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Many state lawmakers oppose troop withdrawal mandate

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By Doug Abrahms  
GANNETT NEWS SERVICE

WASHINGTON -- South Carolina Republican lawmakers have kept to the party line and agreed with Gen. David Petraeus that the U.S. is making progress in Iraq and Congress shouldn't mandate troop withdrawals.

"The surge has clearly worked," said Sen. Lindsey Graham. "The idea of withdrawing troops because of political posturing in Washington will undercut our successes."

Petraeus, lead ground commander in Iraq, said Tuesday the success of the ongoing troop surge in Iraq had prompted him to recommend modest troop reductions over the next several months and cuts of as much as 30,000 by the summer. He said he would say in March whether troop levels could drop further.

"Our experience in Iraq has repeatedly shown that projecting too far into the future is not just difficult, it can be misleading and even hazardous," he told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

**Advertisement** Rep. Bob Inglis, R-Travelers Rest, said he supports a carrot-and-stick approach to persuading Iraqi leaders to pass a constitution, evenly divide the nation's oil money and include the Sunnis in the national government. He said he mentioned his plan for success checkpoints to President Bush as well as other House members.

"I'm going to do everything I can to urge the success checkpoints kind of concept," he said.

Inglis, who voted against the troop surge this year, voted against a resolution in July that would have mandated a troop reduction in Iraq and still opposes that step. Though the surge has been a military success, he said it hasn't achieved the political goal of persuading the Iraqi leadership to make the tough decisions to govern itself.

While the U.S. military made a number of mistakes when it first went into Iraq, "we're there," said Sen. Jim DeMint, R-S.C.

And the nation is "asking our troops to provide security and maintain order while we work desperately to create a functioning government, military, police force ... and a free society," said DeMint, who opposes legislation mandating troop withdrawals.

This week's testimony by Petraeus and Crocker is expected to spark some of the most intense debate on the war so far as Democrats seek to start force reductions and President Bush defends his troop surge in a major speech later this week.

Graham helped persuade 31 senators this week to sign a letter asking the Senate Democratic leadership to denounce ads by MoveOn.org that accused Petraeus of lying with his testimony. DeMint also signed letter.

"General Petraeus is a distinguished military leader and should be treated with respect," Graham said. "To suggest he would come before Congress and not give us his honest assessment of the situation on the ground in Iraq flies in the face of who he is and the responsibility on his shoulders."

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