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## **WHITE HOUSE EXPECTED TO GRANT PENTAGON AUTHORITY FOR AFGHANISTAN TROOP LEVELS**

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CNN (14 June 2017)

Washington (CNN)The Pentagon is expected to soon announce that Defense Secretary James Mattis will now have authority to make decisions about how many US troops are deployed to Afghanistan without first having to get formal agreement from the White House, according to a US official familiar with the plan.

While Mattis will decide under his new authority, he will have to keep President Donald Trump fully informed and briefed, the official said.

This is a change from the Bush and Obama administrations, where the White House approved troop levels, largely because tens of thousands of personnel were involved.

The Trump administration already delegated the authority to set those official troop levels in the fight against ISIS in Iraq and Syria to Mattis in April.

A US senior defense official told CNN that the decision concerning troop levels in Syria and Iraq was communicated via an internal policy memo on April 20.

There are currently about 8,400 US troops devoted to Operation Resolute Support in Afghanistan, which encompasses both US counter terrorism forces to fight ISIS and the Taliban as well as the effort to train, advise and assist Afghan forces in a separate effort.

The Pentagon and White House have been reviewing an option to send 3,000 to 5,000 additional US forces solely in that training and advisory role.

The Pentagon is now conducting a broader military review involving both Afghanistan and Pakistan, so a decision on exactly how many additional troops might not come for several more weeks, defense officials have said in recent days.

Mattis told the Senate Armed Services Committee Tuesday that he will be able to brief the committee on a new Afghanistan strategy by mid-July.

"I believe by mid-July we will be able to brief you in detail," Mattis said. "We are putting it together now and there are actions being taken to make certain we don't pay a price for the delay."

The issue of troop levels became especially sensitive in the Obama administration because precise so-called "force management levels" were set for US deployments to Iraq and Syria. But those troop levels quickly became relatively meaningless because they were increased several times, and did not account for temporary deployments or the use of private contractors.