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Panetta: US to End Combat Role in Afghanistan Next Year

By John Glaser

February 1, 2012

Defense Secretary Leon Panetta told reporters Wednesday that the U.S. would end its combat role in Afghanistan by next year and switch primarily to a support and training role, reiterating the administration's longstanding timetable.

While the media is treating the announcement as something new and a sign that the U.S. is beleaguered in their fruitless war against Afghan insurgents, the stated mission has not changed. A gradual drawdown of troops is planned to begin next year, followed by mountains of money, weapons, and training by 2014 and into the foreseeable future.

“Hopefully by mid to the latter part of 2013 we’ll be able to make a transition from a combat role to a training, advise and assist role,” Panetta said. “It’s still a pretty robust role that we’ll be engaged in. It’s not going to be a kind of formal combat role that we are now.”

But he made sure to clarify that the war and a sizable occupation of Afghanistan will go on: “That doesn’t mean that we’re not going to be combat ready. We will be because we always have to be in order to defend ourselves.”

Meanwhile, nothing about the NATO mission is going as planned. The Afghan army and police, scheduled to take over the security role in 2014, are corrupt, inept, and [potentially infiltrated with insurgents](#). Violence keeps reaching all-time highs and U.S. and Afghan casualties continue to rise.

Furthermore, a recent U.S. [National Intelligence Estimate](#) concluded that the war was a stalemate, and a recently leaked U.S. military report found that the [Taliban are set to retake power, with Pakistan's help](#), after NATO forces withdraw.