



Iraq, Afghanistan, War, and Money: A Look at Two Presidencies

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Promises of Change

While running for the U.S. presidency in 2008, Senator Barack Obama repeatedly criticized the foreign policy of President George W. Bush. In particular, he argued that the Iraq war had been a mistake and a disaster, and that an orderly withdrawal was in America's interest. Obama's critique of Bush's Iraq policy focused on the human costs of the war, the overstretch of the U.S. military, the damage done to U.S. relationships with American allies, and, last but not least, the financial burden imposed by the expensive overseas project. A characteristic position paper stated:

The Iraq war has lasted longer than World War I, World War II, and the Civil War. More than 4,000 Americans have died. More than 60,000 have been injured and wounded. The United States may spend \$2.7 trillion on this war and its aftermath, yet we are less safe around the globe and more divided at home. With determined ingenuity and at great personal cost, American troops have found the right tactics to contain the violence in Iraq, but we still have the wrong strategy to press Iraqis to take responsibility at home, and restore America's security and standing in the world.¹

In vowing to “go through the federal budget, line by line, eliminating programs that don't work,” Obama emphasized in his campaign infomercial that “one of the biggest savings we can make is to change our policy in Iraq.”²

Meanwhile, Obama echoed the campaign position of 2004 Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry³ concerning Afghanistan: that the Bush administration had neglected this front in the war on terrorism. Whereas on Iraq, the Obama campaign was antiwar when contrasted with the Bush administration and Republican candidate John McCain, it was distinctively more pro-war and pro-U.S. intervention on the question of Afghanistan. Although many of the president's supporters have expressed surprise or disappointment that the Obama administration has taken such a decisively hawkish stance on Afghanistan, there was no reason to be surprised—unless it was expected that the Obama campaign was lying. In a major piece of campaign literature, the Obama/Biden campaign asserted:

Obama has been calling for more troops and resources for the mission in Afghanistan for years. Obama and Biden will refocus America on the greatest threat to our security—the resurgence of al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan.⁴

In particular, the Obama campaign drew a link between the folly of Iraq and the neglected reality of Afghanistan:

¹ “Blueprint for Change: Obama and Biden's Plan for America,” Obama for America, 2008, p. 68. Available online at www.barackobama.com/pdf/ObamaBlueprintForChange.pdf.

² “Complete Text (and video) of Barack Obama campaign infomercial,” LA Times blog, October 29, 2008. Available online at <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/washington/2008/10/barack-obama-1.html>.

³ See “Strength & Security for a New World,” John Kerry for President. Available online at http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2004/kerry_natl-security-plans_asia.htm.

⁴ “Blueprint for Change,” p. 67.

The decision to invade Iraq diverted resources from the war in Afghanistan, making it harder for us to kill or capture Osama Bin Laden and the terrorists responsible for the 9/11 attacks. Nearly seven years later, the Taliban is resurgent in southern Afghanistan while Al Qaeda has used the space provided by the Iraq war to regroup, train and plan for another attack on the United States. 2008 was the most violent year in Afghanistan since the invasion in 2001. The scale of our deployments in Iraq continues to set back our ability to finish the fight in Afghanistan, producing unacceptable strategic risks.

The promise to reorient attention and resources from Iraq and Afghanistan was well summed up on the next page, under the heading “Get on the Right Battlefield”:

Obama will end the war in Iraq responsibly and focus on the right battlefield in Afghanistan. He will deploy at least two additional combat brigades and \$1 billion in additional non-military aid to Afghanistan. He will condition U.S. military aid to Pakistan on their making progress to close down training camps, evict foreign fighters and prevent cross border attacks. He will ensure U.S. military aid provides the Pakistani Army the training and capability to go after the Taliban and al Qaeda. If the United States has actionable intelligence on the location of high value terrorist targets like Osama bin Laden and Pakistan will not or cannot act on it, the United States will.

This view that the Afghanistan war had been neglected, the Iraq war was a costly error, and that the U.S. should refocus on the former and save money and restore national honor by withdrawing from Iraq, was consistent throughout Obama’s campaign. Two years into his presidency, we can assess his largest foreign policy promises—to withdraw from Iraq and send more troops to Afghanistan—both on their own terms, and by the standard of whether the policy goals as advertised have been realized.

Troops in Iraq

In December 2008, lame duck President George W. Bush signed the Iraq Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA)⁵, setting a timetable for withdrawal. U.S. troops were now scheduled to leave Iraq’s cities by June 30, 2009, and the country as a whole by the end of 2011.⁶ Thus, President-elect Obama’s promises to gradually but steadily leave Iraq were essentially U.S. policy by the time he actually came to power in January 2009.

In Obama’s February 2009 speech at Camp Lejeune, Obama announced a plan to withdraw all troops by the end of 2011⁷—but this was basically the same policy Bush had agreed to two months earlier, although many commentators spoke as though Obama’s Iraq policy signaled a break from his predecessor’s. Furthermore, the president made no reference to the Vatican-sized embassy or the seemingly permanent U.S. bases, the force protection for these bases, military contractors, or the troops charged with training the Iraqi military. He did mention the continuing

⁵ A provisional version of the text can be found here: <http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2008/11/18/56116/unofficial-translation-of-us-iraq.html>.

⁶ Andrea Stone, “Bush Signs Security Deal in Iraq.” *USA Today*, December 15, 2008.

⁷ Peter Baker, “With Pledges to Troops and Iraqis, Obama Details Pullout.” *New York Times*, February 27, 2009.

presence, for the time being, of “non-combat troops”—although without a clear explanation of what these troops would be doing.

Obama’s unveiling of a withdrawal schedule that had already been declared U.S. policy was not the first time Obama demonstrated solidarity with the Bush administration on Iraq. Although Obama, as a state senator, spoke out against the Iraq war before it began, by 2004 he found himself resigned to the administration’s posture on how to move forward with the occupation. Obama was famously quoted in a *Chicago Tribune* article on June 27, 2004, remarking: “There’s not much of a difference between my position on Iraq and George Bush’s position at this stage.”⁸ Almost three years later, the Senator defended his consistent votes to continue funding the war in Iraq: “I have been very clear even as a candidate that, once we were in, that we were going to have some responsibility to make it work as best we could, and more importantly that our troops had the best resources they needed to get home safely.”⁹ In the last months of his presidential campaign, Senator Obama told anchorman Bill O’Reilly on Fox News that the notorious Iraq “surge”—a questionable plan¹⁰ involving troop escalation devised by General David Petraeus and implemented in the face of Democratic criticism¹¹—had in fact “succeeded beyond our wildest dreams.”¹² Nevertheless, into his presidency, Obama has criticized his predecessor on Iraq policy, especially the choice to go to war.

