

## *The Costs of War to United States Allies Since 9/11*

*Jason W. Davidson<sup>1</sup>*

*May 12, 2021*

The United States' allies in the post-9/11 wars have borne significant human and budgetary costs, and these costs should be included in a full accounting of the consequences of these wars. The 'post-9/11 wars' refers to U.S.-led military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq that have grown out of President George W. Bush's "Global War on Terror" and the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. While Afghan and Iraqi government security forces have incurred the highest human costs of these wars, this research paper focuses on the human and financial contributions of European and other allies of the U.S.

Assessing the costs to allies informs current scholarly and policy debates on the value of U.S. military alliances.<sup>2</sup> President Donald Trump, for example, failed to acknowledge the value of most U.S. alliances; for instance, he threatened to leave South Korea and Japan to defend themselves and talked repeatedly about withdrawing the U.S. from NATO.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, President Joe Biden's administration stresses the myriad benefits allies bring to the U.S. as a reason to rekindle the relationships that suffered during the Trump presidency.<sup>4</sup>

This paper documents what U.S. allies have spent, in human lives and in resources, on their participation in U.S.-led military operations since September 11,

---

<sup>1</sup> Jason Davidson is Professor of Political Science and International Affairs at the University of Mary Washington. Email: [jdavidso@umw.edu](mailto:jdavidso@umw.edu) The author would like to thank Neta Crawford, Catherine Lutz, Heidi Peltier, and Stephanie Savell for their detailed comments on earlier drafts. Rachel McVicker provided valuable research assistance.

<sup>2</sup> Scholars arguing for a grand strategy of retrenchment or restraint make the case that most U.S. allies generate costs and risks that outweigh their benefits; Posen, B. R. (2014). *Restraint: A new foundation for U.S. grand strategy*. Cornell University Press. On the other side of the debate are those that argue that the myriad benefits of allies outweigh the costs and risk to the United States. See Brooks, S. G., & Wohlforth, W. C. (2016). *America abroad: The United States' global role in the 21st century*. Oxford University Press.

<sup>3</sup> Davidson, J. W. (2020). *America's Entangling Alliances: 1778 to the Present*. Georgetown University Press, 1, 197.

<sup>4</sup> The Interim National Security Strategic Guidance states: "Our democratic alliances enable us to present a common front, produce a unified vision, and pool our strength to promote high standards, establish effective international rules, and hold countries like China to account." <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NSC-1v2.pdf>

2001.<sup>5</sup> It examines the top five suppliers of troops to military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq during the year of peak coalition deployment for each conflict (2011 and 2006 respectively). It examines the size of U.S. and allied deployments relative to each countries' populations at the time. Then, turning to the longer war period from 2001 to 2018, the paper tallies each allied nation's total fatalities and considers these numbers relative to the size of their deployments. The paper also compares U.S. and each ally's military spending for the wars. Finally, it outlines U.S. and allied spending on foreign aid to Afghanistan and Iraq through 2018.

In general, allies incurred these costs primarily to further their alliances with the United States. The discussions in each of the following sections on Afghanistan and on Iraq draw on existing scholarship to suggest why each ally contributed to the extent it did. These are not definitive explanations (which would require extensive interviews with allied decisionmakers), but are intended to suggest potential avenues for future research.

### ***Afghanistan***

Allied countries' provision of troops to the US-led military intervention in Afghanistan dates to the earliest days of Operation Enduring Freedom in 2001, when the coalition's goal was to kill and capture Al Qaeda members and overthrow the Taliban regime that had hosted Al Qaeda leading up to the September 11, 2001 attacks on the Twin Towers and Pentagon. After those initial moments of the war, allied contributions continued under the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)'s International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). At the coalition's peak size (in terms of troop totals) in February 2011, the U.S. deployed roughly 100,000 troops and all other allies' deployments totaled 41,893 troops.<sup>6</sup>

Table 1 lists the top five non-U.S. suppliers of troops to ISAF in February 2011: the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, and Canada. At that time—almost ten years after the first coalition forces arrived in Afghanistan—forty-seven countries had troops deployed to Afghanistan. While none of the top troop providers approached the U.S. deployment, either in size or as a percentage of their populations, they all made substantial contributions. The United Kingdom stands out in that it supplied roughly two to three times the troops of the other top contributing allies when considered relative to its population. Each of the other top providers made a similar contribution on a per capita basis, deploying roughly 0.006% of their populations.

