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Where is America Going?

Five years after Sept. 11

*Philip Coyle, Senior Advisor
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In the days before Sept. 11, riding the post-Cold War high, America was blissfully unaware of the threats it faced, and why. A few in the William J. Clinton administration tried to warn their successors about al-Qaida's danger, but overall, most Americans were blindsided by the Sept. 11 attacks. Five years later, America is still largely in the dark.

To be sure, Americans feel threatened in a way they didn't before Sept. 11, 2001. Since then, the George W. Bush administration has kept U.S. citizens in a nearly constant state of fear with apocalyptic warnings, its "global war on terror," and escalated tensions with North Korea and Iran. But other than a generalized notion that evil-doers are out to get us, most Americans still don't have a perspective on *why* they are threatened.

At first we asked questions such as, "Why do they hate us?", "What were the root causes behind the attacks of Sept. 11?" and "What does America need to do differently in the future?" But as a nation we didn't pursue the answers. If we had, we might have been able to avoid the



mistakes of the past five years. Now, after five years of flailing, attention has shifted to Iraq, leaving Afghanistan open to a Taliban resurgence and without any real change in U.S. policies or attitudes.

Immediately after Sept. 11, America enjoyed international support, sympathy and goodwill. The world properly saw the attacks as barbaric and extreme, and rallied to America's side. Unfortunately, we quickly squandered that goodwill. Within a month, the premise for U.S. actions became "an eye for an eye."

Some commentators are saying that we are at the beginning of World War III, but before we glibly decide to give the current global strife any grand historical stature, we need to examine our own more recent history and the actions that resulted. Sept. 11 came after years of neglecting Afghanistan, which allowed al-Qaida to find a willing home from the ruling

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REMEMBERED
Special Issue

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Taliban. After the Soviets pulled out in 1988, the United States paid scant attention to the brewing storm in the Taliban-dominated Afghanistan. Even the Taliban's senseless destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas in early 2001 – before Sept. 11 – did not produce a serious U.S. government reaction, although the act showed the fanatical nature of the Taliban's beliefs and the violent extremes to which the Taliban would go to pursue them.

It's not just Afghanistan that the United States neglected. Our attitude regarding Iran and North Korea, the nuclear members of the axis of evil, has been one of grand-standing and a refusal to engage. Relations with both countries have withered away due to the lack of any real policy during the past five years. If the United States continues to refuse to deal with Iran and North Korea, it stands the risk of incubating another unstable situation like the one in Afghanistan.

This ineffectual approach also clouds U.S. counterterrorism strategies. Since Sept. 11, public debate in the United States has combined, and often blurred, the notions of fighting terrorism, weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan or elsewhere. The actions of al-Qaida on Sept. 11, and the subsequent and still unsolved anthrax infections and deaths after October 2001, followed a year and a half later by the war in Iraq, have unforgettably intertwined the three in the public's mind. For example, over 60 percent of Americans still believe Saddam Hussein had something to do with plotting or carrying out the Sept. 11 attacks. And a solid majority of Americans also still believe that Saddam Hussein had WMD when the U.S.-led coalition invaded Iraq in 2003.

This is not simply a partisan failing. Democratic politicians and non-governmental organizations generally critical of the Bush administration have bought into a cataclysmic world

view, reinforcing the message that we are very close to being under a WMD attack. This in turn justifies the idea of a generalized war on terrorism and the lengths to which such a war should be taken. By promoting this endless war on terrorism and by justifying the invasion of Iraq so that it qualifies as part of it, we short-change non-military ways of dealing with terrorists and what motivates them.

In Iraq, with nearly 3,000 American military personnel and tens of thousands of innocent Iraqi civilians killed, Americans are questioning whether it was worth it. Through this preemptive war, and coming on the heels of U.S. blunders in Afghanistan, we have punished many who were innocent, and stabilized a deep antagonism between Islam and the West.

In doing so, America has lost its role as an honest broker between Islam and Judaism. The United States was credible in 1947 at the time of the United Nations' Partition Plan when Israel was formed, and in 1978 at the Camp David Accords, and still later in 1993 with the Oslo Peace Accords. Today, however, the United States is the focus of the debate between Islam and the West. We have revived in the Arab world the image of the Crusades, compounding the already-murky situation in the Middle East with Iran, Syria, Hezbollah and Israel.