Not only had Bush already agreed to the SOFA, but there is reason to suspect that even if the U.S. government were to decide to stay past the deadline, the Iraqis would force the American troops out. Perhaps Obama deserves some credit for following through with this plan so far, but it should never be forgotten that he has not expedited the policy of withdrawal beyond what was already set in motion by Bush. To complicate matters, Defense Secretary Gates is now floating the idea of a prolonged U.S. presence past 2011.¹³

In November of 2007, at the height of the surge, there were 170,300 U.S. troops in Iraq. There were over 144,000 when Bush left office in January 2009. Since May of 2003 and until the end of the Bush presidency, there were at all times well over 100,000. The number of U.S. troops in Iraq dipped to 98,850 in April of 2010 (see Appendix A). By August, the number dropped to below 50,000—the lowest it had been since the U.S. invaded in March 2003.¹⁴

Troops in Afghanistan

Obama had seen the cost of a high troop presence in Iraq being a lower than optimal presence in Afghanistan, and he has rectified this alleged imbalance. While overseeing the reduction of ground forces in Iraq, and consistent with his campaign promises, Obama has greatly increased

⁸ “Kurtz Misrepresented Obama’s 2004 Remark on Iraq War Stance,” *Media Matters*, January 14, 2008.

⁹ James W. Pindell and Rick Klein, “Obama Defends Votes in Favor of Iraq Funding,” *The Boston Globe*, March 22, 2007.

¹⁰ For a critique, see Nir Rosen, “The Myth of the Surge,” *Rolling Stone*, March 6, 2008.

¹¹ See, eg., Jake Tapper, “MoveOn.org Ad Takes Aim at Petraeus,” ABC News, September 10, 2007.

¹² “Obama: Iraq Surge Exceeds Expectations,” *Associated Press*, September 4, 2008.

¹³ Nathan Hodge, “Expect a Longer Stay in Iraq, Says Democratic Congressman,” *Wall Street Journal* blogs, February 17, 2011. Available online at

<http://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2011/02/17/expect-a-longer-stay-in-iraq-says-democratic-congressman/>.

¹⁴ “U.S. Troops in Iraq Now Below 50,000 Target,” *Associated Press*, August 23, 2010.

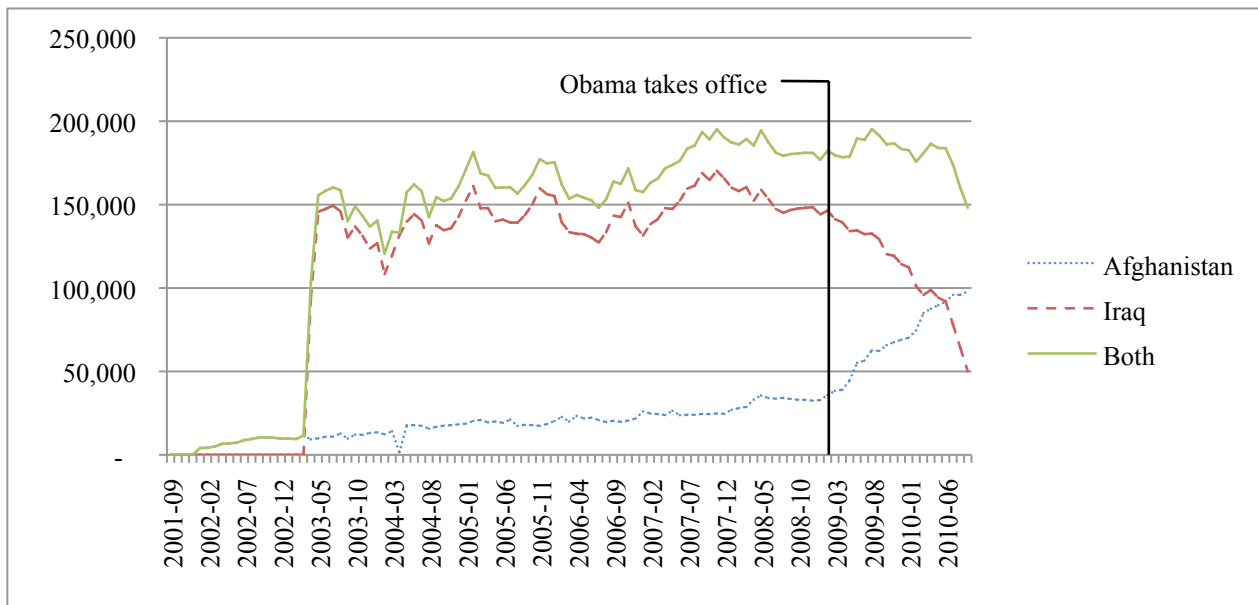
the U.S. presence in Afghanistan. Before 2006, the U.S. troop presence in Afghanistan hovered between 10,000 and 20,000, with the exception of a peak in July 2005. Beginning in 2006, the number began to rise. But at the end of the Bush administration, there were fewer than 33,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan (see Appendix A).

On numerous occasions, Obama has announced an increase in U.S. troop levels in Afghanistan. In February 2009 he announced 17,000 more soldiers and Marines would deploy to Afghanistan.¹⁵ In November, he announced another 30,000 troops to deploy by mid-2010.¹⁶

Obama’s infusion of more troops into Afghanistan has been compared to Bush’s “surge” strategy in Iraq, although we should note that some have pressured the president to increase the troop presence even more. Republican politicians have accused Obama of “dithering” for his supposedly lackadaisical troop deployments,¹⁷ and in mid-2010, even the top U.S. general in Afghanistan, Stanley McChrystal, scandalously spoke out publicly, saying more troops were needed than Obama was willing to commit.¹⁸

Nevertheless, within eight months of the Obama presidency, there were more than twice as many U.S. troops in Afghanistan as when Bush left office. As of June 2010, there were 91,775 U.S. troops there—58,975 more troops than at the end of the Bush presidency, nearly a threefold increase, and between four and five times as many troops as were stationed in Afghanistan for the first five years of the war (see Appendix A).

