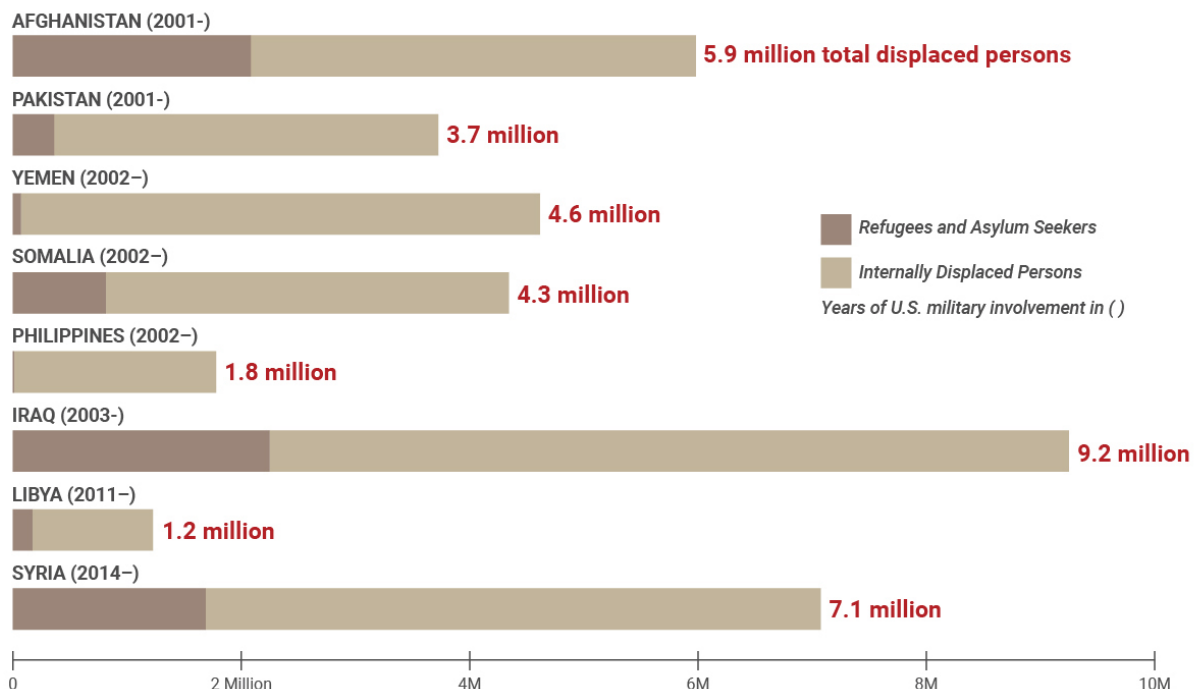
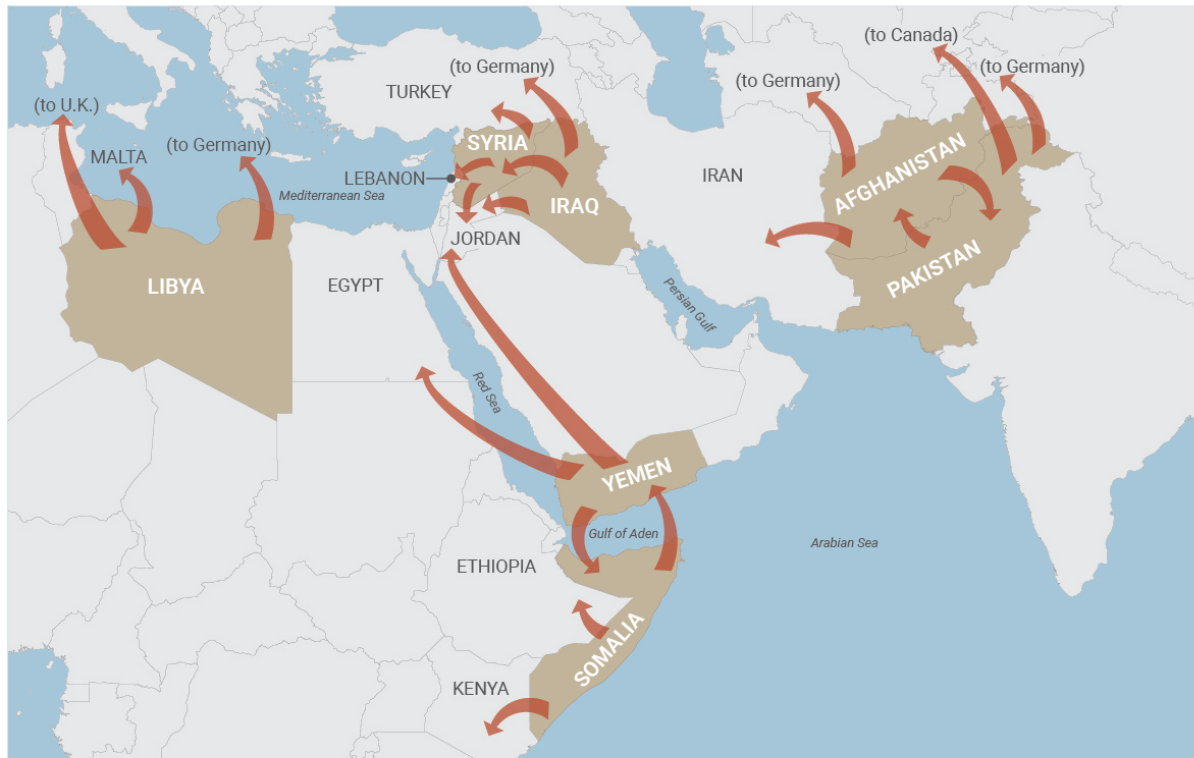