Looking back over the past five years, the protagonists on both sides sometimes acted ignorantly about how their actions might catalyze the actions of others.

Let us hope that in the next five years, America will develop insight and clear understanding of the world and how our actions are viewed abroad. Through its media projects, on-line journals, and analysis and commentary, the World Security Institute is working to achieve a more stable and peaceful world by bringing the world to America, and America to the world. ■

NEW CHINA SECURITY JOURNAL



"China's Defining Challenge: Energy"

China Security's current issue explores critical challenges and opportunities that energy security poses for China, both at home and abroad. In the decades ahead, China's brisk economic growth will inevitably lead to a dramatic rise in energy demand, and with it, a dependence on foreign energy resources. This reality is driving China to redefine its domestic energy policies as well as its strategic approach to addressing geopolitical dangers.

The contributions in this issue of *China Security* address a range of the complex problems that China faces in meeting these goals and their impact on China's relations with the United States and its neighbors. As discussed in these articles, part of the solutions lie within China's control, such as domestic institutional reform and more aggressive policies to improve energy efficiency, while others are much less under China's influence, such as securing foreign energy supplies and safeguarding the sea lanes.

China Security is a policy journal that brings diverse Chinese perspectives to Washington, published by the World Security Institute. To subscribe to the electronic version of *China Security*, go to www.wsichina.org; or request a hard copy by sending an e-mail to info@wsichina.org.

In the Name of Fighting Terrorism

The United States is Still Arming the World

Rachel Stohl, Senior Analyst
and Rhea Myerscough, Research Assistant

In the five years since the Sept. 11 attacks, the George W. Bush administration has continued a trend of supplying high technology weapons and millions of dollars in military assistance to allies in the war on terror. Willingness to pledge support for the United States in its quest to stamp out international terrorist networks continues to take precedence over other criteria usually taken into account when considering an arms transfer.

According to standing tenets of U.S. arms export policy, arms transfers should not undermine long-term security and stability, weaken democratic movements, support military coups, escalate arms races, exacerbate ongoing conflicts, cause arms build-ups in unstable regions, or be used to commit human rights abuses. However, in the last five years the Bush administration has demonstrated a willingness to provide weapons and military training to weak and failing states, and countries that have been criticized by the State Department for human rights violations, lack of democracy, and even support of terrorism.

To evaluate the trend of increased military assistance, CDI maintains profiles of 25 countries that have a role in the "war on terror." The country profiles feature analysis of the current political situations in the featured countries, taking into account the relative stability and openness of the country, military expenditures, total number of armed forces, and the human rights situation as assessed by the State Department, alongside

an evaluation of U.S. military assistance to these countries over the past 15 years.

More than half of the countries examined in this series have received more U.S. military assistance in the five years since Sept. 11 than in the previous 12 years combined. For some countries, any increase in military assistance is significant because many of these countries had received little, if any, funding prior to Sept. 11.

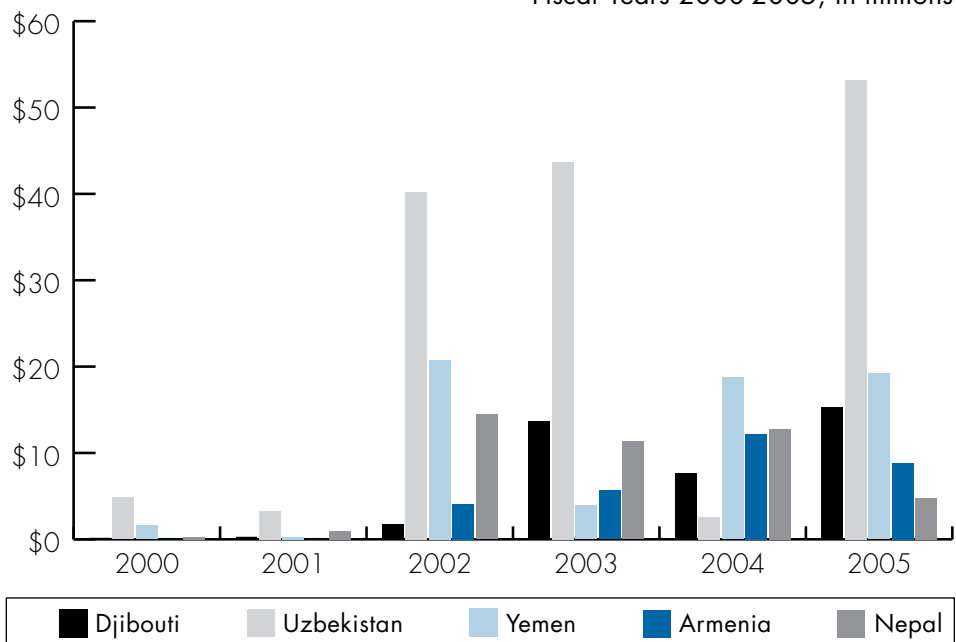
For instance, since Sept. 11, Armenia, Azerbaijan, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (now Serbia and Montenegro) have all become eligible for U.S. military assistance, despite reports by the State Department that security forces in nearly all of these countries have committed human rights abuses, despite India's and Pakistan's ongoing nuclear programs, and despite involvement in a variety of

