

Deconstructing the US Military: America's Global War against Planet Earth

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While in Kabul in March of this year, I visited the U.S. military base in that city, Camp Eggers . Knowing I would need a pretext to gain entry, I typed up a letter offering to give a presentation on wildlife in Afghanistan , which I had been studying. When approaching the base, one passes through an initial checkpoint, where a Hummer topped with a machine-gun nest stands guard. Then there is a 100-yard walk down a narrow corridor between high concrete blast walls, at which point one arrives at a guarded entry point through the wall. I showed my passport and letter, and was escorted through a second layer of blast walls to a little wooden information booth in this still-peripheral circle of defense. The pimply young lad manning the booth was flustered by my request; he had never seen anything quite like it. He did what all soldiers do when faced with something new; he phoned his superior for orders on how to proceed.

Permission was granted to pass to the next entry level. At hut #2 another friendly young male soldier by the name of Ryan was equally baffled by my written request, and he dialed up his commanding officer for instructions on what to do with me. Then, with Ryan as my escort, I made it into the inner sanctum of the base, where soldiers and military contractors strolled leisurely around the streets of the former Kabul residential area. After being passed around to several more levels of authority, I finally ended up at the office of Morale, Welfare and Recreation. The female officer in charge there was as confused by my presence as everyone else had been, and after reading my proposal asked rather sternly, "How did he get on the base?" She reprimanded Ryan for bringing me to the center of Camp Eggers, then realized that she would have to phone her commanding officer because there was no standardized protocol on how to deal with me. As we retraced our steps, Ryan remarked that he certainly could not be held accountable for letting me on the base because all he had done was follow orders. In fact, the primary concern of everyone I interacted with at Camp Eggers was to follow the directives of their superiors; no one appeared to have the capacity to take responsibility for their actions.

In the mid-1960s, political scientist Hannah Arendt published a book-length study of how some of the great evils of history, such as slavery and the Holocaust, managed to occur. Her book, [Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil](#), concluded that generally such crimes are not carried out by fanatics or sociopaths, but rather by *ordinary people who accepted the premises of their superiors and their state* and therefore do what they are told to do, and participate with the view that their actions are normal. The word "banal" is [defined](#) as "something that is trite, normal, and commonplace." The root of the word comes from the Old French word *ban*, referring to feudal military service, which was compulsory

and thus commonly accepted. Thus, military culture is by definition synonymous with banal, which my acquaintances at Camp Eggers demonstrated as they strove to find orders to follow and avoid responsibility for their actions.

Most members of the military establishment receive extensive training in combat techniques, including of course [how to kill other human beings](#). One common drill at boot camp is to have recruits lunge repeatedly at mock human targets with mounted bayonets, shouting "Kill! Kill!" as they stab their imaginary victims. After months of such training, killing itself becomes banal, something normal and commonplace. The military culture of thoughtless submission to authority combined with heavy conditioning to snuff out human life creates a wide path towards the "great evils" that Hannah Arendt addressed.

Examples of what a sane society would call evil acts abound in the annuals of our current wars. For example, in 2010 a group of [five American soldiers](#) murdered a number of Afghan civilians "for sport," and collected fingers of their victims as trophies. Killing for them had become normal and banal; it was in fact what the soldiers were trained to do.

In March of 2011 [two U.S. Army Blackhawk helicopters](#) came upon 10 Afghan children ages 7 to 13 gathering brush to warm their huts and attacked them with heavy machine gun fire. When the parents of the children arrived on the scene, attracted by the gunfire, they could only collect body parts of their children. For the pilots of the helicopters, killing was their job, a normal part of military life.

On March 12, 2006, [four U.S. soldiers](#) entered the home of a 14-year old girl in the Iraqi city of Mahmudiya, took her mother, father and sister into a bedroom and shot them, and then gang-raped the girl. Afterwards, they shot her in the head and attempted to burn her body. They then reported the deaths as being the result of an insurgent attack.

On March 25, 2003, [Marine Sgt. Eric Schrumpf](#) was participating in the U.S. invasion of Iraq when he spotted an Iraqi soldier in his field of view behind a female Iraqi citizen. He couldn't get a clear shot with the woman blocking his line of sight, so he shot her to get her out of the line of fire. "I'm sorry, but the chick was in the way," Schrumpf explained. Later he elaborated, "We had a great day. We killed a lot of people."

Over the long term, most soldiers committing such murders become victims of their own lack of judgment, unable to live with the profoundly antisocial acts they have committed. Sergeant Schrumpf is himself now [debilitated by PTSD](#), and can scarcely function in civilian society. He has attacked people in movie theaters because he mistakes their cans of Coke for military weapons. "I'll never be the same again," says Schrumpf, who seems somehow mystified by the etiology of his emotional dysfunction.