# COSTS OF WAR

## Millions displaced by U.S. post-9/11 wars

Thirty-eight million people have been displaced — becoming refugees seeking safety in another country, or becoming internally displaced people within their own country — as a result of the wars the U.S. military has fought since 2001. That is more than those displaced by any war or disaster since the start of the 20th century, except for World War II. Although the United States has accepted hundreds of thousands of refugees, most have been hosted by countries in the greater Middle East.

Arrows point to the top three countries where the most refugees and asylum seekers from each war-affected country have fled as of 2019. Arrows for Syria include all displaced Syrians, 2011-2019.



Displaced persons data updated through 2020; Syrian and Afghan internally displaced persons data updated through 2021. Syria data only includes people displaced during years of direct U.S. military involvement in the war and in five provinces where U.S. forces have fought. Key source, updated August 2021: David Vine, Cala Coffman, Katalina Khoury, Madison Lovasz, Helen Bush, Rachel Leduc, and Jennifer Walkup, "Creating Refugees: Displacement Caused by the U.S. Post-9/11 Wars," Costs of War Project, Brown University, Sept. 8, 2020. Map and graphics by Kelly Martin/IRW.

***Creating Refugees:  
Displacement Caused by the United States' Post-9/11 Wars***

***David Vine, Cala Coffman, Katalina Khoury, Madison Lovasz, Helen Bush, Rachael Leduc, and Jennifer Walkup***

***August 19, 2021***

This report uses recent data to update our 2020 calculation of the number of people displaced in the eight most violent wars the United States has waged since 2001, in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, the Philippines, Libya, and Syria. Using 2020 and 2021 data unavailable at the time of our [initial report](#), this update conservatively estimates that at least 38 million people have fled their homes—around one million more displaced people than a year earlier.<sup>1</sup>

Our initial report was the first to comprehensively measure the number of people displaced in the wars the U.S. military has waged since President George W. Bush announced a “global war on terror” following Al Qaeda’s September 11, 2001 attacks. That report details a methodology for calculating wartime displacement, provides an overview of displacement in each war-affected country, and points to displacement’s individual and societal impacts.<sup>2</sup>

Wartime displacement (alongside war deaths and injuries) must be central to any analysis of the post-9/11 wars and their consequences. Displacement also must be central to any consideration of the future use of military force by the United States or others. Ultimately, the figure of 38 million—and perhaps as many as 60 million—raises the question of who bears responsibility for repairing the damage inflicted on those displaced.

## **MAJOR FINDINGS**

**§ The U.S. post-9/11 wars have forcibly displaced at least 38 million people in and from Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, the Philippines, Libya, and Syria. This exceeds those displaced by every war since 1900, except World War II.**

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<sup>1</sup> The initial report (2020) is here:

[https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2020/Displacement\\_Vine et al Costs of War 2020 09 08.pdf](https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2020/Displacement_Vine%20et%20al_Costs%20of%20War_2020_09_08.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> We have updated our calculation with 2020 and some 2021 data from the same sources used in our original report. We include the UN refugee agency UNHCR’s estimate of 270,000 displaced in Afghanistan from January to July 2021, which has been widely cited in the media. Our update also refines our calculation of displacement in Syria by including displacement only during the four months of 2014 when U.S. military personnel first became actively engaged in the Syrian civil war. As throughout our Syria calculations, we solely calculate displacement experienced in the five Syrian provinces where U.S. military personnel have fought and operated.

§ 38 million is a very conservative estimate. **The total displaced by the U.S. post-9/11 wars could be closer to 49–60 million**, which would rival World War II displacement.

§ **26.7 million people have returned after being displaced**, although return does not erase the trauma of displacement or mean the displaced necessarily have returned to their original homes or a secure life. Children born in displacement who follow parents home are also among those counted as “returnees.”

§ **Any number is limited in what it can convey about displacement’s damage.** The people behind the numbers can be difficult to see, and numbers cannot communicate how it feels to lose one’s home, belongings, community, and much more. **Displacement has caused incalculable** harm to individuals, families, towns, cities, regions, and entire countries physically, socially, emotionally, and economically.