

15,000 Troops Involved in Massive Operation in Southern. Afghanistan

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KABUL — Some 15,000 troops of Afghan and NATO forces are involved in a massive offensive launched in southern Afghanistan's Helmand province Saturday morning, coalition forces said.

"A combined force of 15,000 is involved in Operation Moshtarak, " said a press release issued by the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Saturday morning.

"The combined force comprises the Afghan National Army, Afghan National Police, International Security Assistance Force Regional Command (South), and Helmand Provincial Reconstruction Team," it added.

Five brigades of Afghan forces, including members of the Afghan National Army, Afghan National Police, Afghan Border Police and Afghan Genarmerie, are involved in the operation, according to the press release.

Coalition troops in the operation are drawn from the United States, Britain, Denmark, Estonia and Canada, it added.

The press release gives a detailed list of foreign troops involved in the operation, which include: 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines (U.S.); 1st Battalion, 6th Marines (U.S.); 3rd Battalion, 6th Marines (U.S.); 4th Battalion, 23rd IN Stryker (U.S.); Combat Engineer Battalion (U.S.); Light Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment (U.S.); 1 Coldstream Guards Battle Group (UK); 1 Grenadier Guards Battle Group (UK); 1 Royal Welsh Battle Group (UK); Helmand Provincial Reconstruction Team (UK); Operational Mentor and Liaison Team (UK); Task Force Pegasus; and Task Force Kandahar.

Smaller-scaled "shaping" operations, as an initial phase in a long-term operation, have been conducted to set conditions for the military operations, it added.

Following the military operations, the swift establishment of an Afghan government presence in cleared areas will be carried out, it further said.

The press release also confirmed the launch of Operation Moshtarak on Saturday morning, which is branded as the biggest operation since 2001 in the war-torn country. Locals in the Marjah town told Xinhua that the long-expected massive operation was believed to be started before dawn on Saturday.

Marjah, a town with a population of 80,000, is a Taliban stronghold in the Helmand province. Military analysts said around 1,000 insurgents might be hiding inside the besieged town.

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