

War may be ending

What did Epic Fury cost?



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ANALYSIS

With a cease-fire agreement signed, negotiations ongoing, and the Strait of Hormuz open, the latest US campaign against Iran that began in February 2026 may be ending. Congressional attention now turns to the war's cost — it needs to be covered, as neither the FY 2026 Department of Defense (DOD) budget nor the president's FY 2027 budget proposal include war costs.

CSIS estimates war costs to be around \$40 billion (\$34 billion to \$42 billion). Six cost categories make up this top-line figure: (1) deployment/redeployment, (2) munitions, (3) higher operational tempo, (4) equipment losses, (5) base damage, and (6) higher fuel prices. This analysis includes only the additional costs to the DOD incurred because of the war and excluded costs already in the budget. Thus, it represents the difference between the DOD budget without the war and the DOD budget with the war.

Table 1: Additional Costs to DOD from Iran War

DOD Category	Costs	Comments
Deployment/Redeployment	\$0.17 B	Most activities already in budget
Munitions	\$26.1 B	Main driver of war costs
Higher Operational Tempo	\$0.75 B	Includes personnel benefits
Equipment losses	\$1.7-\$3.5 B	Aircraft and major ground equipment
Base damage	\$4.0-\$9.4 B	Structures and interior content
Other DOD costs	\$1.5 B	Higher fuel costs, infrastructure security
Total	\$34.2-\$41.5 B	

War costs were not distributed evenly over time but came in four phases:

- The first phase took place over several weeks as US forces deployed to the region.
- The second phase ran about five days, during which the United States used many expensive missiles to attack ground targets and defend against Iranian attacks.
- In the third phase, Iranian missile and drone attacks declined by 80–90 percent. The coalition also allegedly gained air superiority, so ground attacks transitioned to short-range — and much less expensive — munitions.
- Costs declined during the

cease-fire due to a decrease in activity, though they did not fall to zero because forces still operated at higher levels than in peacetime. Periodic skirmishing saw some munitions use, but much less than during the active air campaigning.

The additional cost of the war to federal government departments other than the DOD is estimated at \$1 billion, which includes war-related activities in other departments such as Homeland Security, Veterans Affairs, and Energy. Beyond that, there are real but highly uncertain costs to the US and world economies.

How this estimate compares to others

DOD officials first cited \$25 billion and later \$29 billion in war costs but acknowledged that those numbers were incomplete. Defense officials stated that their estimate does not include base damage, which accounts for a major piece of CSIS's higher estimate.

One study from the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) estimated \$5 billion for base damage, and another estimated \$26–\$36 billion for the other five categories in the CSIS estimate. Together, the AEI estimates suggest war costs are between \$31 and \$41

billion in the war's first week of \$1 billion per day. This approach does not reflect the reduction in US strikes after the cease-fire or the use of cheaper munitions that lowered the daily war costs in its latter weeks.

Finally, the CSIS estimate is lower than the reported DOD wartime supplemental request of \$80 billion. That request, however, includes costs not directly tied to the war, such as expenses to “jump-start” the munitions acquisition process.

Costs for the Department of Defense

The sections below discuss each of the six cost categories in detail. The quality of available data varies, thus requiring rough estimates in some categories; however, rough estimates are better than no estimates because excluding a category implicitly assumes the cost is zero, which is clearly inaccurate. In other instances, alternative assumptions

new bases of operations once in theater, however, incurred costs beyond normal operations. These costs are reflected here.

Although redeployment has not yet begun, all forces will likely return to their home bases because the Trump administration has signaled it will reduce forces in the Middle East rather than increase them. The cost to return will likely be lower than the cost to deploy because it can be done gradually and without having to establish new bases of operation.

• **Munitions:** \$26.1 billion. US forces fired many expensive missiles, making munitions the largest component of the war cost estimate. All need replacement, given that prewar inventories were considered inadequate. Tables 2 and 3 include all munitions — ground attack, missile defense, and drone defense — whether launched from land or sea. They build on previous CSIS analyses of war costs and munitions expenditures.

Table 2: Cost of Expended Ground Attack Munitions

Munition Type	Number Expended	Unit Cost	Total Cost
Tomahawk	1,000+	\$2.8 M	\$2.8 B
JASSM	1,100+	\$1.9 M	\$2.3 B
PrSM/ATACMS	150-380	\$1.6 M	\$0.5 B
JDAM	~10,000	\$0.09-\$0.2 M	\$0.9 B
LUCAS	100	\$0.035 M	\$0.004 B
Other Strike Munitions (AARGM/HARM, JSOW, SDB I and II)	~1,250	\$0.04-\$2.2 M	\$1.1 B
Total	~13,800		\$7.5 B

Note: The estimates represent the cost of a like-for-like replacement with variants currently being procured. The original acquisition costs likely were incurred many years ago and would be much lower.

