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‘Enduring Presence’ in Afghanistan

By Jason Ditz

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Speaking today on ABC’s “This Week,” Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta downplayed the 2014 “end” of the Afghan War that every other official seems to be hyping, saying that US ground troops would have an “enduring presence” in the country long after that date.

“We’re not going anywhere. We’re gonna, we have an enduring presence that will be in Afghanistan,” Panetta insisted. President Obama signed a deal at the start of the month to keep US ground troops in Afghanistan through 2024.

Panetta’s comments reflect a bizarre attempt by the administration to have their cake and eat it too on the Afghan War. Officials hype a deal to “end” the war in 2014, even though it did nothing of the sort, when targeting an audience opposed to the war.

Yet with Gov. Mitt Romney slamming the administration for setting a date, Panetta feels perfectly comfortable in trying to outhawk him by insisting that the war isn’t, in fact, going to end. So far this sort of “targeted” message, despite the obvious contradictions in the comments, seems to be getting more common, not less, and interviewers don’t seem interested in getting a straight answer about the matter.