

Trump's \$200 billion Iran spending request reveals scale of US war plans

Andre Damon
19 March 2026

The *Washington Post* reported Wednesday that the Trump administration is seeking more than \$200 billion to fund the war against Iran.

At a press briefing Thursday, a reporter asked Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth “why a package this large is necessary?” Hegseth not only confirmed the \$200 billion figure but suggested it could grow. “I think that number could move,” he said. “It takes money to kill bad guys. So we’re going back to Congress to ensure that we’re properly funded for what’s been done, for what we may have to do in the future.”

And what, exactly, are these unspecified things the administration “may have to do”?

In 2003, when 150,000 American soldiers invaded and occupied Iraq, Congress appropriated \$51 billion—a quarter of what the Trump administration is requesting before a single ground soldier has entered Iran. At the height of the 2007-2008 surge, when nearly 170,000 American soldiers occupied the country, the war cost roughly \$144 billion a year.

In reality, the \$200 billion is not about “what we may have to do in the future” but about what the White House is actively conspiring to do in the present. The budget request comes as the administration prepares a ground invasion of Iran, deploying 5,000 Marines from the Pacific to the Middle East amid demands by the *Wall Street Journal* and leading Republicans for the seizure of Kharg Island and the Strait of Hormuz.

Reuters reported Wednesday that the Trump administration has discussed sending ground forces to seize Kharg Island, the hub for 90 percent of Iran’s oil exports, and has separately discussed deploying US forces to secure Iran’s stocks of highly enriched uranium. They are operational plans for the invasion and occupation of Iranian territory—and they explain why the administration is demanding more money than was appropriated for any single year of the Iraq invasion.

Just as with the months and years of planning that preceded the US-Israeli attack on Iran, the ground invasion is being prepared behind the backs of the American people, who overwhelmingly oppose the war. Trump called the war an “excursion.” Vice President JD Vance promised it would not become a “quagmire.” At the same briefing where he confirmed the \$200 billion request, Hegseth told reporters: “The media wants you to think, just 19 days into this conflict, that we’re somehow spinning toward an endless abyss or a Forever War or a quagmire. Nothing could be further from the truth.”

In reality, the administration is planning the most endless of all endless wars—an open-ended invasion aimed at subjugating or destroying a country of 90 million people.

The administration sees the Iran war as a prelude to an effort to subjugate China, the world’s largest economy by purchasing power parity. As former Republican Congressman Patrick McHenry put it on ABC’s *This Week*, the wars in Venezuela and Iran are “targets of opportunity to reshape the world.” He added: “Venezuela was in service to American energy dominance. The issue with Iran was a target of opportunity... The results here will mean that, with China, the president’s hand will be enhanced.”

The \$200 billion is a supplemental—on top of the \$839 billion defense bill Congress already passed for fiscal year 2026, the largest military budget in American history. If approved, direct military spending this year will exceed \$1 trillion. US President Donald Trump has called for a \$1.5 trillion military budget for fiscal year 2027—a 50 percent increase.

And \$200 billion is only what the administration will admit to. In 2002, Bush’s chief economic adviser Lawrence Lindsey was fired for estimating the Iraq war would cost \$100 to \$200 billion. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld put the figure at “something under \$50

billion.” When told outside estimates ran to \$300 billion, Rumsfeld replied: “Baloney.” Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz assured Congress that Iraqi oil revenues would pay for reconstruction. The actual cost, including veterans’ care, disability payments and interest on the debt, is now estimated by Brown University’s Costs of War Project at more than \$8 trillion.

The waging of continuous wars, combined with the 2008 and 2020 bank bailouts, has produced an explosion of US debt. In 2000, before the Iraq war, the national debt stood at \$5.7 trillion. By 2010, after the Iraq surge and the \$700 billion TARP bank bailout, it had reached \$12.3 trillion. By 2020, after \$4.6 trillion in COVID bailouts, it hit \$27 trillion. It now stands at \$39 trillion—nearly seven times what it was a quarter century ago.

The United States credit rating has been downgraded three times—by Standard & Poor’s in 2011, Fitch in 2023 and Moody’s in 2025—each time because of military spending and the refusal of either party to cut the military budget. The Vietnam War destroyed Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society programs and produced the inflation of the 1970s, which the ruling class broke through the Volcker shock—mass unemployment to crush wages. The Iraq and Afghanistan wars were waged alongside tax cuts for the wealthy and the gutting of public services.

Trump’s “One Big Beautiful Bill,” signed last July, imposed \$1 trillion in cuts to Medicaid over the next decade, \$536 billion in cuts to Medicare and \$186 billion in cuts to food assistance through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)—the largest cut to food aid in American history. The fiscal year 2026 budget slashed domestic spending by 22.6 percent—cutting the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) by 44 percent, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) by 44 percent and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) by \$18 billion—while increasing the military budget by 13 percent.

Within 24 hours of the administration confirming it is seeking \$200 billion for the war, the Postmaster General testified to Congress that the United States Postal Service (USPS) could run out of cash as soon as October—with just \$8.2 billion in reserves, enough to cover 33 days of operations. The USPS employs more than 500,000 workers and holds billions in pension and retirement obligations. The manufactured insolvency is a pretext for raiding those funds—taking workers’ pension money and spending it on the war.

Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security represent trillions more. The ruling class sees these programs as

money to be seized. The administration does not see pensions and healthcare as social programs. It sees them as collateral.

Trump has promised the economic pain will be a temporary “blip.” This will not pass in weeks. It will mean a permanent reduction in working-class living standards, just as the Iraq war did.

The struggle to defend Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, pensions and public services cannot be separated from the struggle against war. They are the same struggle. The \$200 billion the administration demands is money taken from the programs working people depend on to survive.

The Democrats have systematically enabled Trump’s wars. In January, as Trump declared that a massive armada was steaming toward Iran, every leading Democrat in Congress voted for the \$839 billion military budget—Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, Minority Whip Katherine Clark, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer and Minority Whip Dick Durbin all voted in favor. Their criticism of the war has centered on procedural issues, along with demands that US imperialism direct its fire at Russia and China.

Opposition must come from below—from workers in the United States, in Iran, across the Middle East and around the world—organized independently of both capitalist parties, armed with a socialist and internationalist program, and fighting to build the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) as the revolutionary leadership of the working class. The fight against imperialist war is the fight against the capitalist system that produces it.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)