

How Much Has the American Government Paid for Its Invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan?

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Region: [Asia](#), [Middle East & North Africa](#),
[USA](#)

Theme: [Global Economy](#), [Militarization and WMD](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

In-depth Report: [AFGHANISTAN, IRAQ REPORT](#)

At least six times — in [2006](#), [twice in 2007](#), in [2008](#), in [2010](#), and most recently at the end of [2014](#) — the Congressional Research Service has reported to Congress the U.S. Government’s costs, thus far, for its invasions of Iraq and of Afghanistan. All times, medical costs for treatments of the surviving U.S. invaders, and disability-payments to them for their war-related disabilities, were excluded, because, according to CRS, that information is “not available from the VA.”

Wikileaks, the organization whose head Julian Assange the U.S. Government wants either to assassinate or else place permanently into a high-security prison and disable from communicating with the world outside, [says that](#) “Individual members of Congress will release specific CRS reports if they believe it to assist them politically, but CRS archives as a whole are firewalled from public access”; so, there are probably other, and more-recent, versions of this CRS document, but the most-recent one which has yet been made public is the 8 December 2014 version. In that version, the amount that the U.S. Government had spent — up till then — on these two invasions and military occupations, both of Iraq and Afghanistan, was \$1.6 trillion total. No projection of what the total cost of either invasion-occupation will cost the U.S. Government has ever been publicly issued from the U.S. Government.

Furthermore, as regards those medical and disability costs, “not available from the VA,” **Joseph Steiglitz** and **Linda Bilmes** in 2008 published their estimate of what those costs *would turn out to be*, and based their estimates on both the raw VA numbers of veterans from those two wars who were receiving benefits from those two benefit-programs, and on the historical evidence from WW II and other U.S. wars, regarding how those expenses *trend* during the decades following a war. On 13 June 2011, Bilmes looked again at the VA data, and she headlined the revised results, as of that time, [“Current and Projected Future Costs of Caring for Veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars”](#) and reported that she found that it was clear that she and Stiglitz had severely *underestimated* the numbers of troops who would be receiving benefits under those two programs. Far more troops were receiving these benefits than they had projected for 2011. She then revised there the earlier estimates, into line with the actual 2011 numbers. Her revised estimate was shown in “Table 2: Estimated PV of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans Disability and Medical Costs” and the “moderate-realistic” projection was \$934 billion; the “best-case” projection was \$589 billion. In other words: these federal costs will probably be around \$934 billion, but will almost certainly be above \$589 billion. But, in

either instance: the CRS is simply ignoring these costs — whatever they are.

Here, below, are highlights, key excerpts, from the latest publicly available information regarding this matter — the CRS report to Congress, on 8 December 2014:

[“The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11”](#)

Amy Belasco, Specialist in U.S. Defense Policy and Budget, December 8, 2014

Summary

With enactment of the FY2014 Consolidated Appropriations Act on January 1, 2014 (H.R. 3547/P.L. 113-73), Congress has approved appropriations for the past 13 years of war that total \$1.6 trillion for military operations, base support, weapons maintenance, training of Afghan and Iraq security forces, reconstruction, foreign aid, embassy costs, and veterans’ health care for the war operations initiated since the 9/11 attacks. Of this \$1.6 trillion total, CRS estimates that the total is distributed as follows:

\$686 billion (43%) for Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) for Afghanistan and other counterterror operations received;

\$815 billion (51%) for Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF)/Operation New Dawn (OND);

\$27 billion (2%) for Operation Noble Eagle (ONE), providing enhanced security at military bases; and

\$81 billion (5%) for war-designated funding not considered directly related to the Afghanistan or Iraq wars.

As would be expected, the majority of the FY2015 request is for the war in Afghanistan with

\$58.1 billion for Afghanistan/OEF;

\$5.0 billion for Iraq/OIF/OND;

\$100 million for enhanced security; and

\$10.4 billion for other war-designated costs that are not directly part of war operations or aid to Afghanistan or Iraq.

By Agency

Splitting the cumulative total of \$1.6 trillion (excluding OIR) appropriated by agency:

\$1.5 trillion was appropriated to DOD;

\$92.7 billion to State/USAID, and

\$17.6 billion to the Veterans Administration (VA) for medical treatment¹⁵ (15 This figure does not include the cost of benefits for OEF/OIF/OND veterans, which is not

available from the VA.) (Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) largely for the Afghan war; Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation New Dawn (OND) for Iraq.)

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Anthony Cordesman, of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, severely criticized, in his 26 June 2017 [“U.S. Military Spending: The Cost of Wars”](#), the U.S. Government’s hiding of its war-costs; or, as he phrased this in the passive tense (so as to hide the blame for it), “the failure to deal with the cost of America’s wars.” And, naturally (further in order to keep his job), he said nothing about how [America’s 100 biggest federal contractors](#), almost all of which are firms that, like Lockheed Martin, make weapons and sell them to governments that employ them to kill people in foreign lands, depend mostly (if not 100%) upon these invasions by the U.S. and its allies, in order to be able to stay in business. But he did point out “Critical Failures by Both the Executive Branch and Congress” (though *not* by the newsmedia that constantly propagandize for more and more invasions, such as of Iraq and of Syria — propagandize for being ‘tough on defense’, as if invasions are for ‘defense’, instead of for aggression, [as the world outside America knows to be the case](#)). Cordesman notes that, “Reporting by the Executive Branch seems almost designed to obscure the real costs of conflict,” though he does not say anything about the ways in which the top-100 U.S. Government contractors — the firms that sell the most to the U.S. Government — control U.S. international relations, so as to benefit their stockholders, such as by selling more and more missiles. And he goes on to observe that

“The Congress has done no better. Ironically, members of Congress are fond of criticizing the Administration for lacking a strategy.”

