

# Op-Ed

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## Hidden Costs of the War

A dead U.S. soldier costs less than a disabled one.

It is an unfortunate truth—a callous statement—but a reality of the hidden costs of the occupation of Iraq; an occupation that has destroyed lives and families and cost over \$450 billion in American treasure thus far.

The president has requested another \$46 billion in emergency war supplemental for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Congress has already authorized \$145 billion this year to prosecute the actions in the middle east. The new request brings this year's total to \$195 billion and raises the total cost of the two conflicts to more than \$620 billion dollars for a war that was supposed to pay for itself with oil.

But this is not the only cost of the war. There is another cost related to Iraq that must be exposed to the American people. It's a secret cost that Americans do not, or refuse, to see. Hidden among the costs of the immorality of the Iraq invasion and occupation is the long term care of the dead and returning veterans, and their families.

By comparison, Afghanistan, with 449 dead and nearly 5,000 injured, pales when measured with the deaths (currently 3,835) and injured (over 27,000), as a result of Iraq.

Numbers of those killed and injured change rapidly; growing with every month that our military is forced to stay in the middle east. In the *Milken Institute Review*, Scott Wallsten and Katrina Kosec calculated the 'real cost' of the Iraq war would total one trillion dollars. But their study did not take into account the long term costs, America's hidden obligation, to the young men and women who have died and those who will be returning home with devastating, life-long injuries.

Professor's Joseph Stiglitz, of Columbia University, and Linda Bilmes, a lecturer at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, addressed that issue in their study in 2006. The conclusions of their study; taking into account the dead and injured, their long-term care, compensation, schooling, and benefits for their families, the two conflicts would cost the citizens of this country \$2.1 trillion.

At the time of the study they estimated 2,500 dead and 20,000 wounded. We are now approaching 4,000 dead, 20,000 severely wounded and another 10,000 who will be eligible for some form of government assistance. Using conservative figures of \$250,000 per year for twenty thousand disabled veterans, the cost over the next forty years to take care of them will be over \$200 billion. Using the yearly figures of Stiglitz and Bilmes, estimating a cost of half a million per year, that cost rises to over \$400 billion.

By the same token, the cost of a dead veteran is considerably less. Benefits to the 4,000 veteran's immediate families will cost approximately \$5.75 billion over the twenty years of their eligibility. Medical breakthroughs and techniques, the lifesaving applications on the battlefield, and evacuation improvements have increased the number of severely disabled and decreased the number of soldiers dying in combat.

Given the fact that we have borrowed more than half a trillion to execute the war and the occupation one wonders where the money will come from to payback what we owe. But this president has the gall to ask for more to continue this destructive folly. If we're currently borrowing to pay for the war, every American should be asking who will pay the additional \$500 billion required to take care of the dead and injured in the future.

The answer should be obvious; our children and grandchildren. This administration thought nothing of waging a battle using money borrowed from China, India, Europe, and Japan, plunging the U.S. into nearly untenable debt. It's obvious they are not concerned that we will be passing that burden on, as well as the hidden costs of this war, to future generations.

The question is, do Americans want to pass along an ever increasing burden to their children? Thus far the citizens of this country have sacrificed nothing. Only the soldiers and their families have paid for this unlawful war. And the price tag has been extremely high.

This administration lied to get us into Iraq and they are lying to keep us there. The future costs of this war are escalating every day we remain, and with every death or injury that occurs. It is extremely selfish of Americans to allow it to continue and make those who had nothing to do with it pay for it now, and in the future.

It is time to bring our young men and women home, not only because of the cost, but because we can no longer tolerate them coming home with limbs missing and legs that won't work, sightless, or in flag draped coffins. We cannot ask them to continue for a lie. And we cannot leave future generations drowning in debt.

A dead U.S. soldier costs less than a disabled one. Callous, but true.