---

<sup>5</sup> This paper focuses on those costs incurred in military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq and does not include the by far smaller and less well-documented operations outside those two countries in the "Global War on Terror."

<sup>6</sup> O'Hanlon, M., Livingston, I., & Messera, H. (2020). *Afghanistan Index*. <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/index20110228.pdf>, 4.

**Table 1: Top Troop Suppliers to Afghanistan as of February 2011**

Country	Troops <sup>7</sup>	As % of Population <sup>8</sup>
United States	100,000	.032
United Kingdom	9,500	.015
Germany	4,920	.006
France	4,000	.006
Italy	3,770	.006
Canada	2,905	.008

Table 2 compares the top suppliers in terms of the number of fatalities they incurred from the start of the war in 2001 through 2018: the UK, Canada, France, Germany, and Italy. While the U.S. had the largest total number of fatalities, the allies were not mere bystanders, as some believe. Some U.S. military service members, for instance, joked that ISAF stood for “I Saw Americans Fight” because of all the caveats and limits on when and how some allies could engage the enemy.<sup>9</sup> Yet hundreds of allied troops died. The United Kingdom lost 455 service members, Canada lost 158, and France, Germany, and Italy each lost dozens.

When we look at numbers of fatalities relative to the size of each country’s deployment, Canadian soldiers suffered the highest risk of dying, with their 158 fatalities accounting for 5.4% of Canada’s peak deployment in 2011. The United Kingdom’s 455 fatalities amounted to 4.7% of its peak deployment in 2011. In comparison, the U.S. incurred 2,316 fatalities, which was 2.3% of its peak deployment in 2011. These numbers demonstrate that British and Canadian troops were not hiding from the fight—they put their lives at risk at twice the rate of American troops, when seen as a percentage of peak deployment. France’s fatalities as a percentage of peak deployment were similar to those of the U.S., and Germany and Italy were close behind.

**Table 2: Top Allied Fatalities in Afghanistan, October 2001-September 2017**

Country	Fatalities <sup>10</sup>	As % of Peak Deployment <sup>11</sup>
United States	2,316	2.3
United Kingdom	455	4.7
Canada	158	5.4
France	86	2.1
Germany	54	1.0
Italy	48	1.2

<sup>7</sup> Hanlon. *Afghan Index*. 4, 5.

<sup>8</sup> World Bank population data for 2011. World Bank. (1960-2019). Population, total | Data. Retrieved from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL> .

<sup>9</sup> Korski. D. (February, 2010). ISAF=I Saw Americans Fight? *The Spectator*. <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/isaf-i-saw-americans-fight->; See also Weitsman. P. (2010) Wartime Alliances versus Coalition Warfare. *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, 113; Auerswald. D., Saideman. S. (2014) *NATO in Afghanistan: Fighting Together, Fighting Alone*. Princeton University Press, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Hanlon. *Afghan Index*. 10, 11.

<sup>11</sup> Hanlon. *Afghan Index*; US peak figures are from December 2010, whereas allies’ figures are from February 2011.

Allied nations also spent significant sums of money on their military presence in Afghanistan (Table 3).<sup>12</sup> While at first glance the level of allied spending might seem insignificant relative to U.S. spending, it is useful to consider each ally's spending in Afghanistan as a percentage of that ally's total annual defense spending.<sup>13</sup> This comparison puts each country's spending in Afghanistan in relation to its total military budget, and enables a comparison of allied and U.S. spending in relative terms.

When we consider each country's spending as a percentage of its total military expenditure in one year, the United Kingdom's 2001-18 military spending on Afghanistan was roughly half the U.S. figure. Whereas the U.S. spent over one hundred percent of its baseline on seventeen years of its campaign in Afghanistan, the UK spent 56% of its baseline spending in Afghanistan over the same time period. Canada's military spending on Afghanistan was also roughly half of U.S. spending as a percentage of its baseline. Italy spent a third of its baseline spending on its Afghanistan operations whereas Germany spent a quarter of its expenditures and France spent only seven percent.