Figure 1: U.S. Troop Presence in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Total



Source: Graph created based on Iraq and Afghanistan data from Appendix A.

¹⁵ Julian E. Barnes and Greg Miller, “U.S. Afghan Forces to Grow,” *LA Times*, February 18, 2009.

¹⁶ “Obama Afghanistan Strategy: More Troops in Quickly, Drawdown in 2011,” CNN.com, December 1, 2009.

¹⁷ “Cheney: Stop ‘Dithering’ on Afghanistan Troops,” *MSNBC.com*, October 22, 2009.

¹⁸ Michael Hastings, “The Runaway General,” *Rolling Stone*, June 22, 2010.

All in all, the combined U.S. troop presence in both countries increased in Obama’s first year and has only declined from its peak by about one-fourth as of this writing (see Figure 1). Perhaps we could give credit to the president for this decline, although the policy trajectory when he took office did not suggest troop levels quite this high by this point in time. This is all putting aside the reality of military contractors, to be discussed below.

U.S. Fatalities in Iraq and Afghanistan

As U.S. troops in Iraq have reduced in number, so too have the fatalities. The United States’s bloodiest years in Iraq, 2004 and 2007, saw 849 and 904 U.S. deaths, respectively. In 2009 the number dropped to 149, and in 2010 there were 60 U.S. troop deaths in Iraq—less than 10% the average number of U.S. troop deaths in Iraq per year of war under George W. Bush (see Table 1).

At the same time, U.S. fatalities have only increased in Afghanistan. Before Obama took office, 2008 was the deadliest year for the United States, with 155 deaths. An average of 88 American troops died in Afghanistan per year in the period between 2002 and 2008. Since Obama’s escalation of the war, the figure has skyrocketed. In 2009, 317 died and in 2010, 491 died—more than three times the number during the bloodiest year of war in Afghanistan under George W. Bush, and more than five and a half times the average number of fatalities during that period (see Table 1).

Table 1: U.S. Military Fatalities in Afghanistan and Iraq, Per Year

Year	Afghanistan	Iraq	Total
2001	12		12
2002	49		49
2003	48	486	534
2004	52	849	901
2005	99	846	945
2006	98	822	920
2007	117	904	1121
2008	155	314	469
2009	317	149	466
2010	491	60	551
Total	1438	4430	5868

Source: Calculated from data gathered at <http://www.icasualties.org/>

Although the total number of U.S. deaths in Iraq and Afghanistan in 2010 was significantly smaller than the total number dead in each of the four years from 2004 through 2007, more U.S. troops have died in Iraq and Afghanistan in 2010 than died in 2001, 2002, 2003, or 2008.

The prospects for a truly dramatic decline in U.S. casualties appears contingent on a more complete withdrawal from both wars. Moreover, there is the running risk that other events such

as war with Iran could lead to a great escalation of violence where U.S. troops are currently stationed in Iraq.

Contractors and Civilian Employees

Aside from U.S. troops, there are also private contractors—both foreigners and Americans—employed by the United States in its occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan. During the Bush years, the use of private contractors was a matter of major controversy. But under Obama, the use of contractors has increased in both wars. Jeremy Scahil reported in June 2010:

According to new statistics released by the Pentagon, with Barack Obama as commander-in-chief, there has been a 23% increase in the number of “Private Security Contractors” working for the Department of Defense in Iraq in the second quarter of 2009 and a 29% increase in Afghanistan, which “correlates to the buildup of forces” in the country. In Iraq, the Pentagon attributes the increase to better accounting. But, these numbers relate explicitly to DoD security contractors. Companies like Blackwater and its successor Triple Canopy work on State Department contracts and it is unclear if these contractors are included in the overall statistics. This means, the number of individual “security” contractors could be quite higher, as could the scope of their expansion.

Overall, contractors (armed and unarmed) now make up approximately 50% of the “total force in Centcom AOR [Area of Responsibility].”

As of January 2011, the Defense Department reports there are 87,483 contractors in Afghanistan and 71,142 in Iraq. The data are somewhat inconclusive, as the official reported number of contractors has fluctuated dramatically in just a matter of months¹⁹ (see Table 2).

¹⁹ Compare the Defense Dept. data from January 2011 to December 2010 and May 2010:
http://www.acq.osd.mil/log/PS/hot_topics.html; http://www.acq.osd.mil/log/PS/p_vault/5A_May2010.doc

Table 2: Defense Department Contractors in Iraq, Afghanistan and USCENTCOM (January 2011)

	Total Contractors	U.S. Citizens	Third Country Nationals	Local/Host Country Nationals
Afghanistan Only	87,483	19,381	21,579	46,523*
Iraq Only	71,142	19,943	40,776	10,423
Other USCENTCOM Locations	17,536	8,387	8,134	1,015
USCENTCOM AOR	176,161	47,711	70,489	57,961

*The reported number of local national personnel in Afghanistan continues to fluctuate as we address the challenges associated with the day-to-day employment of individual contractors supporting contracts which meet reporting threshold requirements.

Source: “CONTRACTOR SUPPORT OF U.S. OPERATIONS IN THE USCENTCOM AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY, IRAQ, AND AFGHANISTAN,” DASD, January 2011. Available online at http://www.acq.osd.mil/log/PS/hot_topics.html.

It should be noted that the vast majority of these contractors are not U.S. citizens. Although that might placate some Americans, we should also note that these figures only include Defense Department contractors and not officials working under other such agencies as the State Department, which by year’s end is scheduled to have in Iraq a staff of “17,000 people, the vast majority of whom will be contractors.”²⁰

Private contracting has allowed the government to obscure the wars’ costs in blood. Between 2001 and June 2010, 2,008 civilian contractors have reportedly died in the wars, compared to 5,531 troops. When Obama has gone on record touting the reduction in U.S. fatalities, he neglects to mention “the contractor personnel now dying in their place,” says professor Steven Schooner of George Washington University Law School.²¹

Comparatively, the death toll among contractors has risen against that of U.S. troops. In the first half of 2010, 250 civilian contractors died in Iraq and Afghanistan—more than the 235 soldiers who fell during the same period. This comparison assumes the accuracy of these numbers, when the contractor fatalities figure may very well be deceptively low, since the companies for which the contractors work sometimes do not report deaths and injuries to the Labor Department.

