

Bush plans to increase the size of the U.S. military

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Bush Plans To Expand Military

WASHINGTON, Dec. 19, 2006

(CBS/AP) President Bush, working to recraft his strategy in Iraq, said Tuesday that he plans to increase the size of the U.S. military so it can fight a long-term war against terrorism.

In an interview with The Washington Post, Bush said he has asked his new defense chief, Robert Gates, to report back to him with a plan to increase ground forces. The president did not say how many troops might be added, but said he agreed with officials in the Pentagon and on Capitol Hill that the current military is being stretched too thin to deal with demands of fighting terrorism.

"I'm inclined to believe that we do need to increase our troops - the Army, the Marines," Bush said in the Oval Office session. "And I talked about this to Secretary Gates and he is going to spend some time talking to the folks in the building, come back with a recommendation to me about how to proceed forward on this idea."

Top generals have expressed concern that even temporarily shipping thousands more troops to Iraq would be largely ineffective in the absence of bold new political and economic steps, and that it would leave the already stretched Army and Marines Corps even thinner once the surge ended.

They also worry that it feeds a perception that the strife and chaos in Iraq is mainly a military problem; in their view it is largely political, fed by economic distress.

It will take time to train and recruit more soldiers, reports **CBS News national security correspondent David Martin**. Army chief of staff General Pete Schoomaker estimates the army could increase its current number of 507,000 by at most 7,000 a year. And it will also cost a lot of money - those additional 7,000 soldiers would cost about \$840 million a year.

Bush said he has not yet made a decision about a new strategy for Iraq, which he is expected to announce next month. He said he was waiting for Gates to return from his expected trip to Iraq to get a firsthand look at the situation.

"I need to talk to him when he gets back," the president said. "I've got more consultations to do with the national security team, which will be consulting with other folks. And I'm going to take my time to make sure that the policy, when it comes out, the American people will see that we ... have got a new way forward."

Bush said his decision to increase the size of the armed forces was in response not just to the war in Iraq, but to the broader struggle against Islamic extremists around the globe.

“It is an accurate reflection that this ideological war we’re in is going to last for a while and that we’re going to need a military that’s capable of being able to sustain our efforts and to help us achieve peace,” he said.

According to **CBS News Military Analyst Maj. Mike Lyons (Ret.)**, “[President Bush] is finally talking about the fact that [the Iraq war] is going to take a very long time – shifting the focus almost out of Iraq, out of Afghanistan, to the potential of other places in the world. So, in order to prepare the American people for a longer war, he’s prepping them by saying, ‘We need more troops, we need them to be able to rotate to these places in the world where we don’t even know the enemy could be right now.’”

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