current inter- and intra-state conflicts. Countries such as Nepal, Uzbekistan, and Yemen, which had not been major recipients for U.S. weapons in the 10 years prior to Sept. 11 due to human rights concerns, are emerging as substantial arms trading partners while showing little if any improvement in their human rights records.

The U.S. government should be wary of ignoring its own export control laws and policies in conducting its campaign against terrorism. The Foreign Assistance Act and Arms Export Control Act laws are designed to ensure that U.S. weapons are only transferred to desirable recipients. Short-sighted arms trade policies put U.S. interests at risk, and the current trend of ignoring decades of precedent has worrisome implications for U.S. national security in the years to come.

To see country-specific case studies, see www.cdi.org. ■

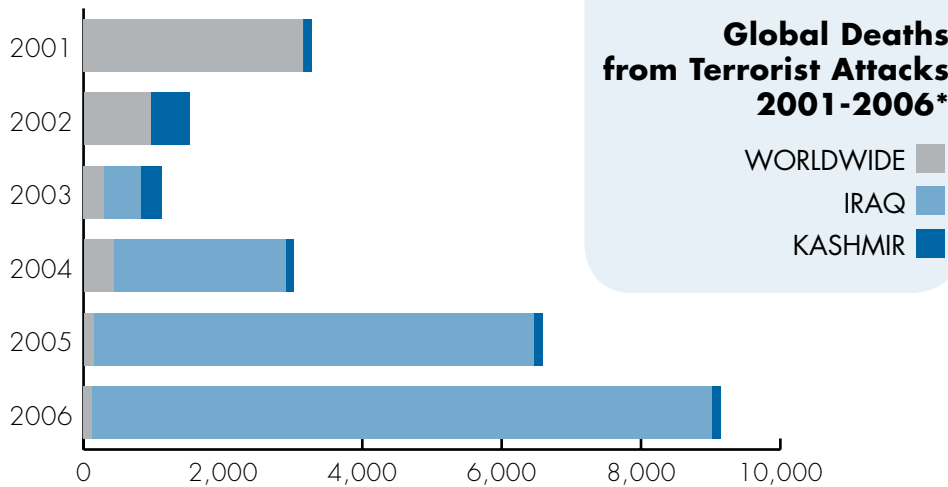
U.S. Military Assistance to Select Allies in the "War on Terrorism"
Fiscal Years 2000-2005, in millions



The War on Terrorism

Winning the Un-Winnable

Graph data prepared by CDI Research Assistant Jessica Ashooh



Five years after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, America is winning the “war on terrorism.” At least that is the oft-stated opinion of President George W. Bush. That this opinion is often accompanied by dire warnings of an impending terrorist threat illustrates the thin line between reassuring and alarming the public. It also belies the fact that if all terrorist deaths in Iraq and Kashmir are discounted from the tally – as some argue they should be – international terrorism appears to be on the wane (see chart).*

That said, a recent poll by *Foreign Policy Magazine* and the Center for American Progress found that 86 percent of America’s top foreign policy experts (from across the political spectrum) consider the world an increasingly dangerous place for Americans. In addition, 84 percent of those polled disagree with Bush’s assessment, and believe the administration is actually losing its so-called war on terrorism.

This is not to deny that there have been some successes over the past five years. The toppling of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan would be considered by many to be such a triumph, while the capabilities of

al-Qaida have undoubtedly been disrupted and degraded. Not only has the organization lost its state-sanctioned bases in Afghanistan and many of its key players, but its few remaining leaders are in hiding. Such

enhanced international counterterrorism cooperation, and improvements to America’s intelligence and homeland security apparatus, as have been implemented, could also be contended to be steps in the right direction. In the last five years there has also not been another terrorist attack on a Sept. 11 scale (and none at all on American soil) – even if the recent plot to bomb airliners flying from the U.K.’s Heathrow Airport to the United States seemingly had the potential to match if not surpass this.

