

The Game Is Rigged.

Andrew Exum is very good at **constructing** straw men. Responding to Matt Yglesias' **post** noting that many national security think tanks -- like CNAS, which employs Exum -- are funded by defense contractors, Exum writes:

If [Yglesias] thinks this blogger -- or anyone else advocating the U.S. military take *population-centric counterinsurgency* more seriously -- is in the pocket of the military-industrial complex, he does not understand the acquisitions implications of an institutional move toward COIN, a form of warfare in which expensive weapons platforms like the F-22 have little utility.

This makes sense in a world in which the only defense contractors are those supplying weapons. Suffice it to say, the industry is more complicated than that now. Whatever one thinks about the growth of primate military contractors, it is hard to argue that even more mundane contracting groups -- those that **provide** catering, laundry, base security and other support services -- do not benefit from troop surges. More troops in the theater means more support services are necessary, and thus more profits for these types of groups.

Now, we do not know that these are the types of groups financing pro-war think tanks like CNAS. As Nathan Hodge notes, many think tanks aren't exactly enthusiastic about **revealing** their donors. But even if the kinds of contractors who directly benefit from the very escalatory policies that hawkish think tanks back *aren't* the ones financing them, a cultural component still exists here as well. It could be true -- entirely apart from self-interested considerations -- that far more wealthy donors are interested in financing national security experts with more enthusiastic views about the use of force than in funding those urging restraint. It's at least worth noting that, of the many Washington think tanks, only the Cato Institute's fellows consistently offer skeptical views on the war in Afghanistan. The reasons could be more complicated than contractor self-preservation -- the institutional prestige of the military, more general political patterns amongst the upper classes, etc. -- but they still result in a systemic preference for pro-war experts within the vast majority of influential think tanks.

--Dylan Matthews

Posted by on December 4, 2009 2:03 PM | [Permalink](#)