

"On the Tenth Anniversary of the US invasion of Iraq"

by Pastor Steve Ramer

March 18, 2013

Ten years ago this month, the United States invaded Iraq. While combat forces were withdrawn at the end of 2011, there is still a significant U.S. presence in Iraq, and many people in both countries will never recover fully from the effects of the fighting. It is worth remembering the invasion and considering the costs if we are to avoid the fate warned of by George Santayana: "Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it."

First, how can we forget the various rationales George W. Bush gave us for launching the war: nuclear and chemical weapons of mass destruction, Iraq's collusion with al-Qaida, and Iraq's threat to the existence of Israel? Of course, none of these proved to be true.

Let us count the costs of this war started under false pretenses. The most tragic cost is the human toll. The war in Iraq has resulted in the deaths of 4,480 U.S. troops and more than 32,000 wounded. These numbers are dwarfed by Iraqi losses. According to the British medical journal, *The Lancet*, Iraqi fatalities alone have exceeded 650,000. How can we forget these irreplaceable losses?

Anyone curious about the financial costs of America's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan can find them on www.costofwar.com, up to the latest fraction of a second. By early this month, the Iraq war had cost more than \$812 billion, which works out to more than \$2,500 per second since March 19, 2003.

Adding the costs of treating wounded U.S. veterans (as much as \$717 billion) will boost the costs of the Iraq war still further. Throwing in the replacement of vehicles, weapons, and other equipment, the eventual tab for the United States for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan could reach \$4 trillion to \$6 trillion, according to Joseph Stiglitz and Linda Bilmes. This sum is more than the **\$3.6 trillion** the U.S. spent in inflation-adjusted dollars to fight World War II.

Ten years ago, the Pentagon estimated the cost of the war would be between only \$50 billion and \$60 billion. Economic adviser Lawrence Lindsey got into hot water when he publicly stated that the war could cost as much as \$200 billion. We now know that even that figure was ridiculously low.

And now, in our discontented season of sequestration and debt limit debates, how can we forget how the war on Iraq was funded? By implementing the Bush tax cuts again and again, Congress ensured that the war was ultimately financed by federal debt. The U.S. debt zoomed from \$5.7 trillion when Bush took office to \$10.6 trillion when he left. The cost of the war was deliberately kept off the books and hidden from the American people. Deficit spending helped avoid uncomfortable questions about the cost of the war.

Despite their recent expressions of outrage over the national debt, back then the Republicans followed the advice of Vice President Dick Cheney, who said that deficits don't matter and spent freely. The Bush administration encouraged the American people to keep spending and enjoy life while the government paid for the occupation of Iraq with a credit card they were hoping to never pay off.

Remembering past mistakes can be painful and depressing, but as George Santayana also said, Wisdom comes by disillusionment.

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