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Trump: More US Troops Might Not Be Needed in Afghanistan

7/20/2017

Visiting the Pentagon today, President Trump gave the impression that the US might hold off on any further escalations of the Afghan War, saying that he believes “we’re doing very well against ISIS” and that might have the US waiting longer on deciding troop levels.

The ISIS affiliate in Afghanistan is, of course, not historically what have driven troop decisions in the 16-year occupation of Afghanistan. Rather, the US fight against the Taliban has been the focus, and the Taliban’s mounting gains had many Pentagon hawks arguing for escalation.

President Trump already delegated the authority to send up to 3,900 more troops to Afghanistan to Defense Secretary James Mattis. The recent comments out of the Pentagon had pointed to the US using that as a “stopgap,” then trying to convince Trump to send even more.

Wednesday’s full security cabinet meeting may be changing that, and Trump appears less convinced than ever on the merits of escalation in Afghanistan. The cabinet is seen sharply divided on the matter, mostly on whether the war is even conceivably winnable at this point.