

## **Critics: Long deployments strain soldiers, reveal deeper problems**

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A sweeping Army policy that prevents troops bound for Iraq and Afghanistan from leaving their units reveals deeper structural problems within the service and could create an exodus of soldiers in the coming years, critics said Wednesday.

The impact could be especially prevalent throughout the National Guard and Reserve forces, where soldiers have faced unexpectedly long deployments.

"It's particularly acute for people who were about to get out and now have to deploy for maybe a year more. That's a huge change," said Marcus Corbin, senior analyst at the Center for Defense Information, a defense policy think tank. "It's not just that they're staying in, but they're deploying to Iraq, which is an extremely hostile and difficult deployment."

The Army announced a new two-pronged [stop-loss and stop-movement policy](#) Wednesday that restricts active-duty and reserve soldiers from leaving units that will deploy as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.

The stop-loss order prevents soldiers from leaving the service when their volunteer time is up if their unit is going to deploy within 90 days. Instead, they have to remain in the Army until the end of their deployment overseas and up to another 90 days after they come home. The stop-movement order blocks soldiers from shifting to new assignments during the restricted period.

A former Army captain called the stop-loss policy "shameful" and a "gross breach of contract" in a New York Times opinion piece Wednesday. Andrew Exum, who led troops in battle in Afghanistan, said soldiers he knows who were nearing the end of their commitment told him they felt "a sense of hopelessness" about having to return to Iraq.

"These soldiers have already been asked to sacrifice much and have done so proudly," he wrote. "Yet the military continues to keep them overseas -- because it knows that through stop-loss it can do so legally, and that it will not receive nearly as much negative publicity as it would by reinstating the draft."

The new policy is a sign that the Army's structure and rotation base are no longer adequate to meet the needs of the force, said Andrew Krepinevich, executive director of the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, a policy research institute.

"This is really the consequence of an Army that has been structured to run sprints rather than marathons," he said.

Army personnel Chief Lt. Gen. Frank L. "Buster" Hagenbeck denied claims that the Army is getting desperate because troop levels are overextended by long commitments in Iraq and

Afghanistan. Rather, he said the new policy is needed to maintain unit cohesion as the Army creates more, smaller and interchangeable Brigade Combat Teams.

"We want to build them, train them and deploy them together as a team," he said. "If we didn't have stop-loss, we would send units to Iraq or Afghanistan and over that period of six to 12 months while they're in theater, they would be continuously having individuals rotate in and out of there, breaking up the teams and squads."

Hagenbeck acknowledged, however, that the Army is overextended. "I don't think there's any question that here in the near-term the United States Army, active and reserve, are stretched. But the fact of the matter is we've got what we need," he said.

The new policy replaces piecemeal stop-loss orders issued by the Army since the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, which have affected about 45,000 active-duty and reserve soldiers. Hagenbeck was unable to say how many soldiers would be affected now by the stop-loss and stop-movement orders.

Reginald Brown, assistant Army secretary for manpower and reserve affairs, said in a statement that without stop-loss, an average division would have to acquire more than 4,000 soldiers from other units to bring itself up to strength.

Corbin and Krepinevich both agreed in separate interviews that commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan are a driving force behind the new stop-loss policy.

Corbin believes stop-loss is one of several valuable tools the Army can use to address personnel needs. He hopes in the future the service will have a structure where stop-loss is integrated into units and soldiers are aware of this when they join. It's too early to tell exactly what kind of an effect the stop-loss policy will have on retention and recruitment, Corbin added.

"The effect on the Guard and Reserves may be greater because I think there was less of an expectation that they would be deployed as much," he said.

Krepinevich said stop-loss is an effort to ensure that when units go into battle they are as well-trained and prepared as possible. He added that it's hard to predict whether or not the new stop-loss policy would have a greater impact on the active-duty or reserve forces.

"The real danger is the Army is so below what would be considered an adequate rotation base," Krepinevich said. "I think the sheer frequency of the rotations is too much."