**Table 3: Top Supplier Military Spending on Afghanistan, 2001-18**

Country	Spending (in \$ bi.)	As % of Annual Baseline Defense Spending <sup>14</sup>
United States	730 <sup>15</sup>	106
United Kingdom	28.2 <sup>16</sup>	56
Canada	12.7 <sup>17</sup>	55
Germany	11.1 <sup>18</sup>	23

<sup>12</sup> Table 3 is based on official government statements of military expenditures for operations in Afghanistan. Table 7 provides official spending (for South Korea and Poland as stated in news reports) for Iraq operations. Analyses of U.S. spending on Afghanistan and Iraq reveal that official spending figures are often understatements of the actual cost of the wars.

<sup>13</sup> 2018 is the year of reference for annual defense spending because it was the last year that Afghanistan military spending figures for all allies could be obtained.

<sup>14</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. (2020). *Data for all countries from 1988–2019 in constant (2018) USD*.

<https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/Data%20for%20all%20countries%20from%201988%E2%80%932019%20in%20constant%20%282018%29%20USD.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Federation of American Scientists. (2018) *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*. <https://fas.org/man/eprint/cow/fy2018q3.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> Official UK Ministry of Defense reported expenditures found here: "Defence departmental resources," Ministry of Defence, December 2020, <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/defence-departmental-resources-index>. Converted to USD based on the 12/31/18 exchange rate. The MOD data only covered 2003-18. I used 46 million British pounds for 2001-2002. This is the same as the 2003 figure but covers the Special Forces role in the overthrow of the Taliban/pursuit of Al Qaeda in 2001 and the early British mission to Operation Enduring Freedom of 300 troops in 2002).

<sup>17</sup> Official government expenditures through fiscal 2012-13.; Stone, J.C. (2015) "The Cost of the War in Afghanistan: A Billion Dollars a Year and Counting," in Jack Cunningham and William Maley eds., *Australia and Canada in Afghanistan: Perspectives on a Mission*, Dundurn, 138.; I added 414.4 million Canadian dollars (the 2012-13 FY figure) to the total to cover the additional costs of the deployment and withdrawal through March 2014. Converted to \$US at 12/31/18 exchange rates.

<sup>18</sup> Official German government figures for military spending 2001-18 found here: "Antwort der Bundesregierung: Kosten der militärischen Intervention in Afghanistan," 14.11.2019, <http://dip21.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/19/152/1915234.pdf>; "Antwort der Bundesregierung: Kosten der militärischen Intervention in Afghanistan," 02. 12. 2010,

Italy	8.9 <sup>19</sup>	32
France	3.9 <sup>20</sup>	7

Afghanistan is one of the world’s poorest countries, a fact connected with the devastation of decades of war. The U.S. and its allies have long seen the war in Afghanistan as a fight over “hearts and minds,” so part of the U.S. and allied counterinsurgency strategy has been providing international aid to improve living conditions in Afghanistan. While the U.S. has provided more foreign aid in absolute terms than other top contributors have provided (see Table 4), if we look at aid relative to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) another pattern emerges. The U.S. provided less foreign aid as a percentage of its GDP than did the U.K., and U.S. contributions were roughly the same as those of Germany and Canada. Italy provided roughly a third of the U.S. contribution as a percentage of GDP, and of the top five troop contributors, only France provided a tiny fraction of the U.S. contribution.