But, he says nothing about the incentive-system that crucially explains this ugly state-of-affairs.

He then points out

“The Need for Far Better Accountability in Planning, Programming, and Budgeting U.S. Wars.”

Cordesman’s report then proceeds to summarize work by independent analysts who find that the U.S. Government is systematically under-reporting the costs of its invasions. Here is that passage:

Summary of Direct Costs of the Afghan War, Iraq War, and Total OCO in Budget Authority vs. Other Illustrative Estimates

The charts and tables in this section summarize the actual and projected cost of U.S. wars as reported for the OCO account — drawing heavily largely on earlier work by the Congressional Research Service.

- The Department of Defense’s OCO costs of the **Afghan** conflict since FY2001 will rise to **\$840.7 billion** — if the President’s FY2018 budget request is met. They will be **\$770.5 billion** for **Iraq**.
- The total costs for all OCO spending between FY2001 and FY2018 will be in excess of \$1,909 billion. Given the costs omitted from the OCO budget, the real

total cost will almost certainly be well over \$2 trillion, even using OCO data as the only costs of the wars.

These latter estimates update a series of earlier CRS analyses, one of which noted that, “Other observers and analysts define war costs more broadly than congressional appropriations and include estimates of the life- time costs of caring for OEF/OIF/OND veterans, imputed interest costs on the deficit, or increases in DOD’s base budget deemed to be a consequence of support for the war...Such costs are difficult to compute, subject to extensive caveats, and often based on methodologies that may not be appropriate...”

Three alternative cost estimates are also summarized in this section.

- One by Lina J. Blimes [actually Linda J. Bilmes] puts the total cost at \$4 to \$6 trillion by end FY2016.
- A related estimate by the Watson Institute puts the cost at \$4.8 trillion through FY2016.
- A third estimate, by Neta Crawford, puts costs at more than \$4.8 trillion through FY2017, **plus more than \$7.9 trillion in cumulative interest on past appropriations, or more than \$12.7 trillion.**

It is important to note that separate work by Todd Harrison of CSIS in assessing the overall OCO account — Enduring Dilemma of Overseas Contingency Operations Funding, Transition45 Series, January 11, 2017 — states that both Congress and the Obama administration moved items from the base budget to the OCO budget as a way of circumventing the BCA budget caps. Roughly half of the OCO budget (\$30 billion) is now being used for programs and activities that were previously funded in the base budget.

In other words: the people that are being voted into public office at the federal level in the United States (including the President and the Congress) are skillfully hiding from the public the costs — to the American people, not to the lands we destroy by our invasions — of our invasions and military occupations of foreign countries that (like both Iraq and Afghanistan) never invaded, nor even threatened to invade, the United States.

Cordesman is touching very close to portraying a criminal U.S. Government, but he avoids discussing, at all, the private persons, billionaires, whose collective trillions of dollars of personal wealth have been derived largely from instituting and refining this system of massive international imposition of death, crippling, and destruction — most but not all of which is experienced abroad, rather than by Americans.

Then, Cordesman makes some rough estimates, to compare today’s American military-industrial complex, with earlier ones:

- *The Afghan and Iraq/Syria wars are more than five times more expensive than World War I.*
- *They are more than five times more expensive than the Korean War.*
- *They are nearly 2.5 times more expensive than the Vietnam War.*
- *They are more than 18 times more expensive than the first Gulf War in 1991.*
- *Given the estimates that the real costs are already well over \$4 trillion, these multipliers would be more than doubled if any of the alternative war costs cited earlier are correct.*

Just excluding the interest-costs from these calculations — the “more than \$7.9 trillion in cumulative interest on past appropriations” — makes clear at least one of the reasons why America’s children will be growing up to work hard just to pay the taxes to cover the federal debt that was incurred in order to keep soaring the wealth of today’s billionaires who benefit from this ‘[democracy](#)’. The public’s children will pay that public debt, and, by that time, they will perhaps be honoring, from their hovels, the children of the individuals who will have inherited control over [the 100 largest U.S. Government contractors](#).

There are some other governments that choose not to function this way; they refuse to privatize their military industries, because those countries understand — which Americans are prevented from understanding — what “the military-industrial complex” actually consists of, and why its very existence is an unforgivable curse upon the world, which nations less corrupt than the United States is, will simply not allow. Profiting from war should be prohibited — or at least weapons-purchases from private entities should be prohibited. This should be discussed at the United Nations. The fur would then fly there; but, that’s far better than the flesh flying everywhere, as it now does. And now, with nuclear weapons, things could suddenly get extremely worse.

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Investigative historian **Eric Zuesse** is the author, most recently, of [They’re Not Even Close: The Democratic vs. Republican Economic Records, 1910-2010](#), and of [CHRIST’S VENTRILOQUISTS: The Event that Created Christianity](#).

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