



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on July 1, 2011

Wars' Costs Pegged at \$4 trillion; \$20 billion a Year for Air Conditioning

"The human and economic costs of these wars will continue for decades, some costs not peaking until mid-century," according to the ["Cost of Wars"](#) report, done by more than 20 economists, political scientists, and other specialists. It continues,

Many of the wars' costs are invisible to Americans, buried in a variety of budgets, and so have not been counted or assessed. For example, while most people think the Pentagon war appropriations are equivalent to the wars' budgetary costs, the true numbers are twice that, and the full economic cost of the wars much larger yet. Conservatively estimated, the war bills already paid and obligated to be paid are \$3.2 trillion in constant dollars. A more reasonable estimate puts the number at nearly \$4 trillion.



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Among the "invisible" costs of the war is the care for wounded and disabled veterans, something the study estimates to be somewhere between \$600 billion and \$950 billion. The report also refers to the wars' unquantified "ripple effects on the U.S. economy," including "job loss and interest rate increases," that have been "underappreciated."

The human costs of the wars include more than 6,000 U.S. military personnel killed so far. "At least 137,000 civilians have died and more will die in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan as a result of the fighting at the hands of all parties to the conflict," the report said. The war dead in Pakistan, where the United States is funding Pakistan military forces and conducting air strikes against alleged terrorist targets, is as great as the death toll in neighboring Afghanistan, the report said, while also stating that many deaths and injuries among U.S. contractors have not been identified. "Putting together the conservative numbers of war dead, in uniform and out, brings the total to 225,000," the study said. An estimated 7.8 million people have been displaced by the war "and are living in 'grossly inadequate conditions,'" the report observed, noting the number is "equivalent to all of the people of Kentucky and Connecticut fleeing their homes."

A recent report on National Public Radio's *All Things Considered*, meanwhile, [quoted a former Pentagon official's estimate](#) that the cost of air conditioning for U.S. personnel in Iraq and Afghanistan runs to more than \$20 billion a year. That, the news report noted, "is more than NASA's budget. It's more than BP has paid so far for damage from the Gulf oil spill. It's what the G-8 has pledged to help



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foster new democracies in Egypt and Tunisia."

"When you consider the cost to deliver the fuel to some of the most isolated places in the world — escorting, command and control, medevac support — when you throw all that infrastructure in, we're talking over \$20 billion," said Steven Anderson, a retired brigadier general who served as chief logistician for Gen. David Petraeus in Iraq. Anderson's \$20 billion figure, disputed by the Pentagon, includes the cost of building and maintaining roads in Afghanistan, as well as securing and maintaining security operations for those roads, which are doubtless used for more than transporting fuel for air conditioning. But the cost, in both dollars and lives, of transporting that fuel is, nonetheless, staggering.

To power an air conditioner at a remote outpost in landlocked Afghanistan, fuel must be shipped into Karachi, Pakistan, then driven 800 miles over 18 days to Afghanistan on roads that are sometimes little more than "improved goat trails," Anderson told NPR. And it requires a lot of fuel to cool free-standing tents in temperatures of 125 degrees or more. The retired general estimates more than 1,000 troops have been killed in fuel convoys, prime targets for enemy attacks.

The "Costs of War" study puts the price tag on American conflicts since 9/11 far higher than the \$1 trillion figure cited by President Obama in his recent announcement of plans to bring 33,000 American troops home starting this summer. While a reduced troop level will no doubt involve some savings, the cost of building and maintaining roads and other infrastructure will remain high, particularly in the mostly remote and rural areas of Afghanistan.

"We're building big bases," American University professor Gordon Adams told *All Things Considered*. "We're seeing this in Iraq. We're turning over to the Iraqis — mostly either for a small penny or for free — the infrastructure that we built in Iraq. But we won't see any money back from that infrastructure." The cost of equipping and training armies other than our own will also continue indefinitely. President Obama has requested \$13 billion from Congress to equip and train Afghan security forces for the next fiscal year.

The "Costs of War" study was "a daunting task, given the inconsistent recording of lives lost and what the report called opaque and sloppy accounting by Congress and the Pentagon," [wrote Daniel Trotta](#) for the Reuters news service. The financial cost of the wars are coming under increased scrutiny in Washington as result of efforts to cope with a \$1.4 trillion one-year deficit and national debt of more than \$14 trillion. Social Security and Medicare costs are expected to rise dramatically as the "baby boomers" enter retirement. And while congressional Republicans and the Obama administration have done some limited sparring over cuts to domestic programs, the President has also criticized the Republican majority in the House for voting to cut \$8.9 billion from the administration's \$649 billion military budget.

A cost of \$4 trillion was clearly not what Congress had in mind when large majorities voted to authorize the President to take military action against al-Qaeda forces in Afghanistan in the wake of the 9/11 attacks in 2001, or when they authorized the use of military force against Iraq a year later. Bush administration officials at the time dismissed as far too high the estimate of Lawrence Lindsey, then director of the Office of Management and Budget, [that the Iraq venture could cost as much as \\$200 billion](#). The current Congress is faced with the question of how much continued nation-building efforts in the Middle East, or the quest for the "global democratic revolution" proclaimed by President George W. Bush, are worth in both lives and dollars.



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"While it was promised that the US invasions would bring democracy to both countries," the "Cost of Wars" report said, Afghanistan and Iraq "continue to rank low in global rankings of political freedom, with warlords continuing to hold power in Afghanistan with US support, and Iraqi communities more segregated today than before by gender and ethnicity as a result of the war."

"Some people will say that's an expensive price tag, but what we're trying to do makes it worth it. Other people will say we can't afford it," Catherine Lutz, co-director of the study, [said in an interview with the Boston Globe](#). Sen. Joe Manchin, a West Virginia Democrat, argues the drawdown of forces in Afghanistan announced by President Obama is not enough.

"We have the greatest special ops in the world. We have more technology than any other country on Earth," Manchin told NPR. "Do we actually need to have 70,000 troops on the ground?" Afghanistan, he said, "has no economy, no infrastructure and a corrupt government — and you're trying to stabilize it and build them into a viable nation? I'm not sure we have enough time, and I definitely know we don't have enough money."

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