**Table 4: Top Suppliers Foreign Aid to Afghanistan, 2001-18<sup>21</sup>**

Country	Foreign Aid (in \$bi.)	As % of GDP <sup>22</sup>
United States	32.32	.15
Germany	5.88	.14
United Kingdom	4.79	.16
Canada	2.42	.14
Italy	.99	.04
France	.53	.01

Existing literature provides some clues as to why allies provided troops and spent money on their military presence and foreign aid in Afghanistan. When the war in Afghanistan began, NATO countries widely supported the United States—including the only occasion NATO members have ever invoked Article V, of the NATO Charter which says that an attack on one is an attack on all. From the outset, the intervention had widespread international legitimacy, including United Nations Security Council authorization. That said, allied governments did not see Afghanistan as a threat to their

<http://dip21.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/17/020/1702026.pdf>. Thanks to the German Bundeswehr Joint Forces Operations Command for helping me locate these figures. Converted to \$US at the 12/31/18 exchange rate.

<sup>19</sup> “Rapporto annuale sulle spese militari italiane, 2018,” a cura di Enrico Piovesana e Francesco Vignarca, Milex, 2018,

<http://www.milex.org/2018/02/02/milex-2018-secondo-rapporto-annuale-sulla-spesa-militare-italiana/>, p. 10. Converted to \$US at the 12/31/18 exchange rate.

<sup>20</sup> “RAPPORT D’INFORMATION *sur le retrait d’Afghanistan*,” COMMISSION DE LA DÉFENSE NATIONALE ET DES FORCES ARMÉES, 26 février 2012, [http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/14/rap-info/i0744.asp#P772\\_171303](http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/14/rap-info/i0744.asp#P772_171303), Official French Defense Ministry figures through 2012 according to a 2012 National Assembly report. I have adopted the report’s estimate of 3.5 billion euros through the end of 2014, which was the year France withdrew the last of its troops from Afghanistan.

<sup>21</sup> OECD.stat. Aid (ODA) disbursements to countries and regions. <https://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx>. Original data in U.S. Dollars, constant prices.

<sup>22</sup> World Bank Population Data 1960-2019. GDP data for 2018 in current USD.

own national interests.<sup>23</sup> The allies supplied troops to US-led operations in Afghanistan and lost lives and tax revenue there in order to support the U.S. and NATO.<sup>24</sup>

The high percentage of their GDP that allies contributed in foreign aid, relative to the U.S., is striking. One possible explanation is that these states have greater faith than the U.S. does in the ability of foreign aid to solve problems. The U.S.'s European allies contribute a higher percentage of their GDPs to foreign aid more generally, and there is more public support for foreign aid in Europe than the US.<sup>25</sup> An additional related possibility is that allies chose consciously to contribute more in foreign aid in preference to making a military contribution at the U.S. level.

The literature also suggests an explanation for the variance in contributions across the allies. The most plausible explanation for the UK and Canada's higher costs in fatalities and military spending, relative to other allies, is that both countries place a higher value than the other countries on their alliance with the U.S. and NATO.<sup>26</sup> Alliance value means that these states see the U.S. as being extremely important for their security and that a stronger alliance gives them the ability to influence decisions in Washington, D.C.<sup>27</sup>

Germany and Italy both have pacifist strains of identity that make participation in violent conflict controversial domestically but both value their alliance with the U.S. and NATO.<sup>28</sup> Thus, even when they supply troops, it makes sense that the numbers are lower and that their governments place greater constraints on the rules of engagement. The UK, Canada, and Germany have a track record of generous foreign aid contributions that is evident in this case with relatively high levels of foreign aid to Afghanistan.

France's mission was small and relatively low cost prior to 2008 and after 2012 (French forces withdrew entirely from Afghanistan at the end of 2014).<sup>29</sup> France has historically attributed a lower value to its alliance with the U.S. and NATO, which could

---

<sup>23</sup> Davidson. J. (2001) *America's Allies and War: Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq*. Palgrave, 105-31. The British government did perceive a threat to national interest but they were the exception.

<sup>24</sup> Davidson. (2001).

<sup>25</sup> Paxton, P., & Knack, S. (2012). Individual and country-level factors affecting support for foreign aid. *International Political Science Review*, 33(2), 178-179.

<sup>26</sup> On the UK and Afghanistan see Davidson. (2001). 106-107.; For Canada and Afghanistan, see Hlatky S. (2013). *America's Allies in Times of War: The Great Asymmetry*. Oxford University Press, 111.

<sup>27</sup> Davidson. (2001).

