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Costs of War

At least **4.5 million people** have died in post-9/11 war zones as a result of war and its reverberating impacts.

COSTS OF WAR

Reflecting on 25 Years of Forever Wars Post-9/11

A Message from Stephanie Savell, Costs of War Director

As we approach the 25 year mark since the 9/11 attacks, we at Costs of War remember the devastation of thousands of American families and the profound effects of the U.S.-led wars that followed. The military operations first launched in the name of what President Bush called the “war on terror,” starting with the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, now extend to [dozens](#) of countries and continue to take an unfathomable toll on human lives. The Trump administration continues to use counterterrorism to justify launching and intensifying a range of operations and policies, including airstrikes against boats in the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific and the ouster of Venezuela’s President Maduro — operations that cost over [\\$4.7 billion](#) in the past year. Our project’s research not only documents the broad costs, but highlights the urgency of asking big-picture questions about these military operations.

Six months into the current war with Iran, there are key lessons from the post-9/11 wars that Costs of War continues to highlight:

First, the decision to wage war means the deaths of service members and also many, many others. Even beyond those killed by violence, war’s destruction of economies, critical infrastructure, and the environment leads to deaths that occur long after bombs drop, and grow in scale over time. In post-9/11 war zones, including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, the total death toll including direct

and indirect deaths could be over [4.5-4.7 million](#) and counting, though the precise mortality figure remains unknown. Children, especially, are killed by the reverberating effects of war, such as the spread of disease.

Second, wars always cost far more than political leaders say they will at the outset. From late 2001 through 2022, the U.S. post-9/11 wars cost an estimated [\\$8 trillion](#). This includes the expected cost of caring for veterans of these wars through the next several decades. In regard to the war with Iran, the Trump administration claimed it would be over quickly and would be relatively inexpensive. However, researchers estimate that even if this war were to end today, it would cost [over \\$1 trillion](#).

The toll of U.S. wars includes not only death and destruction abroad, but also many [social costs](#) at home. What's more, the vast sums of tax payer dollars funding forever wars have [opportunity costs](#): the government could be investing elsewhere, whether paying off the national debt or providing for basic societal needs such as healthcare, education, a clean environment, infrastructure, and much more.



When it comes to strategy, we in the U.S. often fail to ask the most important questions, such as: Are these wars protecting anyone? What are the alternatives, and how can we as a nation prioritize and invest in those alternatives? It's critical that more U.S. leaders ask these questions if we want to avoid another 25 years of forever wars and begin to devote our resources to meaningful collective security.

In peace,

Stephanie Savell
Director, Costs of War

Resources:

- [Overview: Key Findings on the Costs of The Post-9/11 Wars](#)
- [Teaching The Post 9/11 Wars](#)

More Costs of War: In The News

The New York Times

[The New York Times](#) cited Costs of War research on the cost of recent U.S. military operations in Latin America and the Caribbean.

**the
WAR HORSE**

[The War Horse](#) cited Costs of War research on sexual assault in the U.S. military.

**The
Guardian**

[The Guardian](#) cited Costs of War research on the human costs of the post-9/11 wars.