

SOFA - US - Iraq Status of Forces Agreement

Contributed by Jim Garamone, American Forces Press Service
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Joint Chiefs chairman: Troops out of Iraq by end of 2011

WASHINGTON (Nov. 17, 2008) — All American troops will be out of Iraq by the end of 2011 under the status of forces agreement between the United States and Iraq, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said Monday.

Navy Adm. Mike Mullen called the agreement important and one the United States needs to continue to operate in Iraq after the U.N. mandate expires Dec. 31.

U.S. officials in Baghdad said Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al Maliki and U.S. Ambassador Ryan Crocker signed off on the pact yesterday, and Maliki presented it to the Iraqi Council of Representatives.

U.S. military leaders are comfortable with the provisions of the agreement, including previous concerns that American forces have the necessary legal protections to continue to conduct operations in the country, Mullen said.

“Conditions continue to improve (in Iraq), and specifically, I mean we continue to withdraw forces,” Mullen said during a Pentagon news conference today.

The chairman said he is satisfied with the rate of withdrawal. “(We are) clearly moving forward in a measured way,” he said.

Iraqi security forces have made tremendous progress and should be ready to assume the primary duty of defending their own homeland by the agreement’s 2011 deadline, he said.

Mullen said he is, of course, aware that President-elect Barack Obama has said he would speed up the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq. If ordered, the U.S. military could speed up the withdrawal, he said, but added that he would like for any such actions to be based on conditions in Iraq.

“It’s doable,” Mullen said. “It’s a very significant footprint and a very sizeable force, but we’ve been moving in and out of this theater for a long period of time, and we have the capacity and the capability to do it.”

Mullen added, “I certainly understand there are other options. It’s something that we look at all the time. But … from the military’s perspective, I think it’s best to be conditions-based.”

The agreement also calls for American forces to be out of Iraqi cities and towns by the end of 2009. The American military is already out of the towns and cities in most of Iraq. Coalition forces are in overwatch in the provinces that have

returned to provincial Iraqi control.

“This is consistent with how we have moved, once an area has been turned over to the Iraqis for security,” Mullen said.

Two areas where there may be problems are in Baghdad and Mosul where most of the fighting is and there is greater need to train Iraqi security forces, Mullen said.

“The Iraqi security forces being able to provide for their own security is one of the big keys to a successful transition,” he said. “We're focused on that like a laser.”

Mullen said he is comfortable with the training timetable.

“That (training) mission has been incredibly well executed,” he said. “The pace is a good pace, and I think that the pace will more than suffice for what needs to be, in terms of Iraqi security forces taking over totally in their own security in the future.”

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