



13,000 National Guard Troops to Head to Iraq

Critic Says the Army Has Broken Faith with Guard Members

By JOHN HENDREN

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The Pentagon is expected to announce Monday that 13,000 National Guard troops from Ohio, Indiana, Arkansas and Oklahoma have been alerted that they will probably be headed for Iraq as soon as December.

That violates a Defense Department guideline, for the first time, that aims to deploy Guard troops just one year out of every five.

But Defense Sec. Robert Gates said it had become clear that, "There would be a transition period during which those guidelines would be violated, and which we would be unable, because of the troop commitments in Afghanistan and in Iraq, to meet those goals."

Col. Ronald Westfall's Indiana brigade was informed that it would be among the first Guard units to return to Iraq. This time he will be joined by his 21-year-old daughter, and both, he said, face a very different fight.

"This time, it's different," he said. "We aren't facing the Iraqi army. We are facing insurgents and terrorists."

Paul Rieckhoff, a National Guardsman and director of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, said the Army has broken faith with Guard members.

"It's really destroying the National Guard, and it's ruining that commitment. National Guard folks are going to get out. & It's just totally unsustainable," he said. "Over time, not only is this really going to ruin our military, it's going to ruin the lives of these individuals."

The Army is also asking more of its full-time soldiers as well. Regular Army soldiers now deploy as often as every other year, despite a guideline that regular Army troops would serve just one out of every three years.

"The active Army is about broken," Colin Powell, former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and later secretary of state, said in January.

In a statement responding to ABC News, the Army acknowledged that the force is strained.

"This is not just the Army's war, yet in light of the scale of our commitment, the Army shoulders much of the effort, serving side by side with Marines and our other sister services and coalition partners," said Col. Daniel Baggio.

"We have asked much of our soldiers, from repetitive combat tours, to transforming the Army, to expanding our training base, to resetting our combat equipment," he said. "Simply put, this is the finest Army this nation has ever put into combat. Our soldiers' collective efforts have been magnificent. Our soldiers' effectiveness depends upon a national commitment to recruit, train, equip and support them properly."

"This commitment must be underwritten by consistent investment," Baggio said. "We do have concerns over multiple deployments and shrinking dwell time, which have training and family implications. There's a lot of wear and tear out there, but the Army is not broken."

Marine Gen. Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, acknowledged this week that training is sometimes cut short.

"When you only have one year between -- or less -- between deployments instead of the two that you would like to have, you then do not train to what we call full-spectrum," Pace told reporters at the Pentagon. "So that if an unexpected event were to happen somewhere in the world where you needed your full combined arms team, that you had been training to that on a routine basis."

Pvt. Matthew Zeimer was sent to Iraq without the intense four-week training course most soldiers get before heading there. He was killed Feb. 2, two hours after arriving at his post, apparently by friendly fire. His mother told Time magazine that he should have gotten more training, but there's no telling if that would have made a difference.

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