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USA Today

Afghan war costs now outpace Iraq's

By Richard Wolf

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The monthly cost of the war in [Afghanistan](#), driven by troop increases and fighting on difficult terrain, has topped [Iraq](#) costs for the first time since 2003 and shows no sign of letting up.

Pentagon spending in February, the most recent month available, was \$6.7 billion in Afghanistan compared with \$5.5 billion in Iraq. As recently as fiscal year 2008, Iraq was three times as expensive; in 2009, it was twice as costly.

The shift is occurring because the Pentagon is adding troops in Afghanistan and withdrawing them from Iraq. And it's happening as the cumulative cost of the two wars surpasses \$1 trillion, including spending for veterans and foreign aid. Those costs could put increased pressure on President Obama and Congress, given the nation's \$12.9 trillion debt.

"The overall costs are a function, in part, of the number of troops," says Linda Bilmes, an expert on wartime spending at [Harvard University](#). "The costs are also a result of the intensity of operations, and the number of different places that we have our troops deployed."

Obama made clear Wednesday that the U.S. role in Afghanistan would remain long after troops are withdrawn, a process planned to begin in July 2011. "This is a long-term partnership," he said during a news conference with Afghan President [Hamid Karzai](#).

Continued American support will be crucial as U.S. troop levels and costs in Afghanistan escalate:

- The number of U.S. servicemembers in Afghanistan has risen to 87,000, on top of 47,000 from 44 other countries. At the same time, the number of U.S. servicemembers in Iraq has dropped to 94,000. By next year, Afghanistan is to have 102,000 U.S. servicemembers, Iraq 43,000.

- Afghanistan will cost nearly \$105 billion in the 2010 fiscal year that ends Sept. 30, including most of \$33 billion in additional spending requested by Obama and pending before Congress. Iraq will cost about \$66 billion. In fiscal 2011, Afghanistan is projected to cost \$117 billion, Iraq \$46 billion. To date, Pentagon spending in Iraq has reached \$620 billion, compared with \$190 billion in Afghanistan.

- Costs per servicemember in Afghanistan have been roughly double what they are in Iraq since 2005. That is due to lower troop levels, Afghanistan's landlocked location, lack of infrastructure, high cost of fuel and less reliable security. "The cost just cascades," says Todd Harrison of the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments. "That's always been an issue in Afghanistan."

"Iraq, logistically, is much easier," says [Lawrence Korb](#) of the [Center for American Progress](#). "You get the stuff to Kuwait and just drive it up the road."