



Written by [James Heiser](#) on September 4, 2009

Partial Iraq Withdrawal Could Save \$1.1 trillion

The *Army Times* is reporting that a congressional study has once again discovered the obvious: pulling out of Iraq will save money. “A speedier withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq and Afghanistan would shave \$1.1 trillion off the budget in the next decade, a new congressional budget projection says.”

The *Army Times* article declares, “That would be a sizeable cut in defense-related spending from 2010 through 2019, which the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates at \$7.4 trillion.”



The mind-boggling \$7.4 trillion to be allotted for defense spending is based on continuing the status quo in Iraq, while the proposed savings would come not from pulling out of Iraq, but from cutting the presence of American soldiers to a level comparable to [the number presently serving in South Korea](#).

According to the *Army Times*:

The \$7.4 trillion price tag is based on the number of deployed troops remaining at about 210,000, but looks at two scenarios for reductions:

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A sharp reduction in troops over three years, resulting in \$1.1 trillion in savings. Under this projection, the number of deployed troops falls to 160,000 in 2010; to 100,000 in 2011; to 35,000 in 2012 and to 30,000 from 2013 to 2019.

A more gradual decline that shaves \$700 billion off the \$7.4 trillion defense spending estimate. It assumes 210,000 deployed troops in 2010; 190,000 in 2011; 150,000 in 2012; 100,000 in 2013 and 75,000 in 2014 and beyond.

The timing of the report does raise certain questions. As discussions of deficit neutrality enter the healthcare debate, the possibility of cutting the defense budget by \$1.1 trillion over 10 years may provide support for those favoring President Obama and the Democratic Congress pursuing the so-called “nuclear option” of passing healthcare legislation with a simple majority. As David Leonhardt, [writing for *The New York Times*](#), notes: “The main political problem with health reform is still the immediate cost of it. Covering the uninsured will require \$1.2 trillion or so over 10 years, and Congress hasn’t been able to agree on \$1.2 trillion of spending cuts and tax increases to keep the deficit from growing.”

The close parallel between the amount needed to fund healthcare and the presumed budget cut provided by a speedy withdrawal from Iraq provides a balance that Washington is likely to pronounce “close enough” — juggling numbers to come up with the last \$100 billion over 10 years ought to be easily accomplished through the usual budgetary sleight of hand. For a president who has promised to pull out of Iraq and “reform” healthcare, the pairing could not be more obvious. Meanwhile, one may anticipate that neoconservatives will rally to keep the number of troops at current levels and will work



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to cut a deal on Capitol Hill that would render a "Socialism-lite" version of nationalized healthcare that surrenders on principle, with quibbling only over details.

Of course, the option that almost certainly will not be under consideration is refusing to collectivize healthcare while still bringing the troops home and cutting the tax burden on the American people by \$1.1 trillion over 10 years. If the president and Congress actually intended to solve the budgetary fiasco they might, while they were at it, try figuring out how much more could be saved by withdrawing from Germany, the Philippines, etc. (Let alone address the absurd levels of spending on the "alphabet soup" of federal agencies.)

No, with unemployment and bankruptcies soaring, and a federal deficit that seems to almost be growing exponentially, cutting the budget will almost certainly never even be considered unless the taxpayers continue to increase the pressure on their so-called representatives to actually represent the true interests of their constituency.

Photo: Department of Defense



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