²⁰ Walter Pincus, “Top Diplomat Defends Size, Cost of State Dept. Presence in Iraq,” *Washington Post*, February 2, 2011. Available online at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/02/01/AR2011020106176.html>.

²¹ T. Christian Miller, “This Year, Contractor Deaths Exceed Military Ones in Iraq and Afghanistan,” *ProPublica*, September 23, 2010.

Despite flaws in the data, a trend of an overall larger presence than when Obama took office seems clear, even as troop numbers decline in Iraq (and increase in Afghanistan).

Meanwhile, the overall number of civilian employees in the Defense Department has risen under President Obama. The number of full-time equivalent employees has increased from a peak of about 665,000 under President Bush to an estimated 760,000 under President Obama for the year 2011 (see Appendix B).

War and Defense Spending

A key component of Obama's critique of Bush's foreign policy was its enormous expense. By withdrawing from Iraq, Obama promised to save money, which could be used for domestic priorities and to help relieve America's debt problems.²²

The Iraq war is indeed costing less per year than it did under Bush. For FY2008, the U.S. spent over \$140 billion in the Iraq war—the highest expenditure, in fact, since the war had begun. The direct cost of U.S. involvement in Iraq had dropped each year since Obama has taken office—it was \$95.5 billion in FY2009 and \$65.9 billion in FY 2010, and is projected to be \$51.1 billion for FY 2011 (see Appendix C).

At the same time, spending on Afghanistan has sharply increased. The most expensive year during the Bush presidency was, as in the case of Iraq, in FY2008, with a price tag of \$43.5 billion. In FY2009, that number rose quickly to \$59.9 billion. In FY2010 the war was costing the United States \$104.9 billion and for FY2011 the cost is projected to be \$119.4 billion.

Adding the costs of the two wars, the U.S. is now spending more than it did except during the most expensive year under George W. Bush. Most years under Bush were cheaper, in terms of financial costs for the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, than the current war price tag under Obama (see Appendix C).

One might counter that these figures are deceptive because of inflation. There are flaws with the Consumer Price Index²³ and it is difficult to apply annual CPI figures smoothly to budget items calibrated for the fiscal year, but a rough adjustment of these figures to account for CPI inflation can be found in Table 3.

²² Supra, note 2.

²³ See William L. Anderson, "What's Wrong with the CPI?" *The Free Market*, August 2001. Available online at http://mises.org/freemarket_detail.aspx?control=368

Table 3: Estimated War Funding by Operation: FY2001–FY2011 (in billions of dollars, adjusted for inflation in constant 2011 dollars, as of Feb 2011)

Operation/ Source of Funding	FY 01 and FY 02*	FY03	FY04	FY05	FY06	FY07	FY08	FY09	FY10	FY11	Cum Enacted: FY01- FY10	Cum Total: FY01–FY11 Including Pending FY 2011 Request
Iraq		63.43	88.49	96.41	110.99	139.35	145.35	98.03	66.55	51.1	814.6	865.7
Afghanistan	25.46	17.59	16.90	22.55	20.76	41.64	44.49	61.08	105.94	119.4	356.41	475.81
Enhanced Security	15.91	9.57	4.31	2.37	.87	.53	.102	.103	.101	.1	33.77	33.87
Unallocated	0	6.58	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6.58	6.58
Total	41.4	97.17	109.7	121.33	132.62	181.52	189.94	159.21	172.54	170.6	1205.43	1,376.03
Annual Change	NA	135%	13%	10.6%	9.3%	36.9%	4.6%	-16.2%	8.4%	-1.1%	NA	NA
Change Since FY03	NA	NA	13%	24.9%	36.5%	86.8%	95.5%	63.8%	77.57%	75.6%	NA	NA

* Calculated using FY02 metrics.

Note: CPI years and budget fiscal years might be off by a few months, but this chart is still illustrative of trends with inflation.

Source: Amy Belasco, “The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11,” *Congressional Research Service*, September 2, 1010, p. 3. Consumer Price Index inflation calculated using the Bureau of Labor Statistics’s Inflation Calculator, available online: <http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl>. See Appendix C.

Even in constant 2011 dollars, total war spending has still been considerably higher under Obama in FY2009 (\$159.21 billion) and FY2010 (\$172.54 billion) than in all but the last two years of Bush, the peak of Bush’s war spending (\$181.52 billion and \$189.94 billion for FY2007 and FY2008 respectively). The estimated war costs for 2011 (\$170.6 billion) are 75.6% higher than the war costs in FY2003, the year of the Iraq invasion, even adjusted for inflation. The U.S. government spent more on Iraq in 2010 than it did in 2003 (see Table 3).

Even with a charitable look at the data, today’s war spending is very high compared to most years under Bush. And if the Afghanistan spending had remained constant since 2008 while the Iraq spending had declined as it has (and as it would have anyway, assuming the U.S. had followed the SOFA), projected spending for the two wars in FY2011 would be \$95.6 billion—a striking 78% lower than the projected \$170.6 billion Obama is expected to spend.

And this assumes the Iraq spending to be at the projected amount of \$51.1 billion for FY2011. Shockingly, the U.S. government is still spending about as much in Iraq per year as Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld predicted the war would cost in January 2003, before the invasion.

Rumsfeld had cited a budget office “number that's something under \$50 billion,” claiming that oil revenues would help cover the cost of the military operations and hold down the cost to American taxpayers.²⁴

Beyond the huge dollar amounts involved in all this there is the matter of how the wars are financed. In February 2009, President Obama boasted, in accordance with past campaign promises, that he would not, as President Bush had, use off-budget gimmicks to obscure the cost of the wars:

This budget looks ahead ten years and accounts for spending that was left out under the old rules—and for the first time, that includes the full cost of fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. For seven years, we have been a nation at war. No longer will we hide its price.²⁵

Nevertheless, several months later in June, Obama pushed through a supplemental spending bill that included \$106 billion for Afghanistan and Iraq war spending as well as \$108 billion for the International Monetary Fund, \$660 million in aid for Gaza, \$555 million for Israel, \$310 million for Egypt, \$300 million for Jordan, \$420 million for Mexico, and \$889 million for UN peacekeeping missions.²⁶

In January 2010, Obama requested a record-breaking defense budget of \$708 billion for fiscal year 2011.²⁷ Obama’s Defense Secretary Robert Gates has since proposed a number of reforms to reduce overhead costs and save \$100 billion over five years—but the main idea is to direct the savings to other defense spending priorities, such as force structure and modernizing equipment.²⁸ The administration continues to tout proposals to save money that mostly entail the prospect of merely refraining from routinely increasing spending, rather than actually cutting it. Without a substantial change in foreign policy, U.S. defense spending will continue to rival that of the rest of the world combined.²⁹ Even without dramatic changes in U.S. foreign policy and American commitments overseas, the Deficit Commission and independent institutions have found ways to reduce defense spending by up to \$100 billion per year,³⁰ but there is little sign that the administration plans to implement even these moderate cuts any time soon.

