

Counting the Cost

by [Laurence M. Vance](#)

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For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?

Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him,

Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.

Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?

Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. (Luke 14:28–32)

What has [cost](#) the U.S. taxpayers almost half a trillion dollars, and now costs \$275 million every day, \$11 million each hour, \$191,000 every minute, and \$3,180 each second? If you answered, "The war in Iraq," then you are right. But if you think that the U.S. government had any idea of what the cost of the war would be thus far, or what the cost will be to continue fighting the war, or what total cost will be when and if the U.S. military is completely withdrawn from Iraq, then you are wrong.

What was supposed to be a cakewalk costing about \$50 billion has

turned into a debacle that may cost the taxpayers over \$2 trillion.

Before the invasion of Iraq, then Secretary of Defense [Donald Rumsfeld](#) replied to questions about the length of a war against Iraq, saying: "The Gulf War in the 1990s lasted five days on the ground. I can't tell you if the use of force in Iraq today would last five days, or five weeks, or five months, but it certainly isn't going to last any longer than that."

A year after the invasion, General [Peter Schoomaker](#), the Army chief of staff, stated that the war against terrorism will "never go away in our lifetime."

When asked about the timing of the war at a press conference a week after the invasion, [President Bush](#) replied: "However long it takes. That's the answer to your question and that's what you've got to know. It isn't a matter of timetable, it's a matter of victory." Four years after the invasion, [Bush](#) still maintained his aversion to timetables, vetoing a war-spending bill because it contained a withdrawal timetable. Now we are told that [Bush's model](#) for Iraq is South Korea, a country where the U.S. has had troops since the end of our war there – in 1953.

The Bush Administration initially claimed that the war in Iraq would cost "only" about \$50 billion. To make that number more palatable, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz [claimed](#) that "Iraq's vast oil reserves would help defray the costs." The director of the Office of Management and Budget, Mitch Daniels, and the Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, [believed](#) that some of the war's cost would be paid for by other countries like the last time the United States invaded Iraq. Both of these ideas turned out to be erroneous.

In an interview with the *Wall Street Journal* in 2002, the director of the White House's National Economic Council, [Lawrence Lindsey](#), predicted that the Iraq War would cost between \$100 and \$200 billion. Naturally, the Bush Administration wasn't very happy with those figures, and Lindsey soon lost his job. Lindsey, of course, turned out to be wrong – but only because his estimate was way too low. Now, after four years and billions of dollars, we can only wish that Lindsey had been correct.

Before the second anniversary of the war had passed, the Congressional Budget Office [estimated](#) that the cost of fighting the war for the years

2005–2015 would be an *additional* \$448 billion.

Just a year later, economists Linda Bilmes (Harvard) and Joseph E. Stiglitz (Columbia) *estimated* that the war would ultimately cost between \$1 and \$2 trillion – ten times what Lindsey had estimated.

COSTS OF THE IRAQ WAR*	
BUDGETARY COSTS (BILLIONS)	
Spending to July 2006.....	\$336
Future operating costs**.....	389
Veterans health care and disability compensation**.....	127
Net increased defense, reset and demobilization costs**.....	160
ECONOMIC COSTS (BILLIONS)	
Net economic adjustments (loss of life, brain/spinal/other injuries, Reserve pay differential, net of disability pay):.....	355
Oil price transfer (supply-side) effect.....	300
Oil aggregate demand effect.....	150
Budgetary impact.....	450
TOTAL COSTS OF THE WAR (without interest).....	\$2,267
SOURCE: the authors	
*Assuming Congressional Budget Office troop projections through 2016	
**Net present value of future expenditures	

But in an article published late last year, Bilmes and Stiglitz make the case that their original estimate was too low. They *now say* that because "the cost of the war – in both blood and money – has risen even faster than our projections anticipated," the cost of the war, if one considers "the sum of the current and future budgetary costs along with the economic impact of lives lost, jobs interrupted and oil prices driven higher by political uncertainty in the Middle East," will now *exceed* \$2 trillion. And this is just the cost for the United States. The way things are going in Iraq, is there any doubt that Bilmes and Stiglitz will have to revise upward their figures once again? Is there any doubt that this \$2 trillion figure will one day seem way too low?