<sup>28</sup> Saideman and Auerswald (2014, 17) classify Germany and Italy as having "tight" or restrictive caveats—the only countries among the top contributors to have them. On German pacifism, see. Berger T. (1998). Norms, Identity, and National Security in Germany and Japan, in Peter J. Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security*. Columbia University Press, 317-356. On Italian pacifism, see Ignazi. P., Giacomello. G., Cotichia. F. (2012) *Italian Military Operations Abroad: Just Don't Call it War*. Palgrave.

<sup>29</sup> Olivier Schmitt, "Remembering the French War in Afghanistan," *War on the Rocks*, September 10, 2018, <https://warontherocks.com/2018/09/remembering-the-french-war-in-afghanistan/>; "Afghanistan : l'armée française quitte le pays après treize ans de présence," *Le Monde*, 31 décembre 2014, [https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2014/12/31/l-armee-francaise-quitte-l-afghanistan\\_4547621\\_3210.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2014/12/31/l-armee-francaise-quitte-l-afghanistan_4547621_3210.html).

explain its relatively low contribution. Another factor is that France is heavily involved in military interventions elsewhere in the post-9/11 wars, notably West Africa.<sup>30</sup>

### ***Iraq***

When U.S. troops crossed into Iraqi territory on March 20, 2003, only the United Kingdom, Australia, and Poland supplied troops to the invading force. After U.S. forces seized Baghdad in April 2003, allies provided troops to what they initially thought would be a peace and stabilization mission in Iraq. By the end of 2003 it was clear that peace was unlikely to be in Iraq’s short- or medium-term future. As the violence increased, some allies took precautions to secure their troops and others began reducing their contingents. At the coalition’s peak deployment in December 2005, the U.S. had 160,000 troops in Iraq and the allies had 20,998 troops deployed.<sup>31</sup>

The United Kingdom provided the largest non-U.S. deployment to operations in Iraq at the point of peak deployment in January 2006 (see Table 5). South Korea made the next largest deployment, which is significant, as it did not figure among the top suppliers in Afghanistan. Italy, Poland, and Australia rounded out the top five, though their contributions as a percentage of their populations were lower than those of the UK and South Korea.

**Table 5: Top Troop Suppliers to Iraq as of January 2006**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Contribution<sup>32</sup></b>	<b>As % of Population<sup>33</sup></b>
United States	160,000*	.054
United Kingdom	8,500	.014
South Korea	3,200	.006
Italy	2,600	.004
Poland	1,400	.003
Australia	900	.004

*\*December 2005*

Table 6 provides fatality figures for the U.S. and these top troop providing allies from March 2003 through January 2012 in Iraq. While the U.S. total of 4,487 fatalities far outstrips the UK’s 179 fatalities, if we look at the two countries’ fatalities relative to their peak contributions, we see that both countries’ troops were exposed to significant danger. This fact reveals that U.S. allies did not merely have a symbolic presence, as observers sometimes have said. Italy’s 33 fatalities and Poland’s 23 fatalities are more significant when taken as a percentage of their troop contribution (roughly half the U.S. figure when seen as a percentage of peak deployment).

<sup>30</sup> Davidson. (2001). 114-16.; On France in West Africa see Maclean. R. (2020, March). Crisis in the Sahel Becomes France’s Forever War. *The New York Times*.

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/index20060130.pdf>, 19, 20.

<sup>32</sup> Hanlon. Afghan Index. 19, 20.

<sup>33</sup> World Bank population data for 2005. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL>.

**Table 6: Top Supplier Fatalities in Iraq: March 2003-January 2012**

Country	Fatalities <sup>34</sup>	As % of Peak Deployment <sup>35</sup>
United States	4,487	2.8
United Kingdom	179	2.1
Italy	33	1.2
Poland	23	1.6
Australia	2	.2
South Korea	1	.03