Similar stories of the fruits of combat duty are limited only by time available to tell them. After serving in the Marines during the 2003 invasion of Iraq, [Lance Cpl. Walter Rollo Smith](#) returned home and soon killed his wife, Nicole Marie Speirs, the 22-year-old mother of his twin children. He drowned her in a bathtub without any evident provocation or reason. In reflecting on his heinous crime, Smith said, "I know for a fact that before I went to Iraq, there's no way I would have taken somebody else's life."

After serving in the Army in Iraq in 2004, [Spc. Brandon Bare](#), 19, of Wilkesboro, N.C, came home and stabbed his wife Nabila Bare, 18, at least 71 times with knives and a meat cleaver. About three dozen of the wounds were on her head and neck. Killing is what he was

trained to do.

Mental angst and dysfunction in soldiers returning from combat is commonplace. [A recent study](#) indicates that 62% of soldiers returning from the war in Iraq have asked for mental health counseling, with 27% showing dangerous levels of alcohol abuse. Suicide rates among soldiers and vets have increased dramatically in recent years. Over [100,000 Vietnam vets have now killed themselves](#), far more than died in the Vietnam War. More than 300,000 veterans of the U.S. military are currently homeless, [another study](#) reveals.

If war is in fact destroying the youth of America by turning them into trained and traumatized killers, one could at least hope that the wars themselves have some value to American society.

Objective evidence indicates otherwise. The actual conduct of war bears more resemblance to a circus act than the noble endeavor it is often portrayed to be. To cite one of the many examples of the senselessness of war related in the book [Achilles in Vietnam](#), author and Vietnam vet Jonathan Shay describes how, “During one patrol in the dry season, a U.S. Army squad ran out of water and was not resupplied. They walked for a day and a half in search of water in Vietcong-controlled territory. When men started to collapse from dehydration in the heat, an officer’s plea for emergency resupply was heeded: a helicopter flew over and “bombed” the squad with cases of Tab, seriously injuring one of the men. The major whose helicopter dropped the Tab was recalled to evacuate the casualty. There was no enemy activity. I subsequently read in the division newspaper that the major had put himself in for and had received the Bronze Star for resupplying the troops and evacuating the wounded ‘under fire.’ ” Remember that story the next time you see a soldier’s chest full of medals.

The Vietnam war itself was fought because at the end of World War II, Ho Chi Minh declared Vietnam’s independence from the colonizing French, reading from the U.S. Declaration of Independence to emphasize his people’s reasonable claim to self-determination. Instead of supporting this universal urge that humanity has for freedom, the U.S. supported the French effort to regain their colony for 10 long years (1945-1954). After the French were defeated, the U.S. fought the Vietnamese for another 22 years (1955-1975). Thus, 32 years of brutal mayhem took place, when all the Vietnamese people were asking for was their independence. The American lives that were ruined—the 58,000 combat deaths, 100,000+ suicides, 300,000 homeless men—were all expended for nothing, as were the 3.4 million Vietnamese who died in that war. To briefly mention another of our recent wars, today the nation of Iraq lies in ruins, the people impoverished, a million dead and 5 million living as refugees, while the entire basis of the U.S. invasion in 2003 is widely acknowledged to have been a [complete fabrication](#).

War itself is not only “a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed,” as [Dwight Eisenhower noted](#) in a speech in 1953, but war is also destructive to the physical earth, the very source of human life, and indeed of all life. The U.S. has dropped [15 million tons of bombs](#) on the earth’s surface in last 60 years, spread [1 million tons of napalm](#) on fields and forests, and sprayed [20 million gallons of defoliants](#) on some of the most diverse rainforests on the planet. By any measure, *the U.S. military is conducting a war against the earth itself*. Such an inane effort does not come cheaply. The total cost of all military expenses for 2012 is estimated to be [\\$1.2 trillion dollars, one-third of the total federal budget](#). *It is the U.S. military that is driving the U.S. itself into bankruptcy.*

In summary, the U.S. military is destroying the lives of its own young men while at the same time it devastates other human cultures; it threatens the economic survival of the United States while it is fraying the ecological fabric that makes life on earth possible.

Mikhail Gorbachev once noted that the Soviet system was evil and had to be dismantled. The U.S. military is a similarly evil force loosened on the world. As was done to the repugnant Soviet system, the equally repugnant U.S. military should be completely dismantled, with all soldiers and ships and planes and weapons brought home from the vast web of [1000 American military bases](#) spanning the globe. The savings in terms of human lives, human suffering, ecological integrity and American dollars will be immeasurable. We can then begin to rebuild a national defense consisting of a small militia that can guard our borders and "repel invasions," as called for in the U.S. Constitution, all the while remembering that the best defense is the making of friends.

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