

The War on Terror in Afghanistan and Other Places I Haven't Heard of

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I was surfing the web the other day when I stumbled upon an interesting story. As it turns out, the Afghanistan war is still going on. Remember that war which got started back in 2001 that everybody forgot about a couple years later when we went to war with Iraq? Apparently it never ended. Crazy. In fact, it's been going on for almost ten years now, surpassing Vietnam as the longest war in U.S. history. Who'd have guessed? Of course, the U.S. is also currently at war with terrorists in the Philippines, Somalia, Pakistan, and North Africa, so it can be hard to keep up with every conflict we get involved in. In any case, since women and gays should soon be able to serve on the front lines, I thought it might be fun to compile a list of interesting facts about the Pentagon and its involvement in the global war on terror.

First off, rumor has it that the U.S. Department of Defense is the world's number one polluter. And by rumor, I mean statistics. Remember that whole climate change thing people were worried about a few years ago? Apparently that didn't go away either. According to Steve Kretzmann, director of Oil Exchange International, "The Iraq war was responsible for at least 141 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (MMTCO₂e) from March 2003 through December 2007. . . . That war emits more than 60 percent that of all countries. . . . This information is not readily available . . . because military emissions abroad are exempt from national reporting requirements under US law and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change." A few other interesting facts, courtesy of Project Censored:

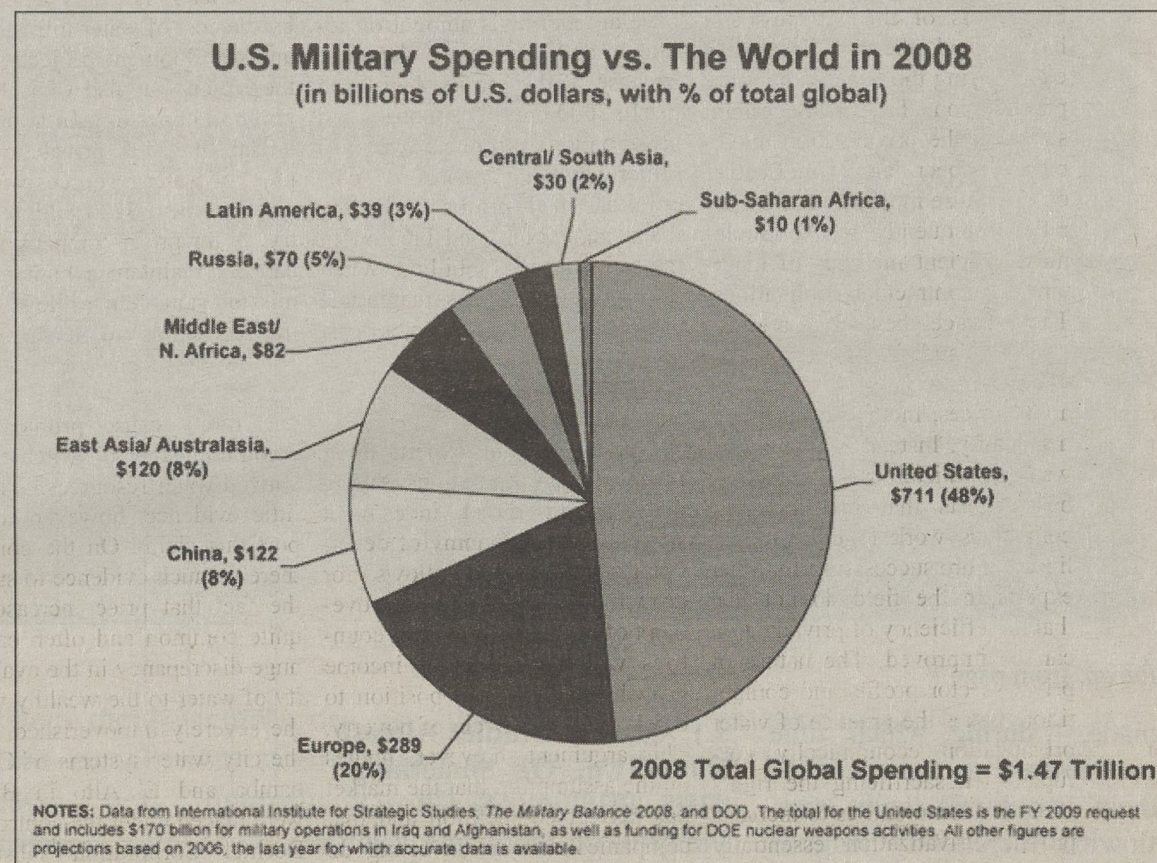
- US military policies and wars in Iraq have created severe desertification of 90% of the land, changing Iraq from a food exporter