The United Kingdom spent more in absolute terms on its military deployment to Iraq than most allies, which makes sense given its significantly larger troop contribution (Table 7). Italy and Australia were in the next tier of allied military spending. As with the Afghanistan case, one benchmark reference point for each ally's military spending in Iraq from 2003-18 is that ally's total defense spending (military expenditure) – its baseline spending, for one year (in this case 2018). When viewed as a percentage of its annual baseline spending, British, Italian, and Australian military spending in Iraq was less than that of the U.S. but still significant. Britain spent just under twenty percent of its annual defense budget on Iraq operations from 2003-18. Italy's spending for its deployment to Iraq constituted ten percent of baseline military spending whereas Australia's contingent represented six percent of baseline spending. South Korea's and Poland's spending were significantly lower in absolute and relative terms than that of all the other allies. The U.S. paid some of the cost of Poland's deployment—transportation to Iraq, medical care, and meals.<sup>36</sup>

**Table 7: Top Supplier Military Spending on Iraq 2003-2018**

Country	Spending (in \$ bi.)	As % of Annual Baseline Defense Spending <sup>37</sup>
United States	756 <sup>38</sup>	110
United Kingdom	9.9 <sup>39</sup>	19
Italy	3.0 <sup>40</sup>	10

<sup>34</sup> Hanlon. *Afghan Index*. 7, 10.

<sup>35</sup> Hanlon. *Afghan Index*; U.S. figures are from December 2005 whereas allies' figures are from January 2006.

<sup>36</sup> Taras, R. (2004). *Poland's Diplomatic Misadventure in Iraq: WITH US OR AGAINST US*. *Problems of Post-Communism*, 51(1), 13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2004.11052156>

<sup>37</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. (2020).

<sup>38</sup> Federation of American Scientists. (2018) *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*. <https://fas.org/man/eprint/cow/fy2018q3.pdf>; This is the total through June 2018.

<sup>39</sup> Official UK Ministry of Defense reported expenditures found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/defence-departmental-resources-index>. Converted to USD based on the 12/31/18 exchange rate.

<sup>40</sup> "IRAQ Quattordici Anni di missioni italiane," A cura di Fabio Alberti, Alfio Nicotra, Martina Pignatti, Enrico Piovesana, Francesco Vignarca, Milex, 2017, <http://milex.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/DOSSIER-IRAQ.pdf>, p. 10. Converted to USD based on the 12/31/18 exchange rate.



Australia	1.7 <sup>41</sup>	6
South Korea	.613 <sup>42</sup>	1
Poland	.449 <sup>43</sup>	3

The U.S. provided significant foreign aid to Iraq: \$43 billion from 2003 to 2018, which represented 0.2 percent of U.S. GDP that year. The top troop-contributing allies provided smaller amounts of foreign aid. Italy provided the largest contribution as a percentage of GDP with Australia a close second. The UK provided roughly a quarter of the U.S. contribution as a percentage of GDP. South Korea and Poland provided a small fraction of the other allies' contributions in real and relative terms.

**Table 8: Top Supplier Foreign Aid to Iraq, 2003-18**

Country	Foreign Aid (in \$bi.) <sup>44</sup>	As % of GDP <sup>45</sup>
United States	43.07	.2
Italy	2.1	.1
United Kingdom	1.88	.06
Australia	1.38	.09
South Korea	.59	.03
Poland	.012	.002

With the exception of the UK, the allied troop deployments to Iraq are smaller than those of the top contributors in Afghanistan both by absolute and relative measures. The combat phase of the Iraq War took place without UN Security Council authorization. After the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, the U.S. was unable to locate the weapons of mass destruction that were the primary justification for the war. Both of these factors contributed to the international controversy surrounding the war and reduced support for the "stability" phase.<sup>46</sup> This controversy is the most plausible explanation for why top contributors in Iraq provided smaller contributions than the top allies contributed in Afghanistan. The controversial nature of the war probably also

<sup>41</sup> Official military spending figures; *Cost of ADF operations: Chapter 9: Section 3: Annual Report 08-09 Vol1*. [https://www.defence.gov.au/AnnualReports/08-09/vol1/ch09\\_01.htm#table0902](https://www.defence.gov.au/AnnualReports/08-09/vol1/ch09_01.htm#table0902). Australian dollars converted to U.S. dollars at 12/31/18 exchange rate.

