

THE COST OF ENDLESS WAR

\$8 TRILLION
 Since 2001, the U.S. has spent \$8 trillion on the “Global War on Terror.”



DIRECT FISCAL CUTS

The U.S is on track to spend \$886 billion on national defense this year. That’s more than half the discretionary budget, which includes everything but entitlement programs like Medicare and Social Security. The U.S. has spent \$8 trillion on the “Global War on Terror” since 2001.



Since the Declaration of Independence was signed in 1776, the United States has been at war for all but a scant 15 years.^{1 2}



The United States has been at war for the past 22 years since President George W. Bush declared a “Global War on Terror” (GWOt) following 9/11.



The U.S. is also the world’s leading arms-exporting nation, with many of its sales directly fueling wars. In recent years, over two-thirds of active conflicts have involved one or more sides armed by the U.S.³

¹ Defined by Smithsonian Magazine as “using military force, or the imminent threat of force (as in the “gunboat diplomacy” of the 1850s), to achieve national ends.” (see below)

² Magazine, Smithsonian, and Smithsonian magazine. “Introducing Our Special Issue on America at War.” Smithsonian Magazine. Accessed August 4, 2023. **SMITHSONIAN MAGAZINE**

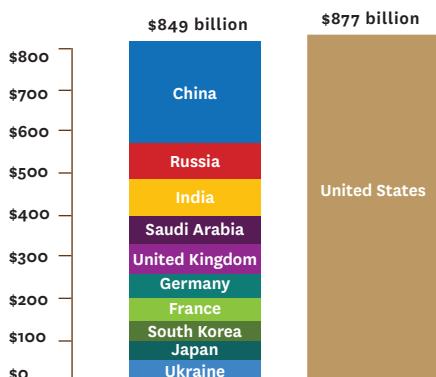
³ William D. Hartung, “Promoting Stability or Fueling Conflict? —The Impact of U.S. Arms Sales on National and Global Security,” Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, October 20, 2022. **QUINCY INSTITUTE FOR RESPONSIBLE STATECRAFT**

Brown University Costs of War Project, “Human and Budgetary Costs to Date of the U.S. War in Afghanistan, 2001-2022

⁴ Reuters, “What’s in the Debt Deal Struck by Biden and McCarthy?,” May 29, 2023 **CNBC**

⁵ Lindsay Koshgarian, “The Budget Deal Gives 56% of Discretionary Spending to the Pentagon,” May 31, 2023 **NATIONAL PRIORITIES PROJECT**

The U.S. Spends More on Defense Than Next 10 Countries Combined



Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, April 2023

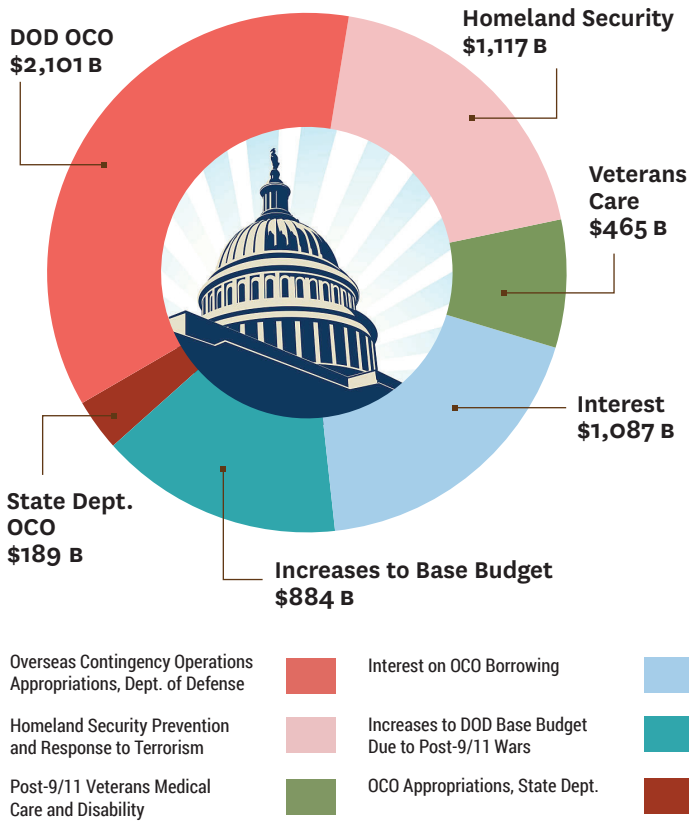
NOTE: Figures are in U.S. dollars converted from local currencies using market exchange rates. Data for the United States are for FY2022 (Oct. 1, 2021–Sept. 30, 2022). Data for other countries are for calendar year 2022. The source for this chart uses a definition of defense spending that is more broad than budget function 050 and defense discretionary spending.



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Unseen Fiscal Costs

Estimate of U.S. post-9/11 war spending, in billions of dollars.



