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As the United States marks 19 years since the September 11 terrorist attacks that killed nearly 3,000 people, a new report finds at least 37 million people in eight countries have been displaced since the start of the so-called global war on terrorism since 2001. The Costs of War Project at Brown University also found more than 800,000 people have been killed since U.S. forces began fighting in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Pakistan and Yemen, at a cost of $6.4 trillion to U.S. taxpayers. "The U.S. has played a disproportionate role in waging war, in launching war and in perpetuating war over the last 19 years," says report co-author David Vine, a professor of anthropology at American University.

AMY GOODMAN: It's been 19 years since the coordinated attacks on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and United Airlines Flight 93 killed nearly 3,000 people. At 8:46 a.m. Eastern time, the first plane hit the north tower of the World Trade Center here in New York City. Today, President Trump and Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden will both visit the Flight 93 National Memorial near Shanksville, Pennsylvania, at different times. Biden will also pay respects after attending a 9/11 memorial ceremony in New York, which Vice President Pence will also attend.

Today, the United States faces a terror of a different kind, as more than 191,000 people have died from the COVID-19 pandemic, and a new [report](#) projects the U.S. death toll could rise to as high as 3,000 people per day by December. There were more than 1,200 new deaths in the U.S. in the last 24 hours. *Time* magazine plans to mark the approaching milestone of 200,000
COVID
-related deaths in the U.S. with a cover that reads "An American Failure" and has a black border for only the second time in its history. The first time was after 9/11.

This comes as a new [report](#) finds the U.S.-led so-called global war on terrorism has displaced at least 37 million people in eight countries since 2001. The Costs of War Project at Brown University has also estimated more than 800,000 people [dead] in U.S.-led wars since 2001 at a cost of $6.4 trillion to U.S. taxpayers. The new report is titled "Creating Refugees:

Displacement Caused by the United States' Post-9/11 Wars."

For more, we're joined by its co-author, David Vine, professor of anthropology at American University. His new book is out next month, called *The United States of War: A Global History of America's Endless Conflicts, from Columbus to the Islamic State*
. He's also the author of
Base Nation: How U.S. Military Bases Abroad Harm America and the World
.

David Vine, welcome to *Democracy Now!* It's great to have you back with us, although this is a very sad day, on this 19th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. Can you talk about the findings of your report?

DAVID VINE: Sure. Thank you, Amy, for having me. It's great to be back.

The findings of our report are basically asking — the United States has been fighting wars continuously, as you said, for 19 years. We're looking at what the effects of these wars have been. The Costs of War Project has been doing this for about a decade. We wanted to look specifically at how many people had been displaced by these wars. Basically, we found that no one had bothered to investigate how many people had been displaced by the wars in what are now, actually, at least 24 countries that the United States has been involved in.

And we found that, in total, at least 37 million people have been displaced in just eight of the most violent wars that the United States has either launched or participated in since 2001. That's Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Somalia, Yemen, Libya, Syria and the Philippines. And that's a very conservative estimate. We found that the actual total could be up to 48 to 59 million.

And I do think we have to pause on these numbers, because we — in many ways, our lives are drowning in numbers, about COVID, about many things that are important to track quantitatively, but to wrap one's mind around what — just 37 million people displaced is difficult, in fact, and I think it requires some active effort, certainly did for me.

Thirty-seven million, to put it in historical perspective, that's more people displaced by any war since at least the beginning of the 20th century, with the exception of World War II. And if our larger less conservative methodology is accurate, the 48 to 59 million estimate, that is comparable to the displacement one saw in World War II. Another way to try to wrap one's mind around just the 37 million minimum figure, 37 million is about the size of the state of California. Just imagine the entire state of California disappearing, having to flee their homes. It's about the size of all of Canada, or Texas and Virginia combined.

AMY GOODMAN: And for those enough who are lucky to have homes during this pandemic, I think people particularly appreciate — I mean, the word "refugees" is thrown around, but what it means to be displaced. Can you talk about why those eight countries? And can you correlate that with U.S. wars abroad?

