



Why Won't the Pentagon Tell Us Where Our Troops Are Fighting?

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December 13, 2017

2017 has been a year of massive expansion for the Global War on Terror, but you could be forgiven for not noticing.

In addition to the media focus on the ongoing chaos in the Trump White House, the Pentagon has consistently avoided disclosing where and who America's armed forces are engaged in fighting until forced to do so.

Take Syria, where the Pentagon long claimed that there were only 500 boots on the ground, even though anecdotal accounts suggested a much higher total.

When Maj. General James Jarrard accidentally admitted to reporters at a press conference in October that the number was closer to 4,000, his statement was quickly walked back. Finally, last week, the Pentagon officially acknowledged that there are in fact 2,000 troops on the ground in Syria, and pledged that they will stay there "indefinitely."

Even when we do know how many troops are stationed abroad, we often don't know what they're doing.

Look at Niger, where a firefight in October left four soldiers dead. Prior to this news—and to the President's disturbing decision to publicly feud with the widow of one of the soldiers—most Americans had no idea that troops deployed to Africa on so-called 'train-and equip' missions were engaged in active combat.

Yet U.S. troops are currently engaged in counterterrorism and support missions in Somalia, Chad, Nigeria, and elsewhere, deployments which have never been debated by Congress and are authorized only under a patchwork of shaky, existing authorities.

Even in the Middle East, deployments have been increasing substantially under the Trump administration, with the number of troops and civilian support staff in the region increasing by almost 30 percent during the summer of 2017 alone.

These dramatic increases were noted in the Pentagon's quarterly personnel report, but no effort was made to draw public attention to them.

The fundamental problem is simple. With only limited knowledge of where American troops are, and what they are doing there, we cannot even have a coherent public discussion about the scope of U.S. military intervention around the globe.

We should be discussing the increase in U.S. military actions in Africa or the growth in U.S. combat troops in the Middle East, but that discussion is effectively impossible—even for the relevant congressional committees—with so little information.

So if I could ask for one change to U.S. foreign policy for Christmas, I'd like to know where American troops are and what they're doing there.

It's past time for a little more transparency, from the Trump administration, and from the Pentagon.

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