<sup>42</sup> (December 29, 2007 Saturday). S. Korea National Assembly Extend Troop Deployment In Iraq For Another Year. Qatar News Agency. Retrieved from <https://advance-lexis-com.umw.idm.oclc.org/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:4RG5-PWC0-TW NX-0191-00000-00&context=1516831>. Korean won converted to \$US at 12/31/18 exchange rate.

<sup>43</sup> Official military cost through April 2005 including depreciation of equipment (and taking into account offsets from the Coalition Support Fund) as stated by Poland's Defense Minister. <https://www.ft.com/content/420b1692-ab6a-11d9-893c-00000e2511c8>. I took the yearly troop averages (from the Brookings Iraq Index) in subsequent years to arrive at an estimate of the portion of the expenditures for the subsequent three and a half years. Polish zloty converted to \$US at the 12/31/18 exchange rate.

<sup>44</sup> OECD.stat. Aid (ODA) disbursements to countries and regions. <https://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx>. Original data in U.S. Dollars, constant prices.

<sup>45</sup> World Bank. (1960-2019). Population, total | Data . GDP data for 2018 in current USD.

<sup>46</sup> Though the UN Security Council did authorize the US-led stability operations.

explains why allies were willing to expose their troops less and thus incurred lower fatalities as a percentage of the peak deployment in Iraq than in Afghanistan.

My prior research on the Iraq War suggests that the controversial nature of the war meant that allies contributed troops for shorter periods than the top contributors did in Afghanistan. For example, the Iraq war was politically divisive in Australia and after its election in December 2007 the Australian Labor Party government of Kevin Rudd announced that Australian troops would withdraw from Iraq, minimizing fatalities and expenditures.<sup>47</sup> Poland's troop deployment declined from a peak of 3,000 down to 900 in April 2006 and the country withdrew its troops from Iraq in October 2008.<sup>48</sup> Italy's mission to Iraq began in July 2003 and ended in December 2006.<sup>49</sup>

The UK's willingness to incur the greatest fatalities of all the allies in Iraq makes sense given the value the UK places on its alliance with the US. Both major parties in the UK supported the war and shared President Bush's assessment that the threat of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq justified hostilities.<sup>50</sup> Italy and Poland also appear to have been motivated to incur significant costs because of a desire to bolster their alliance with the US.<sup>51</sup> Insurgents targeted both countries' troops as a means to force their withdrawal. South Korea's contribution consisted of engineering and medical specialists as well as relevant security forces. The most likely reason for their low fatality rate, however, was their deployment to Erbil in Iraq's relatively stable Kurdish northeast.<sup>52</sup> One can similarly explain Australia's low fatality rate by the region of Iraq Australian troops were deployed to—the relatively low violence South-East of the country. Both countries faced domestic opposition to the Iraq war, so it is likely that the U.S. agreed to safer deployments for South Korea and Australia to increase the likelihood that both countries would remain deployed to Iraq.<sup>53</sup>

Allied military spending on Iraq was lower than allied military spending on Afghanistan in absolute and relative terms. Yet if we reflect on the Iraq War's lack of international legitimacy (rooted in the lack of UN Security Council authorization) and declining support among the allies' publics, it is striking that allies contributed as much as they did.<sup>54</sup> Why did the UK and Italy spend more than the other allies on their military operations in Iraq (as a percentage of their 2018 military expenditures)? Quite simply, because of the value they placed on their relationship with the US.<sup>55</sup> Poland and South Korea valued their alliance with the U.S. but the lack of national interest in the

---

<sup>47</sup> Davidson, J. (2014). Heading for the exits: Democratic allies and withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan. *Democracy and Security*, 10(3), 251-286.

<sup>48</sup> RadioLiberty. (October, 2008). Polish Military Marks Close Of Iraq Mission. [https://www.rferl.org/a/Polish\\_Close\\_Iraq\\_Mission/1293972.html](https://www.rferl.org/a/Polish_Close_Iraq_Mission/1293972.html)

<sup>49</sup> "Iraq - Antica Babilonia," Ministero della Difesa, [http://www.esercito.difesa.it/operazioni/operazioni\\_oltremare/Pagine/Iraq-Antica-Babilonia.aspx](http://www.esercito.difesa.it/operazioni/operazioni_oltremare/Pagine/Iraq-Antica-Babilonia.aspx).