The latest war-funding bill passed by Congress was signed into law by the president on May 25, 2007. H.R. 2206 (PL 110-28), the "U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Care, Katrina Recovery, and Iraq Accountability Appropriations Act, 2007," provides *another \$100 billion* to fund the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan through the end of September. [Buried in the bill is also a \$2.10 per hour increase in the federal minimum wage over the next two years.] This war-funding bill was preceded by the following:

- Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2007 ([PL 109-289](#)), \$70 billion
- Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act for Defense, the Global War on Terror, and Hurricane Recovery, 2006 ([PL 109-234](#)), \$66 billion
- Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2006 ([PL 109-148](#)), \$51 billion
- Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act for Defense, the Global War on Terror, and Tsunami Relief, 2005 ([PL 109-13](#)), \$75.9 billion
- Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2005 ([PL 108-287](#)), \$2.1 billion
- Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act for Defense and for the Reconstruction of Iraq and Afghanistan, 2004 ([PL 108-106](#)), \$64.9 billion
- Emergency Wartime Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2003 ([PL 108-11](#)), \$62.6 billion
- Consolidated Appropriations Resolution, 2003 ([PL 108-7](#)), \$10 billion
- 2002 Supplemental Appropriations Act for Further Recovery From and Response To Terrorist Attacks on the United States ([PL 107-206](#)), \$13.8 billion
- Department of Defense and Emergency Supplemental Appropriations for Recovery from and Response to Terrorist Attacks on the United States Act, 2002 ([PL 107-117](#)), \$3.4 billion
- 2001 Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act for Recovery from and Response to Terrorist Attacks on the United States ([PL 107-38](#)), \$13.6 billion

In addition to the billions of dollars these acts gave to the Defense Department for military operations, there were also billions of additional dollars allocated for foreign aid, base security, embassy operations, reconstruction, veterans' health care, and other costs related to fighting the global war on terror.

The latest analysis on the cost of the war is the Congressional Research Service (CRS) report for Congress titled [The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11](#), by Amy Belasco, a specialist in national defense in the Foreign Affairs, Defense,

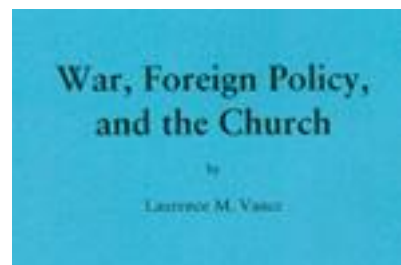
and Trade Division of the CRS.

With a national debt fast approaching \$9 trillion dollars, the cost of continuing the futile attempt to secure Iraq and make it a democracy is a cost that the U.S. economy cannot bear. Back before the war started, Bush tried to justify his impending invasion of Iraq by appealing to the effects of *not* going to war. Another terrorist attack would, [said the president](#), "Cripple our economy." But it is the war in Iraq that has crippled our economy. The price of a barrel of crude oil was under \$25 in 2003. Does anyone in his right mind think that U.S. intervention in the Middle East has not had something to do with the price of oil more than doubling since the invasion of Iraq?

There are, of course, many other costs of fighting the war in Iraq. The morale and readiness of the military are at historic lows. The Guard and Reserve forces have been decimated. Military hardware and equipment are worn out. The reputation of America in the eyes of the world, although previously sullied, is now at rock bottom. New terrorists are being created faster than we can kill them. Countless numbers of American families have suffered because of multiple duty tours and ever-increasing deployment terms. Thousands of American soldiers will need a lifetime of medical and/or psychiatric care. The cost of this war to the children of Iraq is incalculable.

One of the most important costs of fighting this war is the number of U. S. soldiers who have [died for a lie](#). As I write these words, the death toll stands at [3,645](#). The [first time](#) I ever mentioned in an article the number of U.S. troops killed in Iraq the figure was "only" 855. I believe now what I believed then: every death was both unnecessary and preventable. Every life lost was not just lost; every life lost was utterly wasted, thrown away. Bush and company have [blood on their hands](#) – American blood and Iraqi blood. Just as Johnson, Nixon, and their cronies were never held accountable for the crime of Vietnam, so Bush and company may never be held accountable for their [war crimes](#) – in this life. They will certainly give an account to Almighty God for their sins when we are rid of them here.

The great tragedy of this war, like most wars throughout history, is that all the death and destruction, all the carnage, all the broken homes, all the money wasted, all the suffering, all the ruined



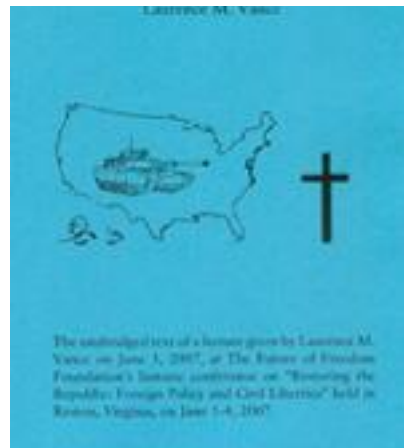
lives, all the power the state has gained, all the liberty the people have lost – all of it could have been prevented if only Bush and company had counted the cost.

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Laurence M. Vance [[send him mail](#)] writes from Pensacola, FL. He is the author of [Christianity and War](#) and [Other Essays Against the Warfare State](#). His latest publication is [War, Foreign Policy, and the Church](#). Visit [his website](#).

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