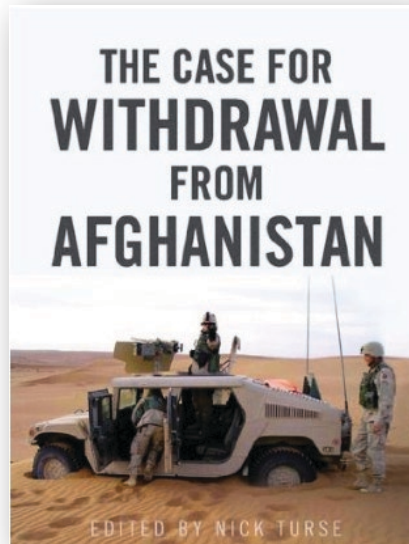
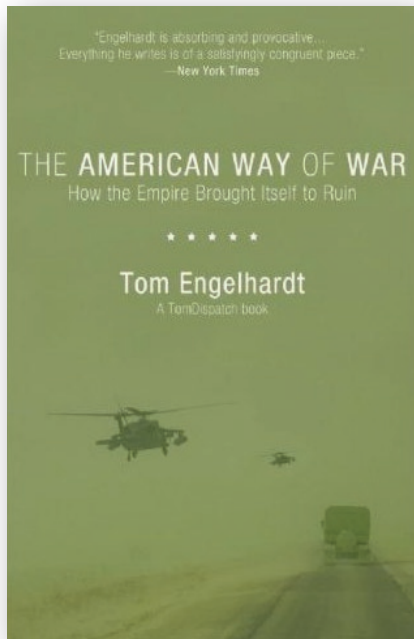


THE TOM ENGELHARDT
& NICK TURSE
WACKY
WORLD OF
AMERICAN
WAR



ColdType



Tom Engelhardt, co-founder of the American Empire Project, runs the Nation Institute's TomDispatch.com. His latest book, *The American Way of War: How Bush's Wars Became Obama's* (Haymarket Books), has just been published..

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THE WACKY WORLD OF AMERICAN WAR

Yes, it would be funny if it weren't so grim. After all, when it comes to squandering money and resources in strange and distant places (or even here at home), you can count on the practitioners of American-style war to be wildly over the top.

Oh, those madcap Pentagon bureaucrats and the zany horde of generals and admirals who go with them! Give them credit: no one on Earth knows how to throw a war like they do – and they never go home.

In fact, when it comes to linking “profligate” to “war,” with all the lies, manipulations, and cost overruns that give it that proverbial pizzazz, Americans should stand tall. We are absolutely #1!

Hence, the very first TomDispatch American Way of War Quiz. Admittedly, it covers only the last four weeks of war news you wouldn't believe if it weren't in the papers, but we could have done this for any month since October 2001.

Now's your chance to pit your wits (and your ability to suspend disbelief)



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against the best the Pentagon has to offer – and we're talking about all seventeen-and-a-half miles of corridors in that five-sided, five-story edifice that has triple the square footage of the Empire State Building. To weigh your skills on the TomDispatch Scales of War™, take the 11-question pop quiz below, checking your answers against ours (with accompanying explanations), and see if you deserve to be a four-star general, a gun-totin' mercenary, or a mere private.

1. With President Obama's Afghan surge of 30,000 U.S. troops complete, an administration review of war policy due in December, and fears rising that new war commander General David Petraeus might then ask for more troops, what did the general do at the beginning of September?

a. He informed the White House that he now had too many troops for reasonable operations in Afghanistan and proposed that a drawdown begin immediately.

b. He assured the White House that he

was satisfied with the massive surge in troops (civilian employees, contractors, and CIA personnel) and would proceed as planned.

c. He asked for more troops now.

Correct answer: c. General Petraeus has already reportedly requested an extra mini-surge of 2,000 more troops from NATO, and probably from U.S. reserves as well, including more trainers for the Afghan military. In interviews as August ended, he was still insisting that he had “the structures, people, concepts, and resources required to carry out a comprehensive civil-military counterinsurgency campaign.” But that was the summer silly season. This is September, a time for cooler heads and larger demands.