into a country that imports 80% of its food.

- In the US, military bases top the Superfund list of the most polluted places, as perchlorate and trichloroethylene seep into the drinking water, aquifers, and soil.
- Rusting barrels of chemicals and solvents and millions of rounds of ammunition are criminally abandoned by the Pentagon in bases around the world.
- Nuclear weapons testing in the American Southwest and the South Pacific Islands has contaminated millions of acres of land and water with radiation, while uranium tailings defile Navajo reservations.

Take that, Navajos. Hey, since we're talking statistics, see if you can make sense of this crazy chart at right, courtesy of the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

It's almost as if the United States military budget is greater than the combined budgets of the next 45 highest spending countries in the world. But I'm not sure if I'm reading this right, because my public school's funding was cut, so I don't know how to read graphs very well. I guess the government needed money for something else. For example, additional money has been required to investigate countless corruption charges against the U.S.-backed Afghan government. A survey conducted by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime stated that "In 2009, Afghan citizens had to pay approximately US\$ 2.5 billion in bribes, which is equivalent to 23 per cent of the country's gross domestic product. . . . By coincidence, this is similar to the revenue accrued by the opium trade in 2009 (which UNODC estimates at US\$ 2.8 billion)." This makes drugs and



I don't know what all these triangles mean.

bribes the two largest sources of income in Afghanistan. Thirteen other surveys, combined to form the Corruption Perceptions Index of 2009, revealed Afghanistan to be the world's second-most corrupt country.

Anyway, some of you may remember that Julian Assange guy. It turns out, last summer he was actually doing something useful by publishing a massive cache of files compiled from almost 90,000 military reports detailing the Afghan war, entitled the Afghan War Logs. These reports described coverups such as an instance where coalition troops attacked a busload of children in 2008, wounding eight, and another incident in which soldiers massacred an entire wedding party, including a pregnant woman, in a revenge attack. Oh, and a video also turned up showing U.S. Apache helicopters killing two Reuters cameramen. I was too busy watching a cat tap-dancing on Youtube to bother looking for the video, but I did later find out that a UNAMA (United Nations

Assistance Mission in Afghanistan) survey estimates civilian deaths in Afghanistan from 2006 to June 2010 to be 6,982. Coalition deaths are currently at 2,289, with 10,082 wounded and the numbers steadily climbing, according to CNN. According to BBC, there are currently "no reliable or verifiable source figures available" to estimate insurgent casualties.

So, obviously civilian casualties suck and all, but it's not like coalition forces are dying senselessly, right? Well... apparently they might be. The Afghan War Logs detail numerous instances of friendly fire casualties between coalition forces, including U.S. troops shooting civilian vehicles filled with coalition personnel, U.S. gunships strafing Afghan police, and a certain 500 lb smart bomb being accidentally dropped on a U.K. compound. Oops. But at least most of the coalition casualties are only wounded, not killed. I mean, how bad could post-traumatic stress disorder, amputation, and paralysis be? I'm not

really sure. I've never suffered from PTSD, had to have a limb amputated, or been paralyzed. But the more I read about this war, the more I see a lack of military organization, a lack of support for wounded veterans, and a lack of empathy for the dead of Afghanistan, America, and the rest of the world. Maybe it's about time our politicians started taking some responsibility for the dead, the wounded, the massive budget deficit, and the ecological catastrophe generated by our war on terror. Funneling bribes into the Afghan government is probably not the best way to do that.

