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Cordesman Game Show: So You Think You Can Win This War?

You really think you can dance WIN THIS WAR??

-- Anthony H. Cordesman, the CSIS Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy (not really; just hypothetically)

Anthony Cordesman is not the warm and fuzzy type.

Jack Webb's *Joe Friday* in *Dragnet* was a barrel of laughs compared to CSIS's most severe, anti-glad handing war strategist.

I occasionally run into Cordesman at the BBC's studios, or CNN, or on some radio interview shows in which we have both been booked -- and Cordesman is as austere in real life as his reputation. But there is no one better in Washington today in terms of laying out the facts as they really are.

He is a nuts-and-bolts, cost-and-benefit guy.

Cordesman dissects military missions and analyzes resources, command structures, probabilities of success or failure in such granular detail that few can challenge his sobering analyses that cause many a headache in the Pentagon.

Cordesman has just issued a set of important PowerPoints (*pdf* here) that give a picture of what is unfolding in Afghanistan -- and what the general odds of success or failure are now for General David Petraeus and U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl Eikenberry.

I have just spent the last 90 minutes absorbing every PowerPoint in this package -- and to say that Cordesman's overall analysis is bleak understates things.

On a more frivolous note, I think it would be interesting to get rid of Senate and House hearings on the Hill and start a new game show titled *So You Think You Can Win This War*. (*homage*)

And Anthony Cordesman will play the more-ruthless-in-real-life-than-on-TV central judge with other guest judges.

My recommendations: University of Chicago terrorism expert *Robert Pape*, former Middle East National Intelligence Council director *Paul Pillar*, Council on Foreign Relations Senior Fellow *Charles Kupchan*, Boston University military affairs scholar *Andrew Bacevich*, Princeton's *G. John Ikenberry*, Duke University's *Bruce Jentleson*, Columbia University senior researcher and former IMF staffer *Graciana del Castillo*, Harvard University professor and, even better, *Foreign Policy* blogger *Stephen Walt*, Cato Institute defense studies director *Christopher Preble*, Center for American Progress middle east affairs expert *Brian Katulis*, and National Defense University terrorism expert *Audrey Kurth Cronin*.

And for fun and to add to the creative tension, I'd occasionally bring on CNAS President *John Nagl*, *The Atlantic's* *Jeffrey Goldberg*, Brookings' *Martin Indyk*, COIN and war chronicler and blogger *Tom Ricks*, The George W. Bush Institute's *James Glassman*, New America Foundation President *Steve Coll*, and the Council on Foreign Relations' *Walter Russell Mead*. And another, CNN's *Fran Townsend*. And *David Frum* too. And after this piece, *Ann Coulter* for at least one show.

That would be a cool show. Cordesman would be right up there with Jon Stewart before long.

Just the facts. No smiles. This is war.

-- *Steve Clemons publishes the popular political blog, The Washington Note. Clemons can be followed on Twitter @SCClemons*

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