



A recently released Brown University report entitled “Costs of War” has received national media attention for the startling \$3.7 to \$4.4 trillion price tag it puts on our current wars. According to the report, this staggering dollar range is an estimate of the total cost of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars even assuming a prompt withdrawal of all U.S. forces. Any delay would cause the range to skyrocket further.

An estimated \$1 trillion of this sum – about 25% of the total cost – comes just from interest accumulated by the U.S. as we inflate our national debt to finance the wars. As war spending continues to mount, congressional leaders have repeatedly stated a commitment to overall deficit reduction, yet cuts to defense in this year’s Republican-led House appropriations process have been minor scratches. Even for those who supported the initial decision to go to war, it should be obvious now that a withdrawal of our troops from Iraq and Afghanistan is at least fiscally overdue.

The Brown study enumerates additional elements of the wars’ full cost. Every year we remain combat-engaged, we continue to lose American lives. The social and economic costs to service members who are killed, left disabled or absent from their families for multiple and extended tours of duty are estimated to be in the hundreds of billions. The national opportunity cost of the wars, in terms of forgone federal investment in education, health care, energy and economic revitalization, can also be added to the overall price tag.

We cannot change the past, but we can bring our troops home now and turn the responsibility for Iraq and Afghanistan over to those nations. By pursuing an orderly but swift withdrawal, we can stop the hemorrhaging of American taxpayer dollars and the tragic losses and painful injuries that too many of our military service families are facing. The time has come to face up the true costs of war and finally put an end to them.