



Caps on troop levels in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria mandated by the Obama administration have led to an elaborate Pentagon accounting system that conceals thousands of troops from the public — one that is quickly unraveling as the Trump administration prepares to send more troops to the region.

With new plans to ramp up the war in Afghanistan, the military is finding it exceedingly difficult to maintain a practice that purposely doesn't count certain troops in the battle zone that military officials insist was not designed to be misleading but many critics now assert is at best an officially sanctioned charade.

The U.S. already has as many as 12,000 troops in Afghanistan, significantly higher than its 8,400-person cap. If President Donald Trump sends nearly 4,000 additional troops, as officials predict, the total will be nearly double the current public number. In Iraq, where the Baghdad government faces political resistance to a large American troop presence, the 5,200 troop figure the Pentagon uses in public serves as a useful fiction. In fact, more than 7,000 U.S. troops are in Iraq, according to recent reports.

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