James Fallows of the *Atlantic Monthly* argues that the uncovering of the Heathrow plot highlights the degree to which “al-Qaida central” (as it is now increasingly being termed to differentiate it from its fellow travelers and emulators) has been weakened – apparently representing the first successful Western penetration of the organization’s much-vaunted operational security. Writing in a post-Heathrow follow-up to his article “Declaring Victory,” Fallows also maintains that America, with its much better-assimilated immigrant populations, is less susceptible to homegrown terrorism of the sort that appears to have been involved in the Heathrow plot. Citing Osama bin Laden’s boast that the Sept. 11 attacks cost \$500,000 but provoked a response totaling over \$500 billion, Fallows similarly cautions that the greatest threat posed by such groups is the over-reaction they can

incite. Such arguments are persuasive – even if this last could usefully widen its focus to encompass the political as well as the economic costs of any excessive response.

Fallow’s central argument in “Declaring Victory” – as précised in the article’s subheading: “The United States is succeeding in its struggle against terrorism. The time has come to declare the war on terror over, so that an even more effective military and diplomatic campaign can begin” – also has an alluring logic. The war on terror was a questionable concept from the start. Its accompanying strategic mind-set overestimates military measures at the cost of other necessary elements like law-enforcement and diplomacy, committing America to an open-ended and un-winnable conflict rather than a long-term but manageable emergency. In that sense the “war” on terrorism should indeed be ended.

That said, any successes in the war on terrorism must be tempered by a list of terrorist victories and American failings. The five years since Sept. 11 have seen major terrorist attacks as far a field as Bali, Riyadh, Casablanca, Madrid, and London. Meanwhile, in Afghanistan – the original theater of operations in the war against terrorism – security continues to worsen while al-Qaida elements and their Taliban allies have been able to regroup and the country totters once again near the brink of failed statehood (see chart on right). Likewise, the war in Iraq (now inextricably part of the war on terrorism however tenuous its original links) provides a growing proportion of the larger conflict’s body count while serving as a rallying cause for other would-be terrorists.

On the legal front things have been even less auspicious, with con-

troversy over civilian casualties, the treatment of enemy prisoners, and allegations and investigations into torture and war crimes, ensuring America is in danger of retaining the moral high-ground in this conflict only when viewed from the White House. Against this back drop – as the citizens of Lebanon have become the latest to experience first hand – the larger U.S. policy for the Middle East risks floundering in a largely self-made quagmire while violence and instability in the region escalate.

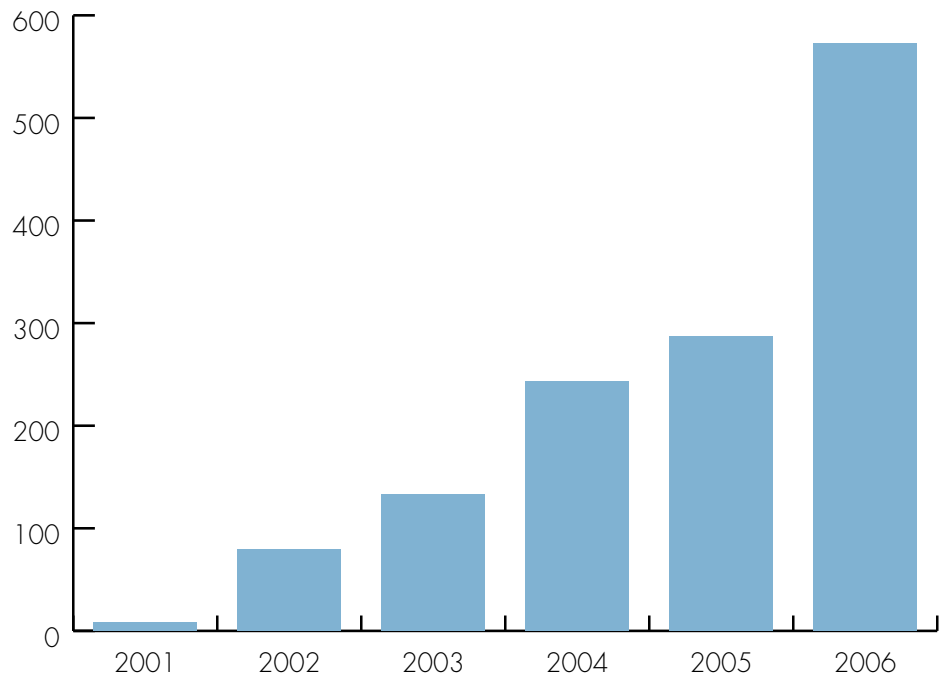
Terrorism – in the reading so often put forward by the Bush administration – has become a catch-all phrase: the lowest common denomi-

