

US has spent almost \$6 trillion on wars since 2001

Trévon Austin
17 November 2018

A report released by the Watson Institute of International & Public Affairs at Brown University indicates the total sum spent on the “war on terror” is much larger than previously suggested. Professor Neta C. Crawford, the author of the study, revealed that the US government is set to spend nearly \$6 trillion on post-9/11 wars by the end of the 2019 fiscal year.

In March, the Department of Defense (DoD) released a report stating the military had spent \$1.5 trillion on the wars. However, the Brown University report notes the DoD’s numbers were a conservative estimate that also failed to take into account spending across other federal departments. The new estimate not only includes expenditures from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), budget increases, and medical costs for veterans, but also interest on money borrowed to pay for the wars.

Including indirect war spending, the total amount of spending allocated since 2001 will be \$4.6 trillion by the end of 2019. The report also estimates the government will be obligated to spend around \$1 trillion for the future care of post 9/11 veterans until 2059. The total sum amounts to a staggering \$5.993 trillion.

The study warns that continuing the multitude of US war and interventions for another four years would cost an additional \$808 billion, even if the United States were to stop such actions by 2023. The accumulated costs would likely exceed the estimated \$6.7 trillion because the number of veterans will continue to grow as long as the US continues military operations.

With no end in sight, the fiscal and human cost of US wars of aggression will continue to climb. A particular concern introduced in the latest study was the US government’s reliance on deficit spending and borrowing to fund war. In 2011 it was calculated that

war appropriations, if capped at \$1.5 trillion, would accrue \$7.9 trillion in interest. War spending has substantially increased since the estimate, and more debt accumulated, so this would only be a conservative estimate.

The larger \$5.9 trillion estimate over three times more than the Pentagon claimed has been spent out of war-related appropriations since 9/11. The DoD estimated \$1.7 trillion would be spent by the end of the 2018 fiscal year, but this lower estimate only contains a portion of all war-related budgeting and spending.

The spending allocated by Congress is not included in the Pentagon’s estimate. Congress passes budgets that increase spending on other war-related areas, particularly “overseas contingency operations (OCO).” OCO spending directly supports the American empire’s global military operations. Along with the DoD, Congress has allocated over \$2 trillion in OCO spending since 2001.

In addition to the unfathomable sums of money spent, the study estimates 370,000 lives lost from direct combat with many times more lost due to indirect consequences such as malnutrition, damaged infrastructure, and environmental degradation. Approximately 200,000 innocent civilians have been killed as well. Professor Crawford personally notes even these estimates are limited with many more likely killed due to US imperialism.

Crawford remarks, “Congress’ attitude almost seems to be that the Pentagon deserves whatever funding they ask for, no matter the cost, and regardless of whether or not this spending is efficient or wise.”

The number of veterans from the “war on terror” is also set to increase significantly. The Department of Veteran Affairs estimates the number of veterans will rise to 4.3 million by 2039. Many will return from

combat severely injured or suffering mental illness, increasing the fiscal and societal toll.

The wars in the Middle East have created the largest humanitarian crisis since World War II with over 10 million refugees forced to flee their countries. Combined with the obscene amount of money spent, the wars waged by Washington and its allies highlight the crisis of capitalism. The ruling classes see no way forward other than war, but it means ruin for working people and society as a whole.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact