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By Congressman Mike Quigley (IL-05)

President Barack Obama recently took a bold step to reduce the deficit, and he didn't have to cut infrastructure, education or health care to do it.

He ended the Iraq war.

Now it is time to do the same in Afghanistan. We must end our longest war.

Ending our Iraq deployment will end annual spending on one of the longest and costliest wars in our nation's history. In 2003, the Bush administration rebuked its own economic adviser, Larry Lindsey, for estimating that the war could cost as much as \$200 billion. He was wrong — by a factor of 10.

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have already cost Americans an estimated \$2.3 trillion, with future costs for veterans and families estimated at an additional \$884 billion. That's a total of \$3.2 trillion, more than the inflation-adjusted costs of World War I, Korea, Vietnam and the Gulf War combined, and just shy of the \$3.5 trillion cost to defeat Japan and Nazi Germany.

We went into Afghanistan 10 years ago to protect America's national security. Our troops performed masterfully, and now only about 50 to 100 al-Qaida members operate in Afghanistan.

But the mission has changed to a nation-building exercise we cannot afford, with an end goal we cannot define, for a population that cannot understand why we're there. No outside power has ever won a war in Afghanistan — and after 10 years we haven't even decided what winning means.

If our goal is to defeat terrorism, we're spending in the wrong place. Al-Qaida has shifted operations to ungoverned spaces around the world. Explosives hidden in ink cartridges and destined for a synagogue in my own district in Chicago were planted by a Saudi militant and shipped from Yemen. We are fighting an enemy without borders, and we need a strategy without borders.

Every major recent victory in the fight against terrorism has come through good police work, such as the detection of the bomb near Wrigley Field, or targeted attacks, such as those that killed Osama bin Laden in Pakistan and Anwar al-Awlaki in Yemen. We do not need a large footprint in Afghanistan to retain the capability to launch such attacks. In fact, our continued presence there has been known to fuel accidental guerrilla syndrome, in which local populations become radicalized and join the fight on the wrong side, which actually makes us less safe.

I have an incredible respect for our troops, the work they do and the sacrifices they and their families make. Nearly 4,400 have made the ultimate sacrifice. We owe it to those still serving, those bearing the scars of war and those we have lost to ensure that the mission makes sense.

We also should make sure that tax dollars are used effectively on programs and services that make America stronger. Each of the 100,000 U.S. troops on the ground in Afghanistan costs about \$775,000 a year to deploy. For the cost of one soldier in Afghanistan, we could put 10 cops on our streets. Which is the best way to keep America safe?

Ending the war in Afghanistan in a safe and responsible manner will enhance national security by allowing us to fix our crumbling infrastructure, protect our streets and refocus our military to confront the real threats we face from abroad.

Most important, it will take us one step closer to solving what Adm. Mike Mullen, former chairman of the Joints Chiefs of Staff, identified as the No. 1 threat to our national security: our national debt.

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