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Mattis: Over 3,000 US Troops in Afghanistan Will Be on ‘Combat Duty’

10/3/2017

Speaking to the Senate Armed Services Committee, Secretary of Defense James Mattis offered new details on the ongoing US escalation of the war in Afghanistan, revealing that more than 3,000 troops are being deployed into the country for “combat duty.”

The US troops in Afghanistan have for years been presented as purely “advise and assist” forces, with the suggestion that combat operations in the country have ended. Mattis said that while Afghan forces will “remain in the lead for the fighting,” the newly deployed US troops will be in combat duty.

Details on the overall size of the US deployment have not been made public, but the “more than 3,000” Mattis is referring to appears to be separate from the mid-September announcement of over 6,000 ground troops heading to Afghanistan from Fort Carson.

Mattis explicitly declined to tell senators how many troops were being sent to Afghanistan in Trump’s escalation. Despite Mattis long insisting he supports more transparency, he insisted numbers would “tell the enemy something that will help them.”

The only other detail Mattis and Gen. Joe Dunford offered at the committee session is that the escalation, at present, is estimated to cost over \$1 billion more per year, bringing the annual Afghan War cost up to around \$12.5 billion.

That's a really rough estimate, too, as Mattis pointed out that while he's confident he's going to get all the troops he needs from Trump, he expressed openness to asking Trump for even more troops for the war if he feels it necessary.