²⁴ Martin Wolk, “Cost of Iraq Could Surpass \$1 Trillion,” *MSNBC.com*, March 17, 2006.

²⁵ “President Obama’s Address to a Joint Session of Congress,” *U.S. News and World Report*, February 29, 2009. Available online at <http://www.usnews.com/news/obama/articles/2009/02/25/president-obamas-address-to-a-joint-session-of-congress?PageNr=7>

²⁶ H.R.2346, Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2009. Available online at <http://www.opencongress.org/bill/111-h2346/text>

²⁷ “Obama Seeks Record \$708 billion in 2011 Defense Budget,” *Reuters*, February 1, 2010.

²⁸ “Sec. Gates Announces Efficiencies Initiatives,” U.S. Department of Defense, August 09, 2010. Available online at <http://www.defense.gov/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=13782>

²⁹ Charles V. Peña, “Pentagon Cuts Don’t Cut It,” *Christian Science Monitor*, February 2, 2011. Available online at <http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Opinion/2011/0202/Pentagon-cuts-don-t-cut-it.-Want-to-really-save-money-Get-a-new-security-strategy>

³⁰ Deficit Commission Illustrative List (Draft Document), available online at http://www.fiscalcommission.gov/sites/fiscalcommission.gov/files/documents/Illustrative_List_11.10.2010.pdf. See also *Debt, Deficits and Defense: A Way Forward*, Sustainable Defense Task Force, June 11, 2010. Available online at www.comw.org/pda/fulltext/1006SDTFreport.pdf

Following Bush's Path on Foreign Policy and the War on Terrorism

In running for president, Obama ran against the Republican foreign policy legacy of George W. Bush. Despite his hawkishness on Afghanistan, the Senator from Illinois gave the impression that the two Bush terms had been aberrations in an otherwise mostly admirable American history. And as president, Obama credits the U.S. for having “underwritten global security for more than six decades.”³¹

In a typical criticism, candidate Obama opined that “the Bush-McCain foreign policy has squandered the legacy that generations of Americans—Democrats and Republicans — have built.” He promised that “as commander-in-chief, [he] will never hesitate to defend this nation, but [he] will only send our troops into harm’s way with a clear mission and a sacred commitment to give them the equipment they need in battle and the care and benefits they deserve when they come home.”³² It is appropriate, then, to judge the president’s record partly in terms of how well he has restored America’s policies status quo ante.

Perhaps the first sign that we would not see much of a break in policy came when Obama announced that he would retain Bush’s Defense Secretary Robert Gates. Moreover, Obama’s original choice as commander of the International Security Assistance Force was Stanley McChrystal, a general embroiled with controversy for having blocked the Red Cross from accessing U.S. prison camps and for his role in covering up the truth behind Pat Tillman’s death.³³ This choice hinted at a possible continuity of U.S. foreign policy between the last administration and the current one.

The tragedy of the Iraq war, as Obama had argued, lay in the fact that it was unnecessary. The rationale for the continuing and escalating war in Afghanistan rests on similarly dubious ground. Whether it is to vanquish the illegal drug trade or eliminate al Qaeda, which the administration itself has claimed only has about 100 members inside Afghanistan, the war, now in its tenth year, has no successful end in sight. If Obama was right that Iraq diverted necessary resources from bringing Osama bin Laden to justice, the critique would seem to apply to Afghanistan as well. Furthermore, the whole counterinsurgency is counterproductive—Ivan Eland argues that “the U.S.-led nation-building occupation in Afghanistan is fueling the Taliban resurgence. If you follow the timelines, increases in Western forces have brought about the Taliban renaissance.”³⁴ The insurgents are likely just waiting out the U.S. presence, and the Taliban’s support among many Afghans renders it all the more difficult to overthrow it as a U.S. policy goal.

And the cost in manpower and dollars is incredible: Journalists at ABC News noted that “with 100,000 troops in Afghanistan at an estimated yearly cost of \$30 billion, it means that for every

³¹ “Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan,” WhiteHouse.gov, December 1, 2009.

³² Alex Johnson, “Obama Blasts Bush’s ‘Failed Presidency,’” MSNBC, August 29, 2008.

³³ David Zirin, “In the Name of Pat Tillman: Good Riddance to Stanley McChrystal,” *The Nation*, May 25, 2009.

³⁴ Ivan Eland, “Five Facts About Afghanistan,” Independent Institute, October 14, 2009.

one al Qaeda fighter, the U.S. will commit 1,000 troops and \$300 million a year.”³⁵ What’s more, the U.S.-backed leader of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, has recently called the United States an “enemy,” and has said, “If I had to choose sides today, I’d choose the Taliban.”³⁶

Many of Obama’s supporters were concerned not just with American fatalities and financial costs, but also with the effect of Bush’s war on foreigners’ lives and world opinion. These considerations are not absent from Obama’s war in Afghanistan. According to many reports, 2009 was the worst year for Afghans since 2001. There were more civilian deaths since the invasion and an increase in air strikes.³⁷ Although many of these deaths were at the hands of the Taliban, it still does not speak well for the United States’ record of “liberation” and fostering stability there, given that a rise in U.S. troops has been accompanied by a remarkable surge in civilian deaths.

