



U.S. troops may be in Iraq for 10 years

By Tom Squitieri, USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — Two top U.S. defense officials signaled Congress on Wednesday that U.S. forces might remain in Iraq for as long as a decade and that permanent facilities need to be built to house them there.

Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz and Marine Gen. Peter Pace, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, gave no explicit estimates for the time U.S. forces would stay in Iraq, but they did not dispute members of Congress who said the deployment could last a decade or more. The comments were among the most explicit acknowledgements yet from the Bush administration that the U.S. presence in Iraq will be long, arduous, costly and a strain on the military.

Wolfowitz told the House Armed Services Committee that the Bush administration will eventually come to Congress to seek more money for the military occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Wolfowitz said the size of the supplemental funding request will be determined in the fall. But he did not dispute an estimate by Rep. John Spratt, D-S.C., that the military would need an annual budget of \$54 billion — \$1.5 billion a month for Afghanistan, \$3 billion a month for Iraq.

The money would be for costs in fiscal 2004, which starts on Oct. 1 of this year. Former White House budget director Mitch Daniels has said the major combat came in under budget and the administration will not seek additional funds for the Iraq war in the current fiscal year, which ends Sept. 30.

Pace told the committee that the U.S. force in Iraq is just under its peak of 151,000 combat troops and that the number will not be reduced in the foreseeable future. He said military officials want to build a 60,000-strong Iraqi police force to free U.S. troops for other duties. U.S. troops are now guarding 500 sites and conducting 2,300 patrols a night, Pace said.

Wolfowitz urged Congress to vote for money to train Iraqi and Afghan troops, both to ease the burden on U.S. forces and to free them for other duties, including "a possible contingency in Korea."

"We are still in a phase where we need some significant combat power to take on these remnants of the old regime," Wolfowitz said.

"I can't predict how long they (U.S. troops) will be there," he said. "It's got to be driven by conditions and not the calendar."

Wolfowitz and Pace said they believe the burden on U.S. servicemembers will ease as troops from other countries enter Iraq. But the arrival of those troops now does not appear likely to happen before September, Pace said.

Pace said about 12,000 non-U.S. troops from eight countries are in Iraq, almost all of them British. He said 17 nations have promised to send a total of up to 20,000 troops. He also said India and 48 other countries are being asked to send forces to boost that number to 30,000.

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