<sup>50</sup> Davidson. (2020). 134-42.

<sup>51</sup> On Italy see Davidson. (2014). 264.; On Poland, Lubecki. J.v(2005) Poland in Iraq: the Politics of the Decision. *The Polish Review L* (1) 72.

<sup>52</sup> Baltrusaitis, D. (2010) *Coalition Politics and the Iraq War: Determinants of Choice*. Lynne Rienner, 47.

<sup>53</sup> On South Korea see Baltrusaitis, 62. On Australia see Davidson (2014), 260-61.

<sup>54</sup> The Duelfer Report—establishing that Iraq did not have WMD—was released in October 2004. Ricks T. (2006). *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq*. Penguin, 376-77.

<sup>55</sup> Davidson (2020), 134-37, 158-60.

conflict and controversy at home most likely kept their contribution on the low end.<sup>56</sup> Finally, neither country had any prior experience in recent memory with deployments to violent conflicts. It would make sense for their governments to want to keep the costs as low as possible.

In looking at top troop contributors' foreign aid to Iraq the first thing that stands out is the lower level of contributions as compared to top contributor foreign aid to Afghanistan in absolute and relative terms. Iraq's oil reserves versus Afghanistan's poverty offers the most straightforward explanation for this difference. That said, top contributor foreign aid to Iraq as a percentage of GDP still was quite strong when compared to other relative cost metrics in Iraq such as troop contribution as a percentage of population, fatalities as a percentage of peak deployment, or spending as a percentage of 2018 military expenditures. While the top contributors spent less on foreign aid to Iraq than they did on foreign aid to Afghanistan, they were still willing to make financial contributions to Iraq's future. Thus, allied foreign aid contributions to Iraq suggest that they have a strong belief in the importance of foreign aid and, potentially, that they use their aid contributions to make up for less robust military participation.

### ***Conclusion***

George W. Bush's administration initiated military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003. At those times, neither country posed a direct threat to the interests of U.S. allies. This paper demonstrates, however, that allies incurred significant financial and human costs in Afghanistan and Iraq nonetheless. In Afghanistan, in the year of peak deployment in 2011, allies contributed troops totaling roughly half those of the U.S. In December 2005, over 20,000 allied troops in Iraq represented a much smaller portion of the U.S. contingent but still were 20,000 troops the U.S. did not have to provide. Allies suffered significant fatalities in both conflicts, especially when considered relative to the size of their deployments. With only a couple exceptions, allies' fatalities as a percentage of their deployments were comparable to the U.S.' losses.

With regard to military spending, the British and Canadian military spending in Afghanistan was not so different from U.S. spending when viewed as a percentage of each country's annual baseline military expenditures. While allied military spending in Iraq was lower, these countries spent the amounts they did almost entirely in response to U.S. pleas. The UK—known to have a close relationship with the U.S.—committed significant amounts of troops, incurred fatalities, and spent significant sums on both the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Far less known, however, is the fact that Italy also provided substantial troop commitments and incurred fatalities and economic costs in both wars and was the only ally other than the UK to do so. Most of the top troop contributors to

---

<sup>56</sup> On South Korea's public opinion see Baltrusaitis, 62. On Poland's weak public support see Lubecki, 78. Lubecki cites the use of the term "national interest" to justify Poland's contribution but this refers to the country's alliance with the U.S. and not interest in Iraq per se (p. 70, 74). On South Korea's lack of interest in Iraq see Baltrusaitis, 39.

both conflicts also made significant foreign aid contributions to both countries, especially to impoverished Afghanistan.

It is important to recognize the costs that allies incurred in both wars. The U.S. allies discussed here deployed troops, lost service members, and spent tax dollars on wars that were of little concern to their own national security. They did so largely because of the value they placed on their alliances with the U.S. When U.S. policymakers pressure allies to spend more on defense partnerships, they should take into account the price that allies have already paid for America's wars.