Regarding both Afghanistan and Iraq, the administration states the intention to eventually withdraw all troops, but it has not addressed the question of America’s military bases, some of them seemingly permanent, in both countries. Although the Defense Department does not include them in its supposedly comprehensive list of overseas bases, there are at least 88 such installations in Iraq and 400 in Afghanistan.³⁸ One U.S. installation in Iraq, while technically not a base—it is referred to as a U.S. embassy and in fact the largest one in the world—is about as big as the Vatican.³⁹

Meanwhile, Obama has expanded the war into Pakistan, launching more than 40 drone strikes just in his first year alone,⁴⁰ contributing to the humanitarian crisis wherein up to two million Pakistanis have been displaced from the Swat Valley.⁴¹

The Obama administration has also bombed Yemen,⁴² which was later cited as the inspiration behind the would-be “Underwear Bomber,” as well as Somalia, which it also invaded with a small force⁴³ and has provided with more than eighty tons of weaponry—weapons that often

³⁵ Richard Esposito and Matthew Cole and Brian Ross, “President Obama’s Secret: Only 100 Al Qaeda Now in Afghanistan,” *ABC News*, December 2, 2009. Available online at <http://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/president-obamas-secret-100-al-qaeda-now-afghanistan/story?id=9227861>

³⁶ Rajiv Chandrasekaran, “As U.S. Assesses Afghan War, Karzai a Question Mark,” *Washington Post*, December 13, 2010. Available online at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/12/12/AR2010121203747.html?hpid=topnews&sid=ST2010121204208>

³⁷ Laura King, “Afghan Civilian Deaths in 2009 Were Most Since Invasion, U.N. says,” January 14, 2010.

³⁸ “Empire of Bases 2.0: Nick Turse: Why Nobody— Even the President—Knows How Many Bases We Have Overseas,” CBS News, January 10, 2011.

³⁹ Martin Fletcher, “Welcome to the New U.S. Embassy,” *The Times*, September 1, 2007. Available online at <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/iraq/article2364255.ece>

⁴⁰ Peter Bergen and Katherine Tiedemann, “Pakistan Drone War Takes a Toll on Militants—and Civilians,” CNN, October 29, 2009.

⁴¹ Declan Walsh, “Swat Valley Could be Worst Refugee Crisis since Rwanda, UN Warns,” *The Guardian* May 18, 2009.

⁴² Glenn Greenwald, “Cruise Missile Attacks Yemen,” Salon.com, December 21, 2009. Available online at http://www.salon.com/news/opinion/glenn_greenwald/2009/12/21/terrorism/index.html

⁴³ Jason Ditz, “US Troops Attack Somalia,” Antiwar.com, September 14, 2009. Available online at <http://news.antiwar.com/2009/09/14/us-troops-attack-somalia/>

ended up in the hands of “insurgents.”⁴⁴ The administration threatened to invade Eritrea in April 2009.⁴⁵

Obama has been inconsistent on Iran, seeming less belligerent than his predecessor, but at the same time supporting a stiffening of sanctions—a classical act of belligerence. Despite all indications that Iran has not pursued nuclear weapons in violation of the Nonproliferation Treaty, Obama has jumped upon such events as Iran’s generally legal operations at Qom to criticize the nation for supposedly breaking agreements when there is no hard evidence of such malfeasance.⁴⁶ In 2007, the National Intelligence Estimate found with “high confidence that in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program.”⁴⁷ In March, 2009, when Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair was asked whether the U.S. intelligence community still stood by the 2007 estimate, Blair testified:

Mr. Chairman, the nuclear weapons program is one of the three components required for a deliverable system, including the delivery system and the uranium. But as for the nuclear weapons program, the current position is the same, that Iran has stopped its nuclear weapons design and weaponization activities in 2003 and did not—has not started them again, at least as of mid-2007.⁴⁸

In its last several reports on the matter, the International Atomic Energy Agency “continues to verify the non-diversion of declared nuclear material in Iran” to military or other non-civilian purposes.⁴⁹

At home and on the human rights front, the war on terror also continues more or less as Bush left it. Obama has embraced Bush’s policies of warrantless wiretapping, detention without trial, erosions of habeas corpus, immunity for alleged government torturers, denial of protection for whistleblowers exposing wartime wrongdoing, renditioning,⁵⁰ broad claims of executive secrecy, increasingly invasive airport security measures, a bloated homeland security bureaucracy, and

⁴⁴ Mohammed Adow, “Obama’s Incoherent Policy in Somalia” *Al-Jazeera*, September 22, 2009. Available online at <http://blogs.aljazeera.net/africa/2009/09/21/obamas-incoherent-policy-somalia>

⁴⁵ Jason Ditz, “U.S. Threatens to Invade Eritrea,” *Antiwar.com*, April 17, 2009. Available online at <http://news.antiwar.com/2009/04/17/us-threatens-to-invade-eritrea/>

⁴⁶ See Scott Horton, “Reality Check: Iran Is Not a Nuclear Threat,” *Christian Science Monitor*, September 17, 2010. Available online at <http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Opinion/2010/0917/Reality-check-Iran-is-not-a-nuclear-threat>

⁴⁷ National Intelligence Estimate, “Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities,” November 2007. Available online at http://www.dni.gov/press_releases/20071203_release.pdf

⁴⁸ “Iran Has No Weapons-Grade Uranium, Congress Told,” *IrishTimes.com*, March 3, 2009.

⁴⁹ “Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and Relevant Provisions of Security Council Resolutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran,” IAEA Board Report, November 23, 2010. Available online at <http://www.iaea.org/Publications/Documents/Board/2010/gov2010-62.pdf>

⁵⁰ See Scott Horton, “Target of Obama-era Renditioning Alleges Torture,” *Huffington Post*, September 11, 2009. Available online at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/08/11/target-of-obama-era-rendi_n_256499.html

the legal right of the president to order the assassination of suspects, anywhere on earth, without a shred of due process.⁵¹

Conclusions

The Obama administration has shifted focus from Iraq to Afghanistan, but has otherwise maintained the trajectory of U.S. post-9/11 defense policy that was set in motion under the Bush administration. The drawdown in Iraq has been one of the only possible signs of relative restraint, and it is a dubious example, as it has been anything but unconditional, rapid, or unambiguous, and is mostly on course with what the Bush administration formally agreed to at the end of its term. The escalation in Afghanistan has led to a surge in U.S. spending that essentially compensates for the reduction in spending seen in Iraq, and U.S. casualties have not declined nearly as much as many Obama proponents had hoped. The financial cost of both wars combined is higher than it was during all but two years of the Bush administration, even adjusted for inflation.