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were available, requiring a range of possible costs.

• **Deployment/redeployment:** \$0.17 billion. This is the cost to send forces into the theater and then return them to their home stations. On January 2, President Trump warned that the “United States of America will come to their rescue” if the Iranian regime continued cracking down on rioters. Movement of personnel, supplies, and equipment into theater — the “TPFDD flow” — was reported in open sources soon after the president's threat. At the beginning of Operation Epic Fury, US air and naval assets in theater included two carrier strike groups, dozens of fighter aircraft, and many more support and logistics assets — alongside air defense, field artillery, and ground combat units. Much of the cost to move forces, such as flight hours for transport aircraft, was already in the FY 2026 defense budget. Increased sortie rate to move forces to the Middle East and activities to establish

Admiral Brad Cooper, the Central Command commander, reported that US forces fired 13,629 strike munitions against more than 13,000 targets by the time of the

Table 3: Cost of Expended Air Defense Munitions

Munition	Number Expended	Unit Cost	Total Cost
Patriot	1,060-1,430	\$4.9 M	\$5.3-\$7.1 B
THAAD	190-290	\$11.9 M	\$2.3-\$3.5 B
SM-3	130-250	\$28.7 M	\$3.9-\$7.5 B
SM-2/6	190-370	\$4.3 M	\$0.8-\$1.6 B
Other interceptor missiles (AIM-9, AIM-120, APKWS)	2,500+	\$0.02-\$1.4 M	\$1.2 B
Drone interceptors (Coyote, Roadrunner)	Limited	~\$0.05 M	\$0.01 B
Cannon, small arms ammunition	Many	-	\$0.01 B
Total			18.5 B

Note: Because of offsetting missile usage, the total does not add all the high or low values.

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An EA-18G Growler launches from the flight deck of Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln (CVN 72) in support of Operation Epic Fury on March 6, 2026.

US NAVY

The CSIS estimate is lower than several others. For example, it is lower than that of the Cost of War Project at Brown University, which includes \$40 billion for the increased cost of fuel to the entire US economy — not just the DOD. Early estimates of a trillion-dollar war assumed that it would be more intense and much longer than it was. The Iran War Cost Tracker cites \$113 billion by projecting a reported DOD estimate in the war's first week of \$1 billion per day. This approach does not reflect the reduction in US strikes after the cease-fire or the use of cheaper munitions that lowered the daily war costs in its latter weeks.

cease-fire. CSIS also included estimated munitions used related to skirmishing during the cease-fire, including 49 Tomahawks fired on June 10. Note that all the long-range attack munitions — Tomahawk, JASSM, and PrSM/ATACMS — have a high cost. Low-cost alternatives such as LUCAS, a copy of the Iranian Shahed 136, are not yet in serial production.

Calculations for air defense munitions assumed that the United States shot down between 40 and 60 percent of incoming drones and ballistic and cruise missiles. Coalition partners greatly decreased US costs and losses by intercepting rest of the drones and ballistic and cruise missiles. A “shoot-look-shoot” shot doctrine was assumed, so more than one missile was sometimes used for an interception.

US forces predominantly used cheaper, short-range munitions rather than expensive, long-range systems after the first few days of the war. A single dumb bomb fitted with a JDAM guidance kit and a Tomahawk both deliver 1,000 lb payloads with extreme precision but at a much different cost (\$2.6 million versus \$100,000). Iranian launches also diminished significantly by the end of the war's first week, meaning fewer interceptors were needed. Some lawmakers have expressed skepticism of the DOD's \$29 billion war cost estimate after officials reportedly informed Congress that the first six days cost \$11.3 billion. The munitions shift resulting from operational success partly explains the non-linear daily war cost.

• **Higher operational tempo:** \$0.75 billion. The war incurred costs for people and unit operations beyond what has already been appropriated. However, the amounts were not large because most of these costs were already in the budget. For example, crew compensation and ship and aircraft operating costs for the Lincoln carrier strike group were in the FY 2026 budget. However, aircraft flew more missions and ships stayed at sea longer than planned. The crew also received some additional benefits such as imminent danger pay.

The analysis captured these incremental costs for units participating in the conflict by assuming a 10 percent increase in operating costs during the 39 days of active combat, based on practice in the Office of Management and Budget during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. As the build-up and cease-fire both involved some combat operations, 2.5–5 percent was assumed for these periods of the campaign. These costs will continue to accrue at the rate of about \$4 million per day until the forces return home or resume their previously planned operations.