

Gates to assess further troop withdrawals

by UPI

BAGHDAD -- U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates said he planned to assess the security situation in Iraq before determining whether more troops would be withdrawn. The last of the initial five brigades are scheduled to be redeployed in July, reducing the number of U.S. troops in Iraq by about 30,000. But after meeting with the U.S. Army Gen. David Petraeus, U.S. commander in Iraq, Gates said he wanted a "period of evaluation," the BBC reported Monday. "A brief period of consolidation and evaluation probably does make sense," Gates said during an unannounced visit to Iraq. "In my own thinking I have been kind of headed in that direction as well. But one of the keys is how long is that period (of evaluation) and what happens after that." Gates arrived Sunday in Iraq to assess security following the surge in U.S. combat troops about a year ago.

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