nator for a phenomenon that is being portrayed as monolithic, but is more nuanced and difficult to counter.

Underlying this is the fact that ultimately, a war on terrorism is un-winnable. As has been much-stated elsewhere, terrorism is a tactic. Terrorism levels can be managed, but terrorism itself will never be defeated.

Bush’s proclamations on the successfulness of the war on terrorism are not yet as premature as his similar comments regarding the end of the war in Iraq. However, unless the prism through which the wider conflict is viewed by Washington is adjusted, they might yet come to be considered just as ill-advised. ■

TERRORIST INCIDENTS IN AFGHANISTAN 2001-2006*



*This data is taken from the Terrorism Knowledge Base (<http://www.tkb.org>) and considers deaths from domestic and international terrorism (as defined by them) between January 2001 and August 2006. Regression analyses were conducted to project figures through the end of December 2006. This information does not, in itself, provide a definitive metric for assessing the terrorist threat or success in countering it: any such analysis also requires a qualitative dimension. The charts reproduced here are intended to illustrate two broadly agreeable trends: that the conflicts in Kashmir and Iraq account for a large percentage of the total deaths to terrorism; and, the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan.

So, You Think You Know the Cost of the Wars?

*Winslow Wheeler,
Straus Military Reform Project Director*

In a seemingly welcome exercise of congressional oversight, Rep. Christopher Shays, R-Conn., held hearings on the cost of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. He’s the chairman of the subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations of the House Government Reform and Oversight Committee. He required testimony by all three congressional research agencies (the Congressional Research Service [CRS], the Congressional Budget Office [CBO], and the Government Accountability Office [GAO]) and by the departments of State and Defense.

WAR COST ESTIMATES

CRS estimated the cost of the wars per the table below.

In its testimony, CBO reported different numbers:

- \$433 billion, not \$439.9 billion, for

- the total cost of the various wars.
- Of that amount, CBO counted \$290 billion for Iraq, not \$318.5 billion.
- CBO counted \$142 billion for Afghanistan and Noble Eagle, not \$114.4 billion.
- CBO also calculated the cost of interest on the national debt based on war costs (\$11 billion through the end of 2006).

GAO had still different numbers, including \$430.1 billion for all costs for the “war on terror.”

DOD, the State Department and other Bush administration components said the real cost was \$416.6 billion.

These estimates present a range of \$20.3 billion. Perhaps most troubling, these differences are not over the arcane issue of how much has been “obligated” (that is, cued up inside agencies to be spent for a specific program or contractor) or “outlayed” (actually spent). Instead, these differences are over the relatively simple question of

how much has been appropriated in public bills by Congress.

Worse yet, Congress doesn’t seem to know how much it appropriated either. In a letter dated July 20, Shays brought the discrepancies to the attention of the chairman of the House and Senate Appropriations Committee. Shays has received no reply, and Hill staff expect he will get none.

THE MESS IN DOD

These differences notwithstanding, CRS, CBO, and GAO did agree on one thing: DOD’s data on the costs of the wars cannot be trusted.

CBO stated in its testimony to the National Security Subcommittee:

“CBO frequently has difficulty obtaining monthly reports on war obligations [i.e. how the money is planned to be spent] and other data. Often the agency receives that information months after the data are officially approved for release.”

