

Military Contractor CACI Says Afghanistan Withdrawal Is Hurting Its Profits. It's Funding a Pro-War Think Tank.

What CACI reveals about the feedback loop between military contractors and think tanks.

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On August 12, the military contractor CACI International Inc. told its investors that the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan is hurting its profits. The same contractor is also funding a think tank that is concurrently arguing against the withdrawal. This case is worth examining both because it is routine, and because it highlights the venality of our “expert”-military contractor feedback loop, in which private companies use think tanks to rally support for wars they’ll profit from.

The contractor is notorious to those who have followed the scandal of U.S.-led torture in Iraq. CACI International was sued by three Iraqis formerly detained in Abu Ghraib prison who charge that the company’s employees are responsible for directing their torture, including sexual assault and electric shocks. (The suit was brought in 2008 and the case is still [ongoing](#).)

In 2019, CACI International was [awarded](#) a nearly \$907 million, five-year contract to provide “intelligence operations and analytic support” for the U.S. Army in Afghanistan.

During an August 12 [earnings call](#), CACI International noted repeatedly that President Biden’s withdrawal from the 20-year Afghanistan War harmed the company’s profits. **John Mengucci**, president and CEO of CACI International, said, “we have about a 2 percent headwind coming into FY 2022 because of Afghanistan.” A “headwind” refers to negative impacts on profits.

Afghanistan was mentioned 16 times throughout the call — either in reference to the dent in profits, or to assure investors that other areas of growth were offsetting the losses. For example, Mengucci said, “We’re seeing positive growth in technology and expect it to continue to outpace expertise growth, collectively offsetting the impact of the

Afghanistan drawdown.”

Similar themes were repeated in an April 22 [earnings call](#), where the company lamented the “headwinds” posed by the Afghanistan withdrawal. (Industry and defense publications have [picked up on this](#) them, but framed it in the company’s terms, by emphasizing the offsets to its losses.)

Despite CACI International’s clear economic interest in continuing the war, on the August 12 call, company officials were careful not to editorialize about the Biden administration’s decision. The closest they came was a cautious statement from Mengucci: “At least as of today we’ve watched the administration make the decision to completely exit Afghanistan by 9 – 11 and all I can say is they’re executing on that decision.”

But CACI International does not have to broadcast its positions on the war: Instead, it is funding a think tank that has been actively urging the Biden administration not to leave Afghanistan.

CACI International is [listed](#) as a “corporate sponsor” of the Institute for Study of War, which describes itself as a “non-partisan, non-profit, public policy research organization.” Dr. Warren Phillips, lead director of CACI International, is on the [board](#) of the think tank. (Other funders include General Dynamics and Microsoft.)

When it comes to the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, however, the think tank is extremely partisan. In an August 20 [paper](#), the think tank argued that “Russia, China, Iran, and Turkey are weighing how to take advantage of the United States’ hurried withdrawal.”

Jack Keane, a retired four star general and [board member](#) of the Institute for Study of War, meanwhile, has been on a cable news blitz arguing against the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, as [reported](#) by Ryan Grim, Sara Sirota, Lee Fang and Rose Adams for The Intercept. (The Intercept noted CACI’s International’s backing of the think tank.)

Kimberly Kagan, founder and president of the Institute for the Study of War, [told](#) Fox News on August 17 that the U.S. withdrawal could cause Afghanistan to become the “second school of jihadism.” She warned, “It is not clear that the Taliban, which seeks international recognition and legitimacy, is going to want to tolerate or encourage direct attacks on the U.S. from al Qaeda or other extremist groups based in Afghanistan.”

The think tank’s backing from a military contractor was not discussed in these media appearances.

The case of CACI International is not unique. The Intercept notes,

“Among the other talking heads who took to cable news segments or op-ed pages without disclosing their defense industry ties were retired Gen. David Petraeus; Rebecca Grant, a former staffer for the Air Force secretary; Richard Haass, who worked as an adviser to then-Secretary of State Colin Powell; and former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.”

This cacophony of voices matters because Biden is facing a media uproar over the withdrawal. Pundits and mainstream press outlets that have been [ignoring](#) civilian deaths for years are suddenly expressing moral outrage at their hardships now that the war is

ending. While there are legitimate concerns about the fate of Afghans as the Taliban seizes control, the vast majority of the firestorm stems from a reflexively pro-war perspective, in favor of the indefinite extension of an occupation that has proven [brutal and lethal](#) for civilians. The overwhelming effect is to send the message to Biden, and any future presidents, that they should think twice before withdrawing from a war, lest they have a media revolt on their hands.

But this outcry didn't materialize out of nowhere. Think tank "experts," whose organizations are financed by the very companies profiting from the war, play a key part. They are trotted out in front of cameras and quoted in major media outlets, presented as above-the-fray observers. They are well-financed, polished and groomed precisely for moments like these. And the companies financing them get to launder their own objectives through institutions that are seen as respectable, academic and rigorous. It's a grotesque system that is functioning as it was designed.

In its August 12 call, CACI International simply acknowledged the company's economic interests out loud.

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Featured image: U.S. jets bombing Afghanistan. These attacks will not end despite the formal U.S. withdrawal by September 11th. [Source: wired.com]

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