

British hand over Basra to U.S.

by UPI

BASRA, Iraq -- Britain turned over command in the Basra area of Iraq to the United States Tuesday, a prelude to the country withdrawing its remaining troops in the country.

At one point, British military personnel in Iraq numbered greater than 40,000, The New York Times reported. Most British troops are scheduled to leave Iraq by July.

At a ceremony in Basra, Maj. Gen. Andy Salmon of Britain's Royal Marines turned over control of forces in the Basra area to U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Michael Oates.

Speaking at the handover ceremony, U.S. Army Gen. Ray Odierno, commander of American forces in Iraq, praised the British deployment in Iraq, the Times reported.

"None of this has been easy. We have faced tremendous adversity," he said. "You have given the people of Iraq an opportunity to build a bright and prosperous future."

Since 2003, 179 British troops have died in Iraq.

Copyright © 2009, by United Press International. All Rights Reserved.

British hand over Basra to U.S. by UPI