Plus more than \$2.2 trillion in obligations for veterans care over the next 30 years
Total U.S. Post-9/11 Spending on War ➔ \$8 trillion

The true cost of war is more than 2x what Congress spends directly on military operations. "Current and future veterans care, interest on war debt, Homeland Security spending and additions to the Pentagon base budget form the bulk of post-9/11 war expenses."⁶

⁶ "The U.S. Budgetary Costs of the Post-9/11 Wars," Brown University Costs of War Project, September 2021. **BROWN UNIVERSITY COSTS OF WAR PROJECT**

Source: Brown University Costs of War Project



- Future medical and disability costs for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans will total between \$2.2 trillion and \$2.5 trillion. Veterans care costs typically peak 30-40 years after the conflict. The United States has not yet set aside provisions for this future expense.⁷
- As opposed to wars in the 20th Century that were primarily funded through taxes, post-9/11 wars have been majority funded through government borrowing. **Increased national debt leads to rising interest rates** affecting both public and private sectors.
- In 2023, the government plans to pay \$544.98 billion in net interest.⁸ Interest payments for the War on Terror will total \$6.5 trillion by the 2050s, if the federal government stops spending money on the war now.

⁷ "The Long-Term Costs of United States Care for Veterans of the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars," Brown University Costs of War Project, August 2021.

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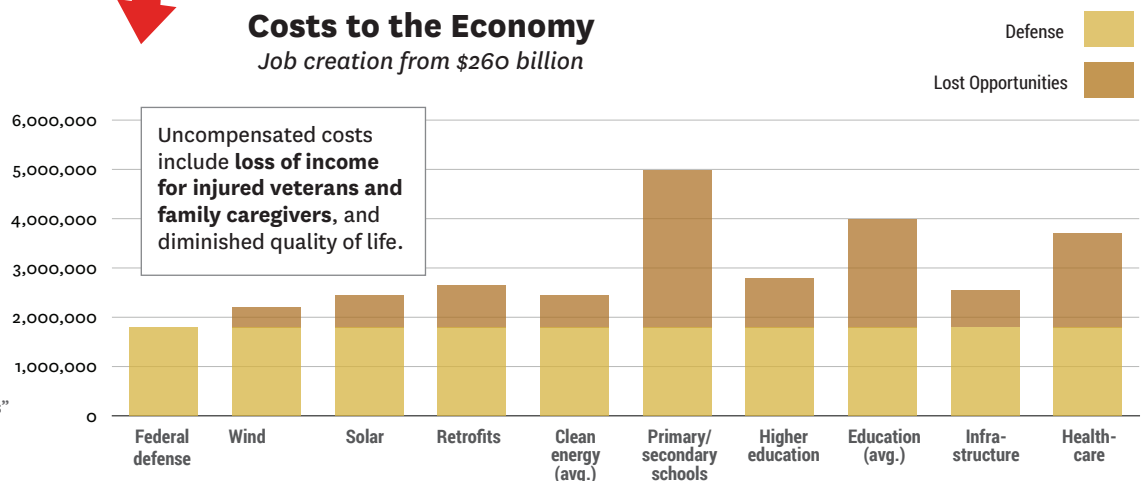
⁸ "The Nation's Fiscal Health: Road Map Needed to Address Projected Unsustainable Debt Levels," U.S. Government Accountability Office, Feb. 2025. **GAO**

"Contrary to the widespread belief that war is a particularly effective way to create jobs, U.S. federal spending on the current wars would have led to **at least 1.4 million more jobs** had the money been invested in education, health care or green energy."⁹

⁹ "War Spending and Lost Opportunities" Brown University Costs of War Project. **BROWN UNIVERSITY COSTS OF WAR PROJECT**

Costs to the Economy

Job creation from \$260 billion



Uncompensated costs include **loss of income for injured veterans and family caregivers**, and diminished quality of life.

The Cost of Endless War



Half of the Defense Department budget goes to contractors.¹⁰ In one recent year, just one contractor—Lockheed Martin—received more in Pentagon contracts than the budgets of the State Department and Agency for International Development combined.¹¹

¹⁰ William D. Hartung, "Congress Has a Chance to Rein in Runaway Pentagon Spending," July 7, 2023 **FORBES**
¹¹ William D. Hartung, "Pathways to Spending Reductions: Removing the Obstacles," March 2, 2022. **QUINCY INSTITUTE FOR RESPONSIBLE STATECRAFT**



Human Cost

The main product of war is death. Direct deaths caused by combat in post-9/11 wars—which include combatants on both sides as well as police, contractors, civilians, journalists and humanitarian aid workers—are estimated to be **940,000**.

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Indirect deaths are caused by:

- Economic collapse and food insecurity
- Destruction of public services and health infrastructure
- Environmental contamination
- Reverberating trauma and violence
- Other impacts such as disease, malnutrition, injury, maternal and newborn complications

Indirect deaths due to America's post-9/11 wars are estimated to be **between 3.6 and 3.7 million people**.

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Cost of Refugee Crisis

- **38 million people displaced** due to U.S.-led post-9/11 wars.
- Of the 4 million Internally Displaced People (IDPs) in Afghanistan in 2022, **60% are children**.



- **The Trump administration's refugee threshold decrease cost the government more** than taking in those refugees would have. The 295,000 less refugees taken in have cost the U.S. **\$9.1 billion** in potential economic activity.¹²

¹² ReliefWeb, "The Economic and Fiscal Effects on the United States from Reduced Numbers of Refugees and Asylum Seekers" **RELIEF WEB**



Direct deaths from post-9/11 wars are estimated to be 940,000, and 38 million people have been displaced.

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