

Army stops soldiers from leaving units designated for Iraq, Afghanistan

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The Army announced a broad new policy Wednesday that restricts active-duty and reserve soldiers from leaving units that will deploy to Iraq or Afghanistan.

The broad stop-loss policy is intended to keep cohesion in units that train and deploy together, said Lt. Gen. Frank L. "Buster" Hagenbeck, the Army's deputy chief of staff for personnel.

"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," he said.

The new policy will be in effect indefinitely, and soldiers in units that deploy as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom cannot rotate out of their units or leave the service except under special circumstances approved by their commanders.

The policy involves units that are 90 days away or less from deploying. It replaces the piecemeal stop-loss orders issued by the Army, which have affected about 45,000 active-duty and reserve soldiers.

Hagenbeck denied claims that the stop-loss policy is Army troop levels are stretched thin by long commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan. Rather, he said the policy allows the Army to maintain unit solidarity as it transforms and increases its number of modular Brigade Combat Teams from 32 to 48.

"Stop-loss is a requirement until we get all these additional Brigade Combat Teams up to 48," he said. "It is, if you will, a stopgap measure here in the next few years until we reach a steady state where we've built these BCTs, and have predictability where we can rotate people over a given period of time."