2. With President Obama’s announced July 2011 drawdown of U.S. troops in Afghanistan in mind, the Pentagon has already:

a. Begun organizing an orderly early 2011 withdrawal of troops from combat outposts and forward operating bases to larger facilities to facilitate the president’s plan.

b. Launched a new U.S. base-building binge in Afghanistan, including contracts for three \$100 million facilities not to be completed, no less completely occupied, until late 2011.

c. Announced plans to shut down Kandahar Air Base’s covered boardwalk, including a TGI Friday’s, a Kentucky Fried Chicken, and a Mamma Mia’s Pizzeria, and cancelled the opening of a Nathan’s Famous Hot Dogs as part of its preparations for an American drawdown.

Correct answer: b. According to Walter Pincus of the Washington Post, construction is slated to begin on at least three



The high-end total for al-Qaeda members in the three countries, then, would be 800, though the actual figure could be significantly smaller

\$100 million air base projects – “a \$100 million area at Shindand Air Base for Special Operations helicopters and unmanned intelligence and surveillance aircraft”; another \$100 million to expand the airfield at Camp Dwyer, a Marine base in Helmand Province, also to support Special Operations forces; and a final \$100 million for expanded air facilities at Mazar-e Sharif in northern Afghanistan. None of these projects are to be completed until well after July 2011. “[R]equests for \$1.3 billion in additional fiscal 2011 funds for multiyear construction of military facilities in Afghanistan are pending before Congress.” And fear not, there are no indications that the fast-food joints at Kandahar are going anywhere.

3. The U.S. military has more generals and admirals than:

a. Al-Qaeda members in Yemen.

b. Al-Qaeda members in Afghanistan.

c. Al-Qaeda members in Pakistan.

d. Al-Qaeda members in all three countries.

Correct answer: a, b, c, and d. According to CIA Director Leon Panetta, there are 50 to 100 al-Qaeda operatives in Afghanistan, possibly less. Best estimates suggest that there are perhaps “several hundred” al-Qaeda members in poverty-stricken, desertifying, strife-torn Yemen. There are also an estimated “several hundred” members and leaders of the original al-Qaeda in the Pakistani borderlands. The high-end total for al-Qaeda members in the three countries, then, would be 800, though the actual figure could be significantly smaller. According to Ginger Thompson and Thom Shanker of the New York Times, the U.S. military has 963 generals and admirals, approximately 100 more than on September 11,

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2001. (The average salary for a general, by the way, is \$180,000, which means that the cost of these “stars,” not including pensions, health-care plans, and perks, is approximately \$170 million a year.) The U.S. military has 40 four-star generals and admirals at the moment, which may represent more star-power than there are al-Qaeda operatives in Afghanistan. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has suggested that, as a belt-tightening measure, he might cut the top-heavy U.S. military by 50 positions – that is, by half the increase since 9/11.

4. With the U.S. military obliged, by agreement with the Iraqi government, to withdraw all U.S. military personnel from Iraq by the end of 2011, the Pentagon has:

- a. *Decided that, in the interests of Iraqi sovereignty and to save U.S. taxpayers money, all U.S. troops will depart ahead of schedule, leaving Iraq no later than next February.*
- b. *Instituted austerity measures, halted renovations on remaining American bases, and handed over all base construction efforts to the Iraqi government.*
- c. *Continued to sink hundreds of millions of dollars into military base improvements.*

Correct answer: c. Jackie Soohen recently toured Balad Air Base in Central Iraq for Democracy Now! That base, described in the past as an American town, has, she points out, “three large gyms, multiple shopping centers, recreation areas, and a movie theater,” not to speak of multiple bus routes and the usual range of fast-food parlors, PXs, and the like. The base, she reports, is still expanding and “on bases like this one..., the military continues to invest hundred of millions



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in infrastructure improvements, and it is difficult to imagine them fully abandoning everything they are building here.” They are, in fact, not likely to do so anytime soon. There are still more than 5,800 U.S. Air Force personnel in Iraq. Thanks to previous American policies, that country, which once had a large air force, today has only a rudimentary one. The new Iraqi air force is now eager to purchase its first jet fighters, F-16s from Lockheed Martin, but no agreement has been signed or date set for delivery. The Iraqis will still need further years of pilot training to fly those planes when they do arrive in 2013 or later. In the meantime, the U.S. Air Force is almost guaranteed to be the Iraqi Air Force, and U.S. Air Force personnel will undoubtedly remain at Balad Air Base in significant numbers, “withdrawal” or no.