DAVID VINE: Sure. Again, we wanted to focus on the most violent wars that the United States has been involved in, the wars that the United States has most deeply invested money, and, of course, the blood, the lives of U.S. military personnel, and, by extension, the lives that have been affected, the family members of U.S. military personnel and others. We wanted to look specifically at the wars the United States has launched, so the overlapping war in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the War in Iraq, of course; wars that the United States has significantly escalated, Libya and Syria, Libya along with — and Syria, along with European and other allies; and then wars the United States has participated in significantly, in ways including providing battlefield advisers, providing fuel, arms and others, in Yemen, Somalia and the Philippines.

In each of these wars, we have found displacement numbering in the millions. And indeed, I think, you know, we have to recognize that displacement, the need to flee one's home, to flee for one's life, is — in many ways, there's no way to calculate what that means for a single individual, a single family, a single community, but we did feel it was important to look at the total mass displacement that these wars have caused.

It is important to note, we are not saying the United States is solely to blame for this level of displacement. Clearly, there are other actors, other governments, other combatants, who are important in the responsibility they bear for displacement in these wars: Assad in Syria, Sunni and Shia militias in Iraq, the Taliban, of course, al-Qaeda, the Islamic State, others. U.S. allies, including Britain, also bear some responsibility.

But the United States has played a disproportionate role in waging war, in launching war and in perpetuating war over the last 19 years. And as you pointed out, this has cost U.S. taxpayers, U.S. citizens, U.S. residents in other ways, including the $6.4 trillion — and that's trillion with a T, $6.4 trillion — that the Costs of War Project has estimated the United States has either spent or obligated already. And that total is, of course, increasing by the day.

AMY GOODMAN: And, David Vine, the number of refugees the U.S. accepts from these wars, whose displacement the U.S. is causing?

DAVID VINE: Yeah, and we can look at the fire in Lesbos that you referred to earlier, that has displaced some 13,000 people, a refugee camp on Lesbos that's been totally destroyed. And I would hope that people looking at the fires in California and Oregon and Washington could more easily empathize with the refugees in Lesbos and the refugees throughout the Greater Middle East, in particular, where fires — essentially, one large fire has been burning since October 2001, when the U.S. launched its War in Afghanistan.

AMY GOODMAN: I wanted to turn to President Trump earlier this week telling reporters top Pentagon officials don't like him because he wants to get the U.S. out of endless wars that benefit weapons manufacturers.

PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP: Biden shipped away our jobs, threw open our borders and sent our youth to fight in these crazy, endless wars. And it's one of the reasons the military — I'm not saying the military is in love with me. The soldiers are. The top people in the Pentagon probably aren't, because they want to do nothing but fight wars so that all of those wonderful companies that make the bombs and make the planes and make everything else stay happy. But we're getting out of the endless wars.

AMY GOODMAN: Sounds a little like, well, if Howard Zinn were alive, what he would say. But Trump's criticism of the military-industrial complex contradicts his own record of overseeing this historic increase in war spending, in the defense budget, in spending on military equipment, selling weapons overseas. Politico recently called Trump the "booster-in-chief of defense contractors." Last year, Trump bypassed Congress so he could sell $8 billion of weapons to Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates. Earlier this year, his administration ordered a reinterpretation of a Cold War-era arms treaty in order to pave the way for drone sales to go to governments that have previously been barred from such purchases. Can you respond to what

he said?

DAVID VINE: In many ways, what Trump said is quite rich, so to speak. Indeed, he is correct that weapons manufacturers have benefited greatly, to the tune of tens of billions of dollars, in addition to other infrastructure contractors, the companies that make military bases that now dot the Middle East. But, you know, Trump, indeed, as Politico said, is the booster-in-chief. He has overseen and pushed for military budgets that exceed those at the height of the Cold War.

And I think we have to ask: What are the enemies the United States faces today that require a military budget of this size? Does the United States need to be spending upwards of $740 billion a year to defend itself? Could we be spending this money in better ways to defend ourselves? And what needs, drastic, dramatic, pressing needs, human needs, are being neglected because we are pouring tens of billions, hundreds of billions of dollars into this war machine on a yearly basis?

And I think COVID, of course, points to this, underlines it, more than ever. The United States was not prepared for a pandemic. And this is in no small part because the United States has been pouring money into this war machine while neglecting human needs in the United States and around the world — healthcare needs, pandemic preparedness, affordable housing, the environment. This money that we've been pouring into the war machine, of course, could have been addressing the global warming that one sees, that plays some role in the fires one is seeing across the West Coast, among many other pressing needs that the world faces today.

