

“War is a racket...in which the profits are reckoned in dollars and the losses in lives.”  
--Major General Smedley Butler

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\$275 million spent per day; almost 4,000 U.S. soldiers killed and more than 60,000 wounded; 700,000 Iraqis killed and 4 million turned refugees; \$500,080,545,236 spent total. These figures all provide a basic answer to the question "What have been the costs of the United States involvement in Iraq since 2003?" But at the same time, the statistics miserably fail to reveal and, in fact, actually obscure the entire picture. The sad truth is that, while talking heads on television can pontificate on and on about insurgency rates and troop efficiency, numbers without context are simply numbers. The significance arising from proper context is without fail, the public's only defense against being lost in a storm of bureaucratic buzzwords and media frenzy.

It is imperative that CNN, Fox News, even The Daily Show, emphasize that whatever progress is made, whatever ground is gained or lost, everything is a direct result of people—people just like you and me, on either side of the conflict. This context, whether in terms of an individual soldier or a regiment of young men and women, adds a shade of gray to the black and white world of us versus them. It maintains a certain sense of humanity in the altogether inhuman pursuit that is modern warfare. Being able to understand the other side's motivations, culture, and mindset is an invaluable art, seemingly giving way in this day and age to a more business-focused point of view. No one will ever be able to completely separate money from political decision-making, as the two go hand in hand, yet strides must be made. Take the time to speak with a veteran, send a care box overseas, do some research on the history of the Middle East—each brings us one step closer to finding a world view not centered solely on the price of oil.

I have learned in high school economics the specific varieties of profit. The accounting type is quite simple, basically the calculated measure of revenue minus costs. In decision-making reality, particularly concerning war, relying on accounting profit falls short. The monetary value of a life can obviously never be ascertained. Who can predict what the college graduate casualty would have achieved given a few more years of existence? Perhaps in a different life, the insurgent would have gone on to do great things. Thus we must rely on economic profit to make our choices, recognizing the value in all sorts of socioeconomic, multicultural and geopolitical areas, not just in terms of dollars and cents.

When the vital essence in each person's life is forgone for an almighty bottom line, war becomes a waste of both. Everyone, world leaders and talk show hosts, should remain cognizant of that fact. Only then can mutual understanding be reached, resulting in peace and a better world for all.