
U.S., NATO STILL TRYING TO MAP OUT AFGHANISTAN STRATEGY

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Even though President Trump announced his strategy for the war in Afghanistan in August, the Pentagon and NATO are still trying to map their way forward in the nearly 16-year-old conflict, according to U.S. officials.

The delay is the byproduct of the U.S. commanders vision for the war and the alliances ability to provide the troops required to make it a reality, according to a U.S. official who like others spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss ongoing deliberations.

[Afghan troop surge likely to include thousands of paratroopers, Marines and heavy bombers]

In recent weeks, the United States deployed additional forces into Afghanistan – a move that coincided with the announcement of Trumps strategy – to help bolster Afghan forces during the final months of this years fighting season. The immediate surge was a short-term solution, requested by battlefield commanders, but the Pentagon is still assessing how U.S. troops will be deployed in the country in 2018, according to a U.S. official in Afghanistan.

Speaking to a small group of reporters, Gen. Curtis Scaparrotti, the head of the U.S. European Command and Supreme Allied Commander of Europe, said that he expects to have a full picture on NATO commitments by October.

There is still a lack of clarity which positions, which functions, to focus their contributions, said Czech Gen. Petr Pavel, chairman of the NATO Military Committee. Speaking at a news conference here, Pavel added that the recently announced U.S. strategy provides a clearer picture of the way forward, but the alliance wont make final troop decisions until another conference in October.

With the military mission in Afghanistan primarily focused on training the Afghan military, the United States wants its NATO allies to take up the bulk of that role, freeing up U.S. forces to push closer to the front. The U.S. military in Afghanistan has the infrastructure, including fire support and medical evacuation capabilities, to move its troops forward, to not only train and advise but also assist – through airstrikes and artillery – their struggling Afghan counterparts, the official said.

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