AMY GOODMAN: This is an amazing fact you've pointed out, David Vine: The U.S. military has waged war, engaged in combat or otherwise invaded foreign lands in all but 11 years of its existence.

DAVID VINE: That's right. The past 19 years of war, many people often see it as exceptional, as strange that people entering college today or most people enlisting in the U.S. military today will not have seen a day of their life or will not — have no memory of a day of their life when the United States was not at war.

In fact, this is the norm in U.S. history. And the Congressional Research Service shows this on a yearly basis in a report that you can find online. This is not just me, although I have a list of

the wars, expanding on the Congressional Research Service list. These are wars and other forms of combat that the United States has engaged in since independence. And indeed, in 95% of the years in U.S. history, all but 11 years in U.S. history, the United States has been involved in some form of war or other combat.

And one needs to look at this much longer-term trend, this longer-term pattern that extends beyond the war, the so-called war on terror that George W. Bush launched in 2001, to understand why the United States has poured so much money into these wars and why the effects of these wars have been so horrific for the people involved.

AMY GOODMAN: David Vine, you report in your forthcoming book, *The United States of War: A Global History of America's Endless Conflicts, from Columbus to the Islamic State*, that U.S. bases abroad enable combat in 24 countries: quote, "Thousands of U.S. military bases in nearly 100 foreign countries and territories — more than half of them built since 2001 — have enabled the involvement of U.S. military forces in wars and other combat deployments across at least 24 nations since the George W. Bush administration launched its war on terror," so-called, following the September 11, 2001, attacks.

DAVID VINE: Indeed. The United States currently has about 800 military bases in around 80 foreign countries and territories. This is more bases than any nation in world history. The United States has, as you alluded to, had even larger numbers of bases. At the height of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, there were upwards of 2,000 bases abroad.

And part of what my book, *The United States of War*, shows is that this is also a long-term pattern. The United States has been building military bases abroad since independence, initially on the lands of Native American peoples, then increasingly outside of North America, and eventually encircling the globe, particularly after World War II.

And what I show is that these bases have not only enabled war, they've not only made war possible, but they've actually made war more likely. It's made war a far-too-easy policy choice decision for powerful decisionmakers, leaders, politicians, corporate leaders and others.

And we need to basically dismantle this infrastructure of war that the United States has built up. Why does the United States have dozens of military bases in the Middle East, in virtually every

country outside of Yemen and Iran? These bases, of course, are in countries that are led by undemocratic regimes, not spreading democracy — far from it — in many cases, actually blocking the spread of democracy, and making these wars possible, that — I think it's important to underline again — beyond displacing 37 million people, at least, and perhaps up to 59 million people, these wars have taken the lives of, as the Costs of War Project has shown, around 800,000 people. And this is just in five of the wars — Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Libya and Yemen — the United States has — U.S. combat has taken the lives of around 800,000 people.

But there are also indirect deaths, deaths that have been caused by the destruction of local infrastructure, healthcare services, hospitals, food sources. And those total deaths could number upwards of 3 million people. And I think most people in the United States, again, myself included, have not really reckoned with the total damage that these wars have caused. We haven't even begun to wrap our minds around what it would mean to have this level of destruction in our lives.

AMY GOODMAN: And you have, for example, the effects of soldiers on bases, like what happened in the Philippines, where the authoritarian leader, President Duterte, just pardoned a U.S. soldier who was found guilty of murdering a trans woman off a base.

DAVID VINE: Yes, this is another cost of war. We need to look at the costs of war in terms — the human costs in terms of direct combat deaths, injuries in these wars, the "wars on terror," numbering in the tens of millions, but we also need to look at the deaths and injuries that are caused on a daily basis around U.S. military bases around the world. These bases have — in addition to enabling the wars that the United States has been fighting, they have very immediate harms that they inflict on local populations, including in the Philippines and in, as I said, around 80 countries and territories around the world, damage to their environments, their local communities, in a whole variety of ways.

AMY GOODMAN: David Vine, I want to thank you so much for being with us, professor of anthropology at American University, co-author of the new   report on the Costs of War Project headlined "Creating Refugees: Displacement Caused by the United States' Post-9/11 Wars." Your new book, coming out, *The United States of War*

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