimate decision to U.S. Army Gen. David Petraeus when he makes his report on progress in Iraq to Congress in March.

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