



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on March 6, 2013

Inspector General: Much of Money for Iraq Reconstruction Wasted

[In his final report](#), released this month, on how \$63 billion of American taxpayers' money was spent in reconstructing Iraq after the end of the Iraq war, Special Inspector General Stuart Bowen [asked two questions](#): "What happened to the money?" and "What effect did it have?" The next 185 pages of his report reviews where it went, how much was wasted, and what effect it had in restoring Iraq's infrastructure so that life there could return to some sort of normal.



The answer to the first question, "what happened to the money?" is that much of it was wasted. He cites a \$40 million project to build a 3,600-bed prison in eastern Iraq that was abandoned three years after it started. Today, says Bowen, it "sits in rubble," and Iraqi officials have no plans to finish it.

Subcontractors with construction firm [Anham overcharged](#) the U.S. government thousands of dollars for supplies, including \$900 for a control switch valued at \$7.05 and \$80 for a piece of pipe that costs \$1.41.

A \$108 million wastewater treatment plant in Fallujah will take eight years longer than originally estimated to complete, and when it is done in 2014, it will serve just 9,000 homes. It's going to cost the Iraqi government another \$87 million to extend the project to allow it to service the other 25,000 homes it was originally designed to serve.

Another \$75 million project, to replace an oil and gas pipeline that was blown up during the invasion with a new one under the Tigris River, failed (as a geological study indicated that it might), and it's taking another \$29 million to repair the original one.

About a third of the \$63 billion allocated for "reconstruction" was spent to train and equip Iraqi security forces, with precious little to show for it as attacks by rebel forces continue almost on a daily basis.

Bowen noted that the money was spent piecemeal, with little coordination among agencies or with Iraqi officials. There was little accountability or control, with the State Department supposed to oversee construction strategy but the Defense Department spending most of the money.

When the Iraq war ended officially on December 15, 2011, it was estimated to have cost American taxpayers more than [\\$800 billion](#) in direct expenses, and another estimated \$1 trillion in additional healthcare costs for those wounded in the war. Joseph Stiglitz, co-author of [The Three Trillion Dollar War](#), wrote:

The figure we arrive at is more than \$3 trillion. Our calculations are based on conservative assumptions ...

Needless to say, this number represents the cost only to the United States. It does not reflect the enormous cost to the rest of the world, or to Iraq.



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Nor does Stiglitz or Bowen so much as mention the horrific human costs of the Iraq war — in human suffering, loss of life, and loss of productivity by those innocents in Iraq who found themselves in harm's way. The best estimate is that 4,487 American lives were lost and more than 32,000 American casualties were suffered during the war, while “estimated violent deaths” among Iraqi civilians exceeded 150,000.

In preparing to write his book, [Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq, 2003 to 2005](#), author Thomas E. Ricks spent hundreds of hours interviewing military officers on the ground in Iraq to conclude that the U.S. efforts in Iraq could have ended within days of the initial attack in March of 2003, but was greatly expanded in a helter-skelter fashion into a war that lasted twice as long as World War II. Said Ricks in an interview following release of his book: “It took the U.S. military four years to get the strategy right in Iraq ... by that time the American people and the Iraqi people both had lost a lot of patience...” not to mention precious lives and billions in wealth.

He added that in response to the expanded war, the Pentagon concocted “the worst war plan in American history” which extended the war unnecessarily and cost vastly more than originally estimated. As Hicks wrote for the [New York Times in 2006](#).

President George W. Bush's decision to invade Iraq in 2003 ultimately may come to be seen as one of the most profligate actions in the history of American foreign policy. The consequences of his choice won't be clear for decades, but it already is abundantly apparent in mid-2006 that the U.S. government went to war in Iraq with scant solid international support and on the basis of incorrect information — about weapons of mass destruction and a supposed nexus between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda's terrorism — and then occupied the country negligently.

Thousands of U.S. troops and an untold number of Iraqis have died. Hundreds of billions of dollars have been spent, many of them squandered.

When President Obama presided over the National Day of Honor celebrating the ninth anniversary of the start of the Iraq war, on March 19, 2012, [Laurence Vance took exception](#), writing instead that it ought to have been called a Day of *Dishonor*: “The president should have proclaimed [it] a National Day of Dishonor. There is nothing honorable about the War in Iraq. It was unconstitutional, immoral, unjust, senseless, unnecessary, aggressive, irresponsible, and destructive.” Laurence, a student of history, should have included “deliberately wasteful” as well. Laurence should have remembered that expensive, wasteful wars are just part of a plan to bankrupt the United States. Mr. Robert Welch, in his presentation (which became [The Blue Book](#) of the John Birch Society) on December 9, 1958, outlined the key steps being taken to bring American to its knees, including step one:

Greatly expanded government spending, for missiles, for so-called defense generally, for foreign aid, for every conceivable means of getting rid of ever larger sums of American money as wastefully as possible ...

The discoveries by authors Hicks and Bowen should be no surprise to informed citizens who have long recognized that wars — which are always expensive and wasteful — are a key element in forcing a government into debt and eventual bankruptcy.

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