5. What did the Pentagon recently hand over to Iraq?

- a. *A check for one trillion dollars to reconstruct a country which the U.S. invasion and occupation plunged into a ruinous civil war that cost millions of Iraqis their homes, their jobs, their economic security, their peace of mind, or their lives.*
- b. *An IOU for two trillion dollars to reconstruct a country which the U.S. invasion and occupation plunged into a ruinous civil war that cost millions of Iraqis their homes, their jobs, their economic security, their peace of mind, or their lives.*
- c. *Some hot air.*

Correct answer: c. We’ll bet you didn’t know that, in 2003, the U.S. military occupied not only the land of Iraq, but its air, too. Just recently, according to a Pentagon press-release-cum-news-story, “the U.S. Air Force handed over the Kirkuk

sector of airspace, 15,000 feet and above, to the ICAA [Iraq Civil Aviation Authority] at Baghdad International Airport.” In November, the U.S. plans to hand over even more hot air, this time in the south of the country – but not all of it. Iraq will not control all of its air until some time in 2011. Of course, once they have their air back, the Iraqi Air Force will only need planes and trained pilots to make use of it. (See question 4.)

6. The 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment, a “combat-capable brigade-sized unit,” has been deployed three times (according to the U.S. Army) “during Operation Iraqi Freedom – serving successfully in tough areas including Fallujah, Tall Afar, Ramadi, and Baghdad.” Its lead elements were recently sent from Fort Hood, Texas, to where?

- a. Afghanistan as the final installment of President Obama’s surge of U.S. troops into that country.
- b. Camp Justice, the U.S. military base in Oman, as a warning to insurgents in neighboring Yemen.
- c. Camp Darby in Livorno, Italy, because the war there didn’t end all that long ago and, besides, Switzerland sits threateningly to the north.
- d. Juarez, Mexico, because Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recently declared Mexico’s drug war an “insurgency,” and insurgencies are now an area of U.S. military expertise.
- e. Iraq, the country that the “last U.S. combat troops” left less than a month ago.

Correct answer: e. Of course, the “Brave Rifles,” as the unit is known, are not – we repeat not – combat troops. They’re just, says the Army, “combat capable.” Yes, they’re trained for combat. But take our



They’re just, says the Army, “combat capable.” Yes, they’re trained for combat. But take our word for it, they’re NOT combat troops

word for it, they’re NOT combat troops. Yes they’re well armed. But NOT for combat. And yes, they’re an “Armored Cavalry” unit. But it’s NOT about combat, OK? They’re in Iraq strictly in an “advise and assist” capacity. Did we mention that they aren’t a combat unit?

7. With the U.S. military occupation of Iraq due to end in 2011, the American mission there is officially being left to the State Department, representing the civilian side of U.S. foreign policy, which is planning to:

- a. Spend about \$1.5 billion dollars to set up and run two embassy branch offices and two or more “enduring presence posts” (they used to be called “consulates”), including hiring the necessary armed private contractors.
- b. Employ 2,400 people in its (“largest in the world”) embassy, the size of the Vatican (but far better defended) in Baghdad’s Green Zone and at its other posts.
- c. More than double its force of private civilian contractors to 6,000-7,000, arm them with cast-off Pentagon heavy weaponry and Apache helicopters, and form them into “quick reaction teams.”
- d. Spend another \$800 million on a program to train the Iraqi police.
- e. Take on more than 1,200 specific tasks previously handled by the U.S. military.

Correct answer: a, b, c, d, and e (and even they don’t cover the subject adequately). Michael Gordon of the New York Times supplied most of the numbers above. Who knows what those 1,200 previously military tasks may be, but, reports the Nation’s Jeremy Scahill, those five “enduring presence posts” are to be set up on what are now U.S. military bases, assumedly so that the Pentagon’s costly base-build-

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ing won't go completely to waste. It all represents a unique arrangement, since the civilian State Department's corps of mercenary warriors will then be used to "operate radar to warn of enemy fire, search for roadside bombs, and fly surveillance drones," among other jobs. Oh, and good news – if you happen to be a private contractor at least – that police-training program will be run by private contractors; and even better, just in case the private contractors don't act on the up-and-up, there will be people specially assigned to provide oversight and they will be... private contractors, of course. How can the new diplomats from the remodeled five-sided State Department go wrong, advancing as they are encased in the latest mine-resistant vehicles known as MRAPS and ever prepared to give peace a chance?

