

July 31, 2008

Inglish says Iraqi progress could speed troops' return

By Dan Hoover
STAFF WRITER

Jet-lagged from his fourth trip to Iraq, Republican U.S. Rep. Bob Inglis said this afternoon that political pressures building in Iraq may mean withdrawal of American troops sooner rather than later.

"That's a good thing," he told reporters in a conference call from his Washington office.

Inglish said there has been "good progress on the military and political front and that's very encouraging," a significant change for the better since his previous trip in mid-April 2007.

But he said that Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki may face a situation where he needs to move faster to end the U.S. military role.

"The pressure is building on al-Maliki to have some resolution to this," Inglis said.

"On our end, we need to pay careful attention and reward it because it means a nation is forming," he said.

Paul Corden, the Democratic Party's 4th District candidate, said he continues to support withdrawal of U.S. troops "at the earliest date" that Iraq's complicated religious and political situation will allow.

He said al-Maliki is caught between satisfying Iraqis' desire to end what they see as an occupation while he still needs American military backing against sectarian insurgents.

Inglish said that the success of President Bush's troop surge and the improvement in Iraqi forces' motivation and capabilities combined with an oil-driven \$74 billion surplus in Baghdad has moved Iraq close to the "reasonable stability" he said was still lacking during his 2007 visit.

He said al-Maliki's personal order to Iraqi forces to clear insurgents from their strongholds in Baghdad's Sadr City district and coastal Basra was a gutsy move by the Shiite leader against Shiite insurgents.

U.S. troops in Baghdad and British units in Basra supported both operations.

"That may be the line of demarcation," Inglis said, adding that "'08 may turn out to be independence day when a Shia overcame sectarian differences to act in the national interest."

Citing improved conditions, Inglis said he was able to tour Sadr City on the ground, something that was not possible 15 months ago, although it was in an MRAP armored vehicle that he was not allowed to leave until it returned to the heavily protected Green Zone.
