

The Costs of Post 9/11 Wars: \$6.4 Trillion

US Budgetary Costs and Obligations of Post-9/11 Wars Through FY2020: \$6.4 Trillion

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Region: [USA](#)

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Since late 2001, the United States has appropriated and is obligated to spend an estimated \$6.4 Trillion through Fiscal Year 2020 in budgetary costs related to and caused by the post-9/11 wars—an estimated \$5.4 Trillion in appropriations in current dollars and an additional minimum of \$1 Trillion for US obligations to care for the veterans of these wars through the next several decades.[2]

The mission of the post-9/11 wars, as originally defined, was to defend the United States against future terrorist threats from al Qaeda and affiliated organizations. Since 2001, the wars have expanded from the fighting in Afghanistan, to wars and smaller operations elsewhere, in more than 80 countries — becoming a truly “global war on terror.” Further, the Department of Homeland Security was created in part to coordinate the defense of the homeland against terrorist attacks.

These wars, and the domestic counterterror mobilization, have entailed significant expenses, paid for by deficit spending. Thus, even if the United States withdraws completely from the major war zones by the end of FY2020 and halts its other Global War on Terror operations, in the Philippines and Africa for example, the total budgetary burden of the post-9/11 wars will continue to rise as the US pays the on-going costs of veterans’ care and for interest on borrowing to pay for the wars. Moreover, the increases in the Pentagon base budget associated with the wars are likely to remain, inflating the military budget over the long run.

Overview

One of the major purposes of the Costs of War Project has been to clarify the types of budgetary costs of the US post -9/11 wars, how that spending is funded, and the long-term implications of past and current spending. This estimate of the US budgetary costs of the post-9/11 wars is a comprehensive accounting intended to provide a sense of the consequences of the wars for the federal budget. Since the 9/11 attacks, the Department of Defense appropriations related to the Global War on Terror have been treated as emergency appropriations, now called Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO).[3] When accounting for total war costs, the Department of Defense and other entities often present only Overseas Contingency Operation appropriations.

The Costs of War Project takes a broader view of war expenses because budgetary costs of the post -9/11 wars are not confined to military spending. Table 1 summarizes post-9/11 war-related costs and the categories of spending. Numbers and occasionally categories are revised in the Costs of War estimates when better information becomes available. For

example, this year’s report uses newer interest rate data in calculating the estimated interest on borrowing for OCO spending. Additionally, this report revises the estimate of increases to the Pentagon base budget given new information, described below, on patterns of military spending and the relations between the OCO budget and base military spending. Further, the Department of Defense budget for FY2020 included new categories, denoting OCO spending intended for the base military budget, reflected in a separate line in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of War Related Spending, in Billions of Current Dollars, FY2001–FY2020 Rounded to the nearest \$billion.

	\$ Billions
Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) Appropriations	
Department of Defense ⁴	1,959
State Department/USAID ⁵	131
Estimated Interest on Borrowing for DOD and State Dept OCO Spending ⁶	925
War-related Spending in the DOD Base Budget	
Estimated Increases to DOD Base Budget Due to Post-9-11 Wars ⁷	803
“OCO for Base” a new category of spending in FY2019 and FY2020 ⁸	100
Medical and Disability Care for Post-9/11 Veterans ⁹	437
Homeland Security Spending for Prevention and Response to Terrorism ¹⁰	1,054
Total War Appropriations and War-Related Spending through FY 2020	\$5,409
Estimated Future Obligations for Veterans Medical and Disability FY2020 – FY2059 ¹¹	>1,000
Total War-Related Spending through FY2020 and Obligations for Veterans	\$6,409

Full Report: [Click here to read the carefully documented report](#) by Professor Neta C. Crawford of Boston University.

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