

Troop levels hinge on Petraeus' assessment

by UPI

WASHINGTON -- A future drawdown of U.S. troops in Iraq would not be considered if the withdrawal negates gains made in the country, President George Bush said Wednesday. Army Gen. David Petraeus, the U.S. commander in Iraq, and U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker are to testify before Congress in April regarding troop levels in Iraq. Last year, Petraeus recommended about 30,000 combat troops be re-deployed and not replaced. "I will await their recommendations before making decisions on our troop levels in Iraq," Bush said during a speech at the Pentagon marking the five-year anniversary of the U.S.-led invasion. Any reduction "must not jeopardize the hard-fought gains our troops and civilians have made over the past year," he said. Petraeus has warned against a quick drawdown, saying it could result in increased violence, and extremists and insurgents regaining ground. "(Having) come so far and achieved so much, we're not going to let this happen," he said.

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