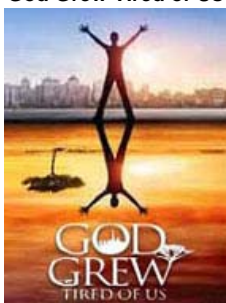


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'Clean sweep': Bush replaces top general in Middle East who opposed troop surge

RAW STORY

Published: Thursday January 4, 2007

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In what appears to be a military shakeup surrounding Iraq, President Bush has replaced both the top US general in the Middle East and the top general in Iraq, ABC NEWS is reporting on air.

Admiral William J. Fallon will replace Gen. John Abizaid, US commander in the Middle East, who announced his retirement in December and was expected to leave the post in March. Abizaid was a critic of Bush's efforts to add more troops to Iraq, but the circumstances of his early departure are unclear.



"The president wants a clean sweep," an official told ABC News.

"Fallon, who is in the Navy, is currently head of Pacific Command; he will be overseeing two ground wars, so the appointment is highly unusual," ABC reports.

According to a *Kansas City Star* article published December 24, "Commanders have been skeptical of the value of increasing troops. The decision represents a reversal for Casey, the highest-ranking officer in Iraq. Casey and Gen. John P. Abizaid, the top commander in the Middle East, have long resisted adding troops in Iraq,

David Petraeus will replace General George Casey, commander of US forces in Iraq. Casey originally opposed the President's plan to add troops in Iraq, arguing it could delay "the development of Iraqi security forces and increase anger at the United States in the Arab world."

The *LA Times* recently reported that Abizaid's departure could clear the way for a more aggressive strategy in Iraq.

Excerpts from *LA Times* article:

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Abizaid's planned departure clears the way for new Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates to recommend his own commander, a decision current and former Defense officials say is nearly as important as the new administration strategy expected to be unveiled by Bush in January.

These officials said Gates faces a clear choice between generals who have agreed with Abizaid's push to quickly hand over security responsibilities to Iraqi forces and a small but increasingly influential coterie of officers backing a more aggressive U.S.-led counterinsurgency campaign.

According to Defense officials, Abizaid submitted his retirement documents just over a month ago, shortly before Donald H. Rumsfeld was pushed out as Defense secretary. One recently retired Army general said Abizaid had

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wanted to retire earlier but that Rumsfeld blocked the move, insisting his war commanders stay in place.

"Going to war isn't like having a regular job," said the retired general, who, like the others, spoke on condition of anonymity because Abizaid's plans had not been made public. "It's extremely stressful, it's heavily responsible. I can understand why he'd want to retire."

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