

The Perversity of American Empire

by staff report via ryall - NPR Monday, Jun 27 2011, 10:19am

international / imperialism / other press

\$20 billion cost for air-con alone in Central Asia while domestic needs go screaming!

Characteristic of the lunacy that is the rapidly failing American Empire is the cost of air-conditioning for occupation forces in Central Asia. A staggering \$20.2 billion annually, which exceeds NASA's entire budget, is wasted so America can fly its flag in unhospitable deserts half way around the globe.

If not for the fact the US prints the world's reserve currency (the greenback) America would already be bankrupt. Perhaps nations that hold the lion's share of US debt may reconsider putting an end to the misery of the American population at home and people in occupied nations by dumping their dollar reserves. By supporting the dollar China and Russia share equally in the destructive madness of US Empire today!



Air-con tents!

The amount the U.S. military spends annually on air conditioning in Iraq and Afghanistan: \$20.2 billion.

That's more than NASA's budget. It's more than BP has paid so far for damage during the Gulf oil spill. It's what the G-8 has pledged to help foster new democracies in Egypt and Tunisia.

"When you consider the cost to deliver the fuel to some of the most isolated places in the world — escorting, command and control, medevac support — when you throw all that infrastructure in, we're talking over \$20 billion," Steven Anderson tells weekends on All Things Considered guest host Rachel Martin. Anderson is a retired brigadier general who served as Gen. David Patreaus' chief logistician in Iraq.

Why does it cost so much?

To power an air conditioner at a remote outpost in land-locked Afghanistan, a gallon of fuel has to be shipped into Karachi, Pakistan, then driven 800 miles over 18 days to Afghanistan on roads that are sometimes little more than "improved goat trails," Anderson says. "And you've got risks that are

associated with moving the fuel almost every mile of the way."

Anderson calculates more than 1,000 troops have died in fuel convoys, which remain prime targets for attack. Free-standing tents equipped with air conditioners in 125 degree heat require a lot of fuel. Anderson says by making those structures more efficient, the military could save lives and dollars.

Still, his \$20.2 billion figure raises stark questions about the ongoing war in Afghanistan. In the wake of President Obama's announcement this week that about 30,000 American troops will soon return home, how much money does the U.S. stand to save?

Dollars And Cents

The 30,000 troops who will return home by the end of next year were sent to Afghanistan in 2009, at a cost of about \$30 billion. That comes out to about \$1 million a soldier.

But the savings of withdrawing those troops won't equal out, experts say.

"What history has told us is that you don't see a proportional decrease in spending based on the number of troops when you draw them down," Chris Hellman, a senior research analyst at the National Priorities Project, tells Martin.

"In Afghanistan that's going to be particularly true because it's a very difficult and austere environment in which to operate," he says.

That means most war expenditures lie not in the troops themselves but in the infrastructure that supports them — infrastructure that in some cases will remain in place long after troops are gone.

"We're building big bases," American University professor Gordon Adams tells Martin. The costs of those bases are, in economic terms, "sunk" costs, he says.

"We're seeing this in Iraq. We're turning over to the Iraqis — mostly either for a small penny or for free — the infrastructure that we built in Iraq. But we won't see back any money from that infrastructure."

Then there's the costly task of training Afghan security forces. The Obama administration has requested almost \$13 billion to train and equip Afghan security forces in the next fiscal year.

And more importantly, Hellman says, "[Afghan President Hamid] Karzai indicated a couple years back that [Afghanistan] wasn't going to be a position to support their own military forces 15, 20 years out. I suspect we're going to be called on to pay a substantial part of that bill going forward."

Criticism From The President's Own Party

For critics of the president, the idea that the troop drawdown won't save much money is reason enough to suggest it should be bigger.

One outspoken critic is Sen. Joe Manchin (D-WV). He notes the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have cost hundreds of billions of dollars so far, and he argues a larger troop drawdown isn't a national security risk.

"We have the greatest special ops in the world. We have more technology than any other country on earth," Manchin tells Martin. "Do we actually need to have 70,000 troops on the ground?"

"When you have this many people in a country that doesn't want you there — that has no economy, no infrastructure and a corrupt government — and you're trying to stabilize it and build them into a viable nation? I'm not sure we have enough time, and I definitely know we don't have enough money," Manchin says.

But others argue war should be waged independent of cost.

"The realm of war and peace exists separately apart — and justifiably so — from the economic realm," says Lawrence Kaplan, a visiting professor at the U.S. Army War College, who says critics like Manchin are looking for "economic answers to a non-economic question.

"And anyway, it's not the war that's broken Washington's piggy bank," he adds, noting that Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security account for far more spending than the \$107 billion the Pentagon says it will spend in Afghanistan next year.

"Remember, we're talking about 30,000 troops," he says "I don't think that hundred-billion-dollar price tag should be the determining one."

Can Greener Mean Safer?

But for Anderson, the retired brigadier general, economics does have a role to play in modern warfare.

Anderson advocates for increased energy efficiency for military structures in order to cut down on the need for long, dangerous fuel-transport missions. A few months ago, Anderson heard from a company commander in Afghanistan.

"He literally has to stop his combat operations for two days every two weeks so he can go back and get his fuel. And when he's gone, the enemy knows he's gone, and they go right back to where they were before. He has to start his counter-insurgency operations right back at square one."

Anderson says experiments with polyurethane foam insulation for tents in Iraq cut energy use by 92 percent and took 11,000 fuel trucks off the road. But he adds there's a lack of enthusiasm for a greener military among top commanders.

"People look at it and say 'It's not my lane. We don't need to tie the operational commanders' hands' — things like this," he says.

"A simple policy signed by the secretary of defense — a one- or two-page memo, saying we will no longer build anything other than energy-efficient structures in Iraq and Afghanistan — would have a profound impact."

© 2011 NPR

<http://tinyurl.com/5tsabqk>