8. When private military contractor Blackwater (now known as Xe Services) found itself in hot water after some of its guards slaughtered 17 Iraqi civilians in a Baghdad square in 2007, the company responded by:

- a. *Admitting error, while begging forgiveness from, and rapidly paying generous compensation to, the families of the dead Iraqi civilians.*
- b. *Vowing to avoid all armed work in the future and to transform the company into a community-services and elderly care operation.*
- c. *Setting up at least 31 shell companies and subsidiaries through which it could still be awarded contracts by the State Department, the CIA, and the U.S. Army without embarrassment to anyone.*

Correct answer: c So James Risen and Mark Mazzetti reported earlier this month in the New York Times. The com-



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pany, which is "facing a string of legal problems, including the indictment in April of five former Blackwater officials on weapons and obstruction charges, and civil suits stemming from the 2007 shootings in Iraq," hasn't suffered in pocket-book terms. Just this year, it received contracts for \$120 million to provide the State Department with security in Afghanistan, and another \$100 million to protect the CIA in Afghanistan and elsewhere. (The Agency has awarded Blackwater and its shell companies \$600 million since 2001, according to Risen and Mazzetti.)

9. Recently, Iran unveiled a new armed drone, billed as a long-range unmanned aerial bomber and dubbed the "Ambassador of Death" by the country's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Afterwards, the Pentagon:

- a. *Cut out drone strikes in Pakistan to send Iran a message that conducting regular attacks on a country with which you are not officially at war is impermissible.*
- b. *Announced plans to rethink the fast-and-loose rules of robotic assassination used in its Terminator wars for the better part of a decade so that Iran could not cite U.S. actions as precedent.*
- c. *Stepped up drone strikes in the Pakistani tribal borderlands, sometimes carrying out more than one a day.*

Correct answer: c. In discussing Washington's desire to export drone technology to allies, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has termed Iranian drones a "concern." The U.S. has, however, not only continued to pave the way for Iran (and every other nation and non-state actor) to conduct drone attacks with utter impunity, but accelerated the process. For his part,

State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley recently echoed Gates, calling Iran's drones a "concern to us and concern to Iran's neighbors." Of the new Iranian drone's hyperbolic unofficial moniker, he said with a laugh, "It's a curious name for a system." Perhaps he's unaware that his own government has dubbed its two marquee armed drones – with a straight face, mind you – Predator and Reaper (as in "Grim...") and that those aircraft launch "Hellfire" missiles. The official name of the Iranian drone is actually the least inflammatory of the three: "Karrar" or "striker."

10. Five hundred million dollars is approximately the amount:

- a. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton pledged in July to development projects for Pakistan to "build broader support for the war against al-Qaeda and the Taliban."
- b. Afghanistan's troubled Kabul Bank had in cash just weeks ago before its panicked depositors bled it dry.
- c. The amount of money the U.S. military will spend on its musical bands this year.

Correct answer: a, b, and c. According to the Washington Post's Walter Pincus, the U.S. military may now spend \$500 million or more annually on its musical bands – the U.S. Army alone has more than 100 of them – the same amount used to sway a critically impoverished country of 166 million people in what's been portrayed as a multigenerational war of paramount importance. At least Kabul Bank now knows where to go for a loan, assuming that Afghans will accept trombones instead of cash.



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Blast-from-the-Past Bonus Question

11. Who said, "I think for us to get American military personnel involved in a civil war inside Iraq would literally be a quagmire"?

- a. Bob Dylan, mumbled during a live performance in April 2002.
- b. Dick Cheney in 1991 when he was George H.W. Bush's Secretary of Defense.
- c. George Steinbrenner in an interview with the New York Daily News after the Yankees won the 1998 World Series.

Correct answer: b. If only Cheney had listened to himself when he became vice president. "Several years after occupied Iraq had become the quagmire he once warned about," writes historian John Dower in his striking new book *Cultures of War: Pearl Harbor, Hiroshima, 9-11, Iraq*, "Cheney was asked how to reconcile what he argued in 1991 and disregarded later. 'Well, I stand by what I said in '91,' he replied. 'But look what's happened since then – we had 9/11.'" Sigh.

And believe it or not, folks, that's it for the wild and wacky world of American war this month. If you answered at least 10 of the American Way of War Quiz questions correctly, consider yourself a four-star general. If you answered 5 to 9 correctly, you qualify as a gun totin' mercenary (with all the usual Lord of the Flies perks). If you did worse, you're a buck private in a U.S. Army woodwind ensemble that's just been dispatched to Camp Dwyer in Helmand Province, Afghanistan.

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