CBO also stated “DOD’s supplemental budget requests and the monthly obligation reports issued by the De-

CRS DATA ON THE COSTS OF THE WARS IN IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN (\$BILLIONS)

	FY 2001-02	FY 2003	FY 2004	FY 2005	FY 2006	TOTAL
IRAQ	2.5	51.0	77.3	87.3	100.4	318.5
AFGHANISTAN	18.1	17.0	15.1	18.1	19.9	88.2
NOBLE EAGLE	12.0	6.5	3.7	2.1	1.9	26.2
UNABLE TO ALLOCATE		3.9				
TOTALS	32.6	78.4	96.1	107.5	122.2	439.9

(Source: “The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11,” Amy Belasco, Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, RL33110, p. CRS-4)

fense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) often do not provide enough detail to determine how ... funds for operations in Iraq and the war on terrorism have been obligated."

GAO's testimony was more pointed: "GAO's prior work found numerous problems with DOD's processes for recording and reporting GWOT [global war on terrorism] costs, including long-standing deficiencies in DOD's financial management systems and business processes, the use of estimates instead of actual cost data, and the lack of adequate supporting documentation."

For example, GAO found \$1.8 billion in expenses that were double counted in 2004 and 2005; and some costs to be "materially overstated" by as much as \$2.1 billion in 2004.

GAO concluded: "As a result, neither DOD nor the Congress reliably know how much the war is costing and how appropriated funds are being used or have historical data useful in considering future funding needs."

CRS' testimony was the most revealing of all. It asserted that reporting on the costs of the wars requires the "use of estimates to fill gaps and resolve discrepancies and uncertainties" encountered in DOD's data.

The terms "gaps" and "discrepancies" are perhaps a bit too polite for some of the problems CRS found, including:

- In fiscal years 2001 to 2002, DOD "obligated" [intended to spend] \$1.2 billion more than the budget authority appropriated by Congress for the wars – a potential violation of the Anti-Deficiency Act.
- The funding sources for \$2.5 billion spent in 2002, "presumably for initial troop deployments" for the Iraq war, were "unclear."
- \$7 billion that was appropriated in 2003 to DOD for the war has

apparently not been spent, but in any case DOD's records on what happened to the money do not exist.

- Yet again, in 2004, DOD obligated \$2 billion more than the appropriations available to it from Congress – another potential Anti-Deficiency Act violation.

Most of the above data pertain to "obligations," not the money actually spent (outlays). The outlays for the war are impossible to track; DOD mixes those records with outlays for non-war costs, making it impossible to determine if the money was spent as DOD, or Congress, intended.

CRS also reported that it is not just DOD's cost estimates that are problematic. DOD apparently cannot agree with itself on the question of how many military personnel are deployed for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

DOD, and the press, typically report on the numbers of U.S. military personnel deployed inside Iraq and Afghanistan, not including the numbers deployed to surrounding countries to support the in-country personnel.

Different DOD reports give different figures for the total numbers in and around both countries:

- DOD's Contingency Tracking System counted 260,000 deployed in and around Iraq (as opposed to numbers varying from 140,000 to 160,000 for those inside Iraq) and 60,000 deployed in and around Afghanistan (as opposed to 18,000 to 20,000 reported in Afghanistan).
- DOD's report "Active Duty Military Personnel by Regional Area and by Country" listed 207,000 deployed altogether for Iraq and 20,000 for Afghanistan.
- DFAS cost data supports 202,000 deployed for Iraq and 50,000 deployed for Afghanistan.

In short, nobody in the executive branch or Congress can reliably say what the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have cost, nor the exact number of troops deployed for them. Various entities have different estimates that vary by tens of billions of dollars and thousands of people; they cannot even agree on the dollars publicly appropriated by Congress. Also, there is no reliable record for how the Pentagon planned to spend the money appropriated to it by Congress, and there is no record whatsoever for how it was actually spent.

Students of DOD finances over the years will understand this unhappy fact as just one more example of the Defense Department's failure to comply, as most other federal agencies have already done, with generally accepted laws, regulations, and practices for financial management. According to the discussion in the hearing, this problem has been with us since 1947.

Under the banner of "support for the troops," Congress has been heaving hundreds of billions of dollars at DOD, but it has not made a public record of how much it has appropriated for the wars, and it has not required DOD to keep any competent records either. These problems caused some uncomplimentary comments at the July 18 hearing, but no plan for remedial action was decided upon.

What would seem to be a laudable exercise of congressional oversight has actually become a painful example of how little oversight there actually is.

Shays deserves credit for asking for testimony and complaining to the Pentagon and the appropriations committees. However, he might as well just shout down an empty well.

If Shays decided to climb down to the bottom of that well, he'd find the financial and moral accountability Congress and the Pentagon have thrown down there. ■



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