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U.S. cost of war at least \$3.7 trillion and counting

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New report delves into the costs of war (04:01) Report

By Daniel Trotta
NEW YORK | Wed Jun 29, 2011 10:25am EDT

(Reuters) - When President Barack Obama cited cost as a reason to bring troops home from [Afghanistan](#), he referred to a \$1 trillion price tag for America's wars.

Staggering as it is, that figure grossly underestimates the total cost of wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and [Pakistan](#) to the U.S. Treasury and ignores more imposing costs yet to come, according to a study released on Wednesday.

The final bill will run at least \$3.7 trillion and could reach as high as \$4.4 trillion, according to the research project "Costs of War" by Brown University's Watson Institute for International Studies. (www.costsofwar.org)

In the 10 years since U.S. troops went into Afghanistan to root out the al Qaeda leaders behind the September 11, 2001, attacks, spending on the conflicts totaled \$2.3 trillion to \$2.7 trillion.

Those numbers will continue to soar when considering often overlooked costs such as long-term obligations to wounded veterans and projected war spending from 2012 through 2020. The estimates do not include at least \$1 trillion more in interest payments coming due and many billions more in expenses that cannot be counted, according to the study.

In human terms, 224,000 to 258,000 people have died directly from warfare, including 125,000 civilians in Iraq. Many more have died indirectly, from the loss of clean drinking water, healthcare, and nutrition. An additional 365,000 have been wounded and 7.8 million people -- equal to the combined population of Connecticut and Kentucky -- have been displaced.

"Costs of War" brought together more than 20 academics to uncover the expense of war in lives and dollars, a daunting task given the inconsistent recording of lives lost and what the report called opaque and sloppy accounting by the U.S. Congress and the Pentagon.

The report underlines the extent to which war will continue to stretch the U.S. federal budget, which is already on an unsustainable course due to an aging American population and skyrocketing healthcare costs.

It also raises the question of what the United States gained from its multitrillion-dollar investment.

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