In fact, a presidency that continued on the path set by the end of the Bush administration, which officially endorsed the drawdown in Iraq but no escalation in Afghanistan, could very well have meant a more modest footprint, price tag, and cost in American and foreign blood than what, on net, has been produced by the current administration. Meanwhile, in most particulars, U.S. policy has mostly continued uninterrupted even on such controversial questions as the use of military contractors, permanent bases, and human rights abuses. In general terms, U.S. policy is as expensive and interventionist as before, and in absolute dollar terms, the U.S. defense apparatus is larger than ever.

⁵¹ For a summary on Obama's continuation of Bush's anti-terror policies and civil liberties, see "Establishing a New Normal: National Security, Civil Liberties, and Human Rights Under the Obama Administration: An 18-Month Review," ACLU, July 22, 2010. Available online at <http://www.aclu.org/national-security/establishing-new-normal>.

Appendix A: U.S. Troop Presence in Iraq and Afghanistan

Source: Amy Belasco, “The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11.” *Congressional Research Service*. September 2, 2010, pp. 42–3. Original sources listed below.

September 2001-September 2010												
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
2001												
Afghanistan										0	0	0
Iraq										0	0	0
Both										0	0	0
2002												
Afghanistan	4,100	4,200	5,000	6,600	6,900	7,300	8,900	9,500	10,400	10,500	10,200	9,700
Iraq	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Both	4,100	4,200	5,000	6,600	6,900	7,300	8,900	9,500	10,400	10,500	10,200	9,700
2003												
Afghanistan	9,800	9,500	11,450	9,300	9,900	10,900	10,900	12,700	9,800	12,100	12,000	13,100
Iraq	0	0	0	93,900	145,700	147,400	149,400	146,000	130,300	136,900	131,300	123,700
Both	9,800	9,500	11,450	103,200	155,600	158,300	160,300	158,700	140,100	149,000	143,300	136,800
2004												
Afghanistan	13,500	12,300	14,100	19,500	17,700	17,800	17,400	15,700	16,800	17,500	17,800	18,300
Iraq	126,900	108,400	119,600	131,700	139,800	144,300	140,600	126,800	137,700	134,600	135,900	142,600
Both	140,400	120,700	133,700	151,200	157,500	162,100	158,000	142,500	154,500	152,100	153,700	160,900
2005												
Afghanistan	18,700	20,300	20,900	19,500	20,000	19,200	21,100	17,400	18,000	17,800	17,400	18,500
Iraq	152,300	161,200	147,800	147,900	140,000	141,100	139,300	139,200	143,700	150,000	159,800	156,200
Both	171,000	181,500	168,700	167,400	160,000	160,300	160,400	156,600	161,700	167,800	177,200	174,700
2006												
Afghanistan	20,300	22,700	20,000	23,300	21,800	22,300	20,800	19,700	20,400	19,800	20,500	21,800
Iraq	155,100	139,300	133,500	132,500	132,300	130,300	127,300	133,500	143,400	142,600	151,200	136,900
Both	175,400	162,000	153,500	155,800	154,100	152,600	148,100	153,200	163,800	162,400	171,700	158,700
2007												
Afghanistan	26,000	24,800	24,400	23,900	26,400	23,800	24,000	24,000	24,500	24,400	24,800	24,600
Iraq	131,500	138,300	141,200	147,900	147,400	152,500	159,600	161,400	169,000	164,700	170,300	165,700
Both	157,500	163,100	165,600	171,800	173,800	176,300	183,600	185,400	193,500	189,100	195,100	190,300
2008												
Afghanistan	27,000	28,000	28,800	33,100	35,600	34,000	33,700	34,200	33,500	33,000 ^a	33,000 ^a	32,500
Iraq	160,200	158,100	160,500	152,300	158,900	153,300	147,400	145,100	146,800	147,650 ^a	148,075 ^a	148,500
Both	187,200	186,100	189,300	185,400	194,500	187,300	181,100	179,300	180,300	180,650 ^a	181,075 ^a	181,000
2009												
Afghanistan	32,800	35,900	38,350	39,000	44,700	55,100	56,500	62,600	62,300	65,800	67,500	69,000
Iraq	144,100	146,400	141,300	139,400	134,100	134,500	132,300	132,600	129,200	120,300	119,300	114,300
Both	176,900	182,300	179,650	178,400	178,800	189,600	188,800	195,200	191,500	186,100	186,800	183,300
2010												
Afghanistan	70,200	74,600	85,000	87,600	89,700	91,775	95,925 ^b	95,920 ^b	98,000 ^b			
Iraq	112,400	101,100	95,900	98,850	94,250 ^b	92,000 ^b	78,000 ^b	64,000 ^b	50,000 ^b			
Both	182,600	175,700	180,900	186,450	178,760 ^b	171,070 ^b	163,380 ^b	155,690 ^b	148,000 ^b			

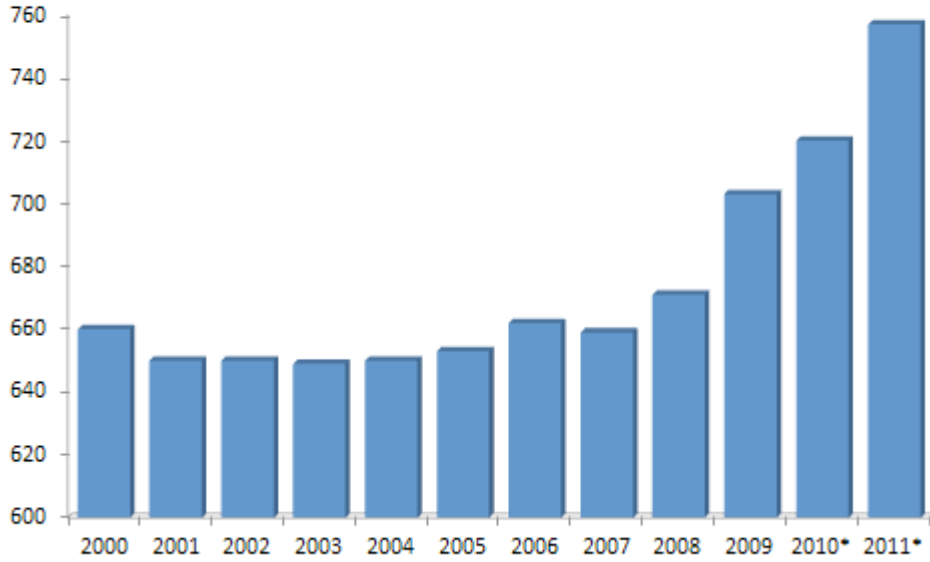
Sources: DOD, Joint Staff, Summary and Monthly Boots on the Ground Reports to Congress; for troops in country through August 2009; interpolated for October and November 2008 and August 2009 because not reported. Estimates for Afghanistan reflect Figure 6-2, “Force Level Assumptions in DOD Budgets,” in DOD, *FY2011 Budget Request: Overview*, Feb. 1, 2010; http://comptroller.defense.gov/defbudget/fy2011/FY2011_Budget_Request_Overview_Book.pdf.

