

Official: 'Pause' in troop reduction brief

by UPI

WASHINGTON - A Bush administration official told reporters Friday President George W. Bush expects to reduce the number of U.S. troops in Iraq before the end of his term. The official said the "pause" in troop reductions requested by Gen. David Petraeus, the U.S. commander in Iraq, would last four to six weeks, The Washington Post reported. The official briefed reporters under the condition that he be identified only as a senior administration official. "This is not a stall tactic," he said. "I fully expect further reductions this year, in '08, and so does the president. It's just a question of when will the reductions be announced, when will they take effect ... and what will be the pace." The 20,000 additional troops sent to Iraq for the "surge" in 2007 are already leaving and are expected to be gone by July. Petraeus would then assess how large a force the U.S. needs to maintain order, the official said. Sen. Russell Feingold, D-Wis., sponsor of a failed bill to set a timetable for troop withdrawals, said the administration is delaying political reconciliation in Iraq by sending "mixed messages."

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