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US Plans Further Escalation of Afghan War

By Jason Ditz
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This week, the Pentagon is expected to deliver a series of “options” for the US escalation of the 16-year-long war in Afghanistan. Each of these plans involves sending a minimum of 3,000 more US ground troops into the country, with some reportedly seeking as many as 5,000.

The other details, beyond raw numbers, are still coming out, but most recently, the signs are that the plans will follow the escalations in Iraq and Syria, in that they will see President Trump transferring the future decisions on US troop levels in Afghanistan to the Pentagon directly.

President Trump has been eager to delegate decision-making to the military brass wherever possible, though giving the Pentagon control over not just day-to-day operations but broader strategic decisions clearly poses significant risks to the level of civilian control over the US military.

Afghan forces have been losing ground significantly to the Taliban across the country, and the US is keen to put more ground troops in sensitive areas, trying to slow territory losses. It was a foregone conclusion this would involve new deployments of troops, as indeed the US has sent more troops to its other various wars across the world to escalate them.

That this is also including the administration ceding decisions on troop levels to the Pentagon is noteworthy, however, as these moves appear more or less permanent, and the Pentagon has always leaned toward the largest escalations in the past, suggesting that's being locked in going forward.