

Opinion articles do not necessarily represent the views of the Portland Observer. We welcome reader essays, photos and story ideas. Submit to news@portlandobserver.com.

OPINION

15 Years After the Iraq War, What Are the Costs?

Adding up the numbers and human toll

BY STEPHANIE SAVELL

This March marked the 15th anniversary of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq.

In 2003, President George W. Bush and his advisers based

their case for war on the idea that Saddam Hussein, then dictator of Iraq, possessed weapons of mass destruction — weapons that have never been found. Nevertheless, all these years later, Bush's "Global War on Terror" continues — in Iraq and in many other countries.

It's a good time to reflect on what this war — the longest in U.S. history — has cost Americans and others around the world.

First, the economic costs: Ac-



ording to estimates by the Costs of War project at Brown University's Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, the war on terror has cost Americans a staggering \$5.6 trillion since 2001, when the U.S. invaded Afghanistan.

This figure includes not just the Pentagon's war fund, but also future obligations such as social services for

an ever-growing number of post-9/11 veterans.

It's hard for most of us to even begin to grasp such an enormous number.

It means Americans spend \$32 million per hour, according to a counter by the National Priorities Project at the Institute for Policy Studies.

Put another way: Since 2001, every American taxpayer has spent almost \$24,000 on the wars

— equal to the average down payment on a house, a new Honda Accord, or a year at a public university.

As stupefying as those numbers are, the budgetary costs pale in comparison with the human toll.

As of 2015, when the Costs of War project made its latest tallies, up to 165,000 Iraqi civilians had died as a direct consequence of U.S. war, plus around 8,000 U.S. soldiers and military contractors in Iraq.

Those numbers have only continued to rise. Up to 6,000 civilians were killed by U.S.-led strikes in Iraq and Syria in 2017 — more civilians than in any previous year, according to the watchdog group AirWars.

In addition to those direct deaths, at least four times as many people in Iraq have died from the side effects of war, such as malnutrition, environmental degradation, and deteriorated infrastruc-

ture. Since the 2003 invasion, for instance, Iraqi health care has plummeted — with hospitals and clinics bombed, supplies of medicine and electricity jeopardized, and thousands of physicians and healthcare workers fleeing the country.

Meanwhile, the war continues to spread, no longer limited to Afghanistan, Iraq, or Syria, as many Americans think. Indeed, the U.S. military is escalating a shadowy network of anti-terror operations all across the world — in at least 76 nations, or 40 percent of countries on the planet.

Last October, news about four Green Berets killed by an Islamic State affiliate in the West African nation of Niger gave Americans a glimpse of just how broad this network is. And along with it comes all the devastating consequences of militarism for the people of these countries.

We must ask: Are these astounding costs worth it? Is the U.S. accomplishing anything close to its goal of diminishing the global terrorist threat?

The answer is, resoundingly, no.

U.S. activity in Iraq and the Middle East has only spurred greater political upheaval and unrest. The U.S.-led coalition is seen not as a liberating force, but as an aggressor. This has fomented insurgent recruitment, and there are now more terrorist groups in the Middle East than ever before.

Until a broad swath of the American public gets engaged to call for an end to the war on terror, these mushrooming costs — economic, human, social, and political — will just continue to grow.

Stephanie Savell co-directs the Costs of War project at Brown University's Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs. Distributed by OtherWords.org.

A Community Conversation about Menthol Cigarettes

Coalition looks at negative impacts

BY DE'SHAWN HARDY

The Highland African American Youth Community Coalition and Multnomah County have been "talkin' tobacco" for a few years.

In June 2015, youth and adults came together for a day-long tobacco prevention training session called "Becoming a Power Player." The group learned about the predatory marketing of tobacco in African American communities and what the policy-making process looks like. Youth learned to develop their own messages and tried them out on staff from the Multnomah County Commission.

The Highland coalition has been active in protecting our youth from easy access to tobacco by supporting licensing at retailers of tobacco products and raising

the legal age to buy tobacco to 21 years old, rules which have been in effect since the New Year.

Now we are talking about restrictions on menthol flavored tobacco — the product of choice among many African Americans, youth and underserved communities.

Mona MacDonald, Highland

Haven REACH (Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health) program coordinator, in collaboration with Multnomah County REACH staff, are delivering powerful presentations about the harms of menthol cigarettes

When a room full of youth were recently asked 'does anyone smoke or know someone who

who smoke in Multnomah County die from smoking related diseases, infant mortality, colorectal cancer, lung cancer, stroke, diabetes, coronary heart disease and all cancers, at a higher rate than all other smokers.

Despite the myths about the safety of menthol vs. regular cigarettes, there is no medical value

and death from smoking-related illnesses.

Menthol is more, not less addictive, than regular cigarettes as well. Menthol increases the amount of nicotine in the blood, making cigarettes more addictive and harder to quit. Research has found that people who smoke menthols have a harder time quitting smoking, especially African American women. But people are not generally aware of this when they take up the habit, often thinking they can quit whenever they decide.

For all these reasons, cities throughout the country are banning the sale of menthol cigarettes (San Francisco, Oakland, Sonoma, Chicago, New York and Berkeley). Several other countries already have prohibited the sale of menthol cigarettes as well.

Highland Haven REACH program, in partnership with Multnomah County Health Department, is available to come and share with your organization or youth group information about menthol and to hear your ideas about what we can do about it.

If you are interested, please email Sandra Meucci at andra.meucci@multco.us. Let's keep "talkin' tobacco" and figure out how we can help our community!

De'Shawn Hardy is a coordinator with the Highland African American Youth Community Coalition.

For the overwhelming majority of African Americans and youth who smoke, menthol is their product of choice. Nationally, 95 percent of black smokers use menthol cigarettes! African Americans who smoke in Multnomah County die from smoking related diseases, infant mortality, colorectal cancer, lung cancer, stroke, diabetes, coronary heart disease and all cancers, at a higher rate than all other smokers.

Subscribe! *The Portland Observer*
 503-288-0033 Fill Out & Send To:
 Attn: Subscriptions, PO Box 3137, Portland OR 97208
 \$45.00 for 3 months • \$80.00 for 6 mo. • \$125.00 for 1 year
 (please include check with this subscription form)
 Name: _____
 Telephone: _____
 Address: _____
 or email subscriptions@portlandobserver.com

smokes menthols' all hands went up.

"We know this is an important topic to talk about, but it's a hard discussion to have," MacDonald says.

For the overwhelming majority of African Americans and youth who smoke, menthol is their product of choice. Nationally, 95 percent of black smokers use menthol cigarettes! African Americans

or health benefit of using menthol cigarettes. Rather, the product is actually more harmful, because the menthol flavoring (which is the one flavor that is still legal for cigarette products) results in people taking a deeper draw with each inhalation of the cigarette. This means more of the cigarette's toxic chemicals find their way into the lungs and bloodstream of the smoker, meaning more sickness