

# It's Clear America Can Afford Biden's Investments At Home. Just Look At How Much It Spent On Wars.

By KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL

**H**ere's the price tag: \$5.48 trillion. No, that's not the cost of what President Biden is calling a "generational investment" to rebuild America. That's the price of the so-called War on Terror since 2001, as detailed by Brown University's Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs - the cost to U.S. taxpayers of sending forces to Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Yemen and other countries in a continuing war that, as Biden implied last week, has metastasized more than it has succeeded.

Roughly half of that total - \$2.3 trillion - went into Afghanistan. That total doesn't include the priceless human cost of nearly 6,300 American lives lost, thousands more wounded, and the vast losses suffered by the Afghan people. Even as the foreign policy establishment savages Biden for ending a 20-year occupation in Afghanistan, one can only be outraged by the money and lives squandered on military adventures that have ended in disgraceful calamities.

Contrast that sum - and those lives - with the \$3.5 trillion that Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., correctly dubs the "most consequential piece of legislation" since President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. It would begin to address the existential threat posed by climate change, reduce childhood poverty by half, expand public education from pre-K to free community college, extend health care through Medicare while making drugs more affordable, support families with help for day care, paid family leave and a child allowance and more. It is not enough - but it is a start.

"This is the people's budget," Sanders notes. "This is the budget that will impact tens of millions of lives in this country: the elderly, the children, the working families, the middle class."

Trillions of dollars for debacles abroad versus trillions of dollars for investments at home. Yet, appropriations for the former zip through the Congress while the Biden domestic investments must overcome a filibuster by a unified Republican opposition and posturing by a handful of centrist Democrats demanding cuts.

This isn't because lawmakers are concerned about deficits. If nothing else, Republicans and hawks agree with what President George W. Bush's vice president, Richard Cheney, said Ronald Reagan had taught us: "deficits don't matter." In fact, with the U.S. economy operating far from full capacity, with millions still available to be added to the labor force, and interest rates holding steady, America can afford to do what it needs to do.

Republicans don't worry about "paying for" the tax cuts they lavish on the rich and corporations. And hawks don't worry about "paying for" the money squandered on foreign

misadventures. Yet, to this day, Republicans denounce domestic investments as "socialism," and even Democrats - from Biden to Sanders - accept that they must be paid for with offsetting revenue.

The result is plain to see: a wealthy nation that squanders trillions of dollars on failure and folly abroad while its citizens, its economy, its democracy and its security are undermined at home. We are the only advanced country without paid family leave, without affordable day care, without public education pre-K to college. We are lagging, not leading, in the transition to renewable energy. Publicly funded research, earmarked for defense firms, lavishes money on weaponry while investment in civilian technology and in research and development fails to keep up with rivals such as China.

After the debacle in Afghanistan, we need a broad reckoning, a fundamental reassessment of our priorities and our direction. The nation's security demands it. As the war in Afghanistan ends, the pandemic is spiking once more at home - Europe now moves to ban American visitors because of our rising infection rates. Thanks to climate change, extreme weather - hurricanes, wildfires, floods, droughts - wreaks an increasing toll in lives and destruction. The imperative of addressing these threats to our security could not be more compelling.

Already, leading figures in the foreign policy establishment - the architects of past disasters - have concocted a new argument: that Biden was wrong to pull the plug on Afghanistan, that the United States' security and credibility would be better served by maintaining a small number of troops in that country, backed by drones and air power. The retired generals and intelligence bureaucrats use the chaos and casualties of our exit from Afghanistan to prove their point.

As Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., told New York Times columnist Ezra Klein: "The pro-war crowd sees this as a mechanism by which they can absolve themselves of an accounting for the last 20 years."

But now, the failure of the armchair experts is impossible to miss. We need a new generation of security experts and activists - versed in pandemics and in poverty, in climate change and alternative energy, in political economy and diplomacy. We need a new consensus to advocate a strategy of restraint that focuses on diplomatic and economic engagement

over military intervention. We must address the security threats we now face rather than continue the vain effort to police the world.

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# US Leaves Afghanistan To Fend For Itself



Women and children collect water in a camp for internally displaced people in Kandahar in July 2021.

By J.V. LAKSHMANA RAO

**T**he US has "accomplished" its mission of clearing Afghanistan of its troops exactly on August 31, the deadline day, it set for itself. However, not all those nationals, who were waiting for evacuation, were able to be airlifted from the Kabul airport. A few have been left behind. They include some Americans. The US has left behind millions of dollars' worth arms, military hardware and aircraft, but not before disabling or dismantling them. The US is stated to have invested at least \$2.3 trillion in Afghanistan in the past 20 years.

Now the future of trouble-torn Afghanistan is gloomy. In all expectations the Taliban may form a governing council till a cohesive government is formed. However, Afghanistan becoming a democracy will be a pipedream and the US has once again failed in its objective. It is not too much or hypothetical to expect that there can be a civil war or terrorists groups vie each other to capture power in Afghanistan.

The Taliban, which waited on its wings, could have completed the capture of Afghanistan by August 15, much earlier than anticipated and without facing any resistance from the erstwhile National Army, while the US troops and other allied UK and NATO forces remained calm.

However, there was a ghastly bomb blast by suspected Islamic State (ISIS-K) suicide bombers on August 26 followed by the retaliation from the US, changed the scenario.

All these blasts diminish Taliban's hopes of peaceful transfer of power after capturing Kabul, and now forming a credible and sustainable government in Afghanistan is not going to be an easy task. Therefore, the political future of Afghanistan is anybody's guess.

The US, the UK and Russia, based on their past experience, would not involve themselves in any form in Afghanistan. The only major country that is left in the field is China, though its interests lay in Afghan's minerals and not in annexing and ruling or in helping the new government of the failed country, whoever forms it. And no major world power would be ready to

recognize immediately any government to be formed in Afghanistan. But the exception may be lone Pakistan.

In all probability, China may use Pakistan as a conduit to exploit riches of Afghanistan and also help Pakistan strengthen its ire against India. Pakistan is quite vulnerable as it is already under the influence of China. Pakistan, which harbors terrorists, is likely to back any government in Afghanistan formed by any militant or terrorist group, with an aim to increase its adventures on the border with India and cause trouble in Kashmir.

India's involvement in Afghanistan has been rightfully neutral and non-committal, but aims at helping that country's infrastructure and staying away from its problems - internal or international. India, in the recent past, has provided more than \$3 billion towards the construction of roads and buildings, supply of manpower, offer of expertise and development of infrastructure facilities in Afghanistan.

The developmental works included the construction of the Afghanistan Parliament building costing \$90 million; the Salma Dam, which provides water and electricity to thousands of families in the Herat province with a water storage capacity of 640 million cubic meters; restoration of 100-year-old Stor Palace; laying of strategic 218-km-long Zaranj-Delaram Highway connecting Zaranj near Iran's border at a cost of Rs. 600 crore; and construction of the Indira Gandhi Institute for Child Health, which is the largest pediatric hospital in Afghanistan.

Apart from these projects, India has also gifted 400 buses and 200 mini-buses, 105 utility vehicles for municipalities, 285 military vehicles for the Afghan National Army and 10 ambulances for government hospitals in five cities.

Now, there are at least three other groups vying to take control of Afghanistan. Besides the Taliban, the others are ISIS-K, al Qaeda and Northern Alliance.

With all these four militant groups at work, it would be imprudent to hope Afghanistan will have a stable government.

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