Notes: Estimates for Iraq reflect DOD press conference cited above.

- DOD did not send Congress reports for Oct. and Nov. 2008 so CRS interpolated these months.
- CRS estimates for the rest of FY2010 reflect DOD plans for average strength of 84,000 in Afghanistan. CRS estimates for Iraq are based on a DOD, Press Conference of January 27, 2010, where he said that shortly after the elections (on March 7, 2010), “there’s going to be a pretty steep drop-off to get down to basically six advise-and-assist brigades, under 50,000 forces.” U.S. Status of Forces agreement with Iraq requires that U.S. forces in Iraq are down to 50,000 by August 31, 2010; see also, CRS estimates the months from June to September 2010 by distributing the difference between the reported May 2010 level and the September 2010 endpoint of 50,000 non-combat troops for Iraq and the same method for Afghanistan, distributing the difference between the May 2010 report and the September goal of 98,000.

Appendix B: Civilian Employees in the Department of Defense (Thousands of full-time equivalent employees)

Source: President's FY2011 Budget



* FY2010 & 2011 estimates

Appendix C: Estimated War Funding by Operation: FY2001-FY2011 War Request

Source: Amy Belasco, "The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11," *Congressional Research Service*. September 2, 2010, p. 3. Original sources listed below.

(CRS estimates in billions of dollars of budget authority)

Operation/ Source of Funding	FY01 and FY02	FY03	FY04	FY05	FY06	FY07	FY08	FY09	FY10	FY11 Request	Cum. Enacted: FY01-FY10	Cum. Total: FY01- FY11 Including Pending FY2011 Request
Iraq	0	53.0	75.9	85.5	101.6	131.2	142.1	95.5	65.9	51.1	750.8	802.0
Afghanistan	20.8	14.7	14.5	20.0	19.0	39.2	43.5	59.5	104.9	119.4	336.0	455.4
Enhanced Security	13.0	8.0	3.7	2.1	0.8	.5	.1	.1	.1	.1	28.5	28.6
Unallocated	0	5.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5.5	5.5
Total^a	33.8	81.2	94.1	107.6	121.4	170.9	185.7	155.1	171.0	170.7	1,120.8	1,291.5
Annual Change	NA	140%	16%	14%	13%	41%	9%	-16%	10%	0%	NA	NA
Change Since FY03	NA	NA	16%	33%	50%	110%	129%	91%	111%	110%	NA	NA

Sources: Public laws, congressional appropriations reports, Department of Defense data, and CRS estimates. CRS budget authority (BA) totals are higher than DOD figures because CRS includes all funding provided in supplementals, bridge funds, continuing resolutions, omnibus, consolidated and baseline appropriations for Iraq, Afghanistan and other counter-terror operations as well as transfers from DOD's baseline funds for GWOT requirements beginning with P.L. 107-38, the first emergency supplemental after 9/11 through the FY2010 request. CRS calls Operation Noble Eagle, Enhanced Security because these funds provide higher security at DOD bases, support combat air patrol, and rebuilt the Pentagon. CRS includes additional \$2 billion in BA in FY2003 included by DOD in its tally but not in DFAS obligations; source of funds unclear. CRS splits the \$25 billion provided in the FY2005 Title IX bridge between the \$1.8 billion obligated in FY2004 and the remainder available for FY2005; all those funds are scored as FY2004 because they were available upon enactment in August 2005. CRS estimates for DOD reflect obligations reported in DOD's Defense Finance Accounting Service (DFAS) reports, *Supplemental & Cost of War Execution Reports* and budget justification materials including DOD, *FY2007 Supp*, February 2007, Table 1a.; http://www.dod.mil/comptroller/defbudget/fy2008/fy2007_supplemental/FY2007_Emergency_Supplemental_Request_for_the_GWOT.pdf; DOD, *FY2008 Supplemental Requests*, February, July, and October 2007, and DOD, *Overseas Contingency Operations Request, FY2009 Supplemental: Summary Justification Material* April 2009, p. 81 and other data; http://www.defenselink.mil/comptroller/defbudget/fy2009/Supplemental/FY2009_Supplemental_Request/pdfs/FY_2009_Supplemental_Request_04-08-09.pdf. CRS excludes items that are clearly not war-related including for example, \$5.2 billion in FY2007 and \$8.0 billion in FY2008, for example, for higher fuel prices for DOD's regular program, base closure funding, and childcare centers, hospitals, medical facilities, and Army barracks renovation funds in the United States. Foreign operations figures include monies for reconstruction, development and humanitarian aid, embassy operations, counter narcotics, initial training of the Afghan and Iraqi army, foreign military sales credits, and Economic Support Funds. See also CRS Report R40699, *Afghanistan: U.S. Foreign Assistance*, by Curt Tarnoff. Updates of foreign aid from State Department, U.S. Foreign Assistance, Congressional Budget Justification: Foreign Operations, Summary Tables, Fiscal Year 2010, May 28, 2009; <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/124295.pdf>, and FY2011 budget justification. Updates of diplomatic operations provided by State Department. Updates for VA Medical reflect CRS estimates of shares for OIF and OEF veterans based on applying troop shares to totals shown in Department of Veterans Affairs, FY2010 budget justification materials; <http://www.va.gov/budget/summary/2010/index.htm>. Updated to reflect enactment of FY2010 Supplemental (H.R. 4899/P.L. 111-212), 7-27-10.

Notes: NA = not applicable. Totals may not add due to rounding.

a. Total includes \$5.5 billion in FY2003 of DOD funds that cannot be allocated between Iraq and Afghanistan because DOD records are incomplete.