

U.S. Senate Republican Policy Committee
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Lameduck President's Continuing Globetrotting Forays
Latest Trip Pegged at \$50 Million —
Most Expensive Presidential Trip Ever

There he goes again. Our globe-trotting president was flying high this month, traveling to Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Oman, and Switzerland. That brings the total out-of-country days for President Clinton, the Traveler-in-Chief, to 212. He's racked up visits to 66 countries — some more than once — and 2 territories not recognized as countries. He is, by any measure, the most traveled U.S. president ever.

And just how much is this latest foray estimated to cost the American taxpayer? ABC News, apparently relying on unnamed Pentagon sources, has reported a price tag: a cool \$50 million — the “**most expensive overseas trip ever taken by a president,**” as they put it during the March 23 broadcast of *World News Tonight*. And because the newscast did not fully identify the costs, it is unclear if this estimate includes only military costs – or even only Air Force costs.

Meanwhile, *Air Force Times* also pegged the cost at \$50 million [3/27/00], implying this figure reflects Air Force costs *alone*. The article also identifies the numbers and types of aircraft dedicated to the trip: 14 C-17 Globemaster IIIs; 12 C-5 Galaxys, 3 C-141 Starlifters; and 2 C-130 Hercules. In addition, 7 KC-10 Extenders and 39 KC-135 Stratotankers were to deploy. The return mission was to require the same types and numbers of assets with some exceptions, but to include an additional 10 Galaxys and 3 more Stratotankers.

ABC News' John McWethy, while traveling with the President — who was accompanied by daughter Chelsea and his mother-in-law — on the recent trip to South Asia, reported that:

“Ninety percent of the costs [cited by the *World News Tonight* anchor at \$50 million] are for airplanes, drawn from an Air Force that is already stressed meeting military and humanitarian commitments overseas. When a President travels, all the public ever sees is Air Force One, but consider this: **Seventy-seven other Air Force planes are being used on this one trip, including 26 of the biggest transports, C-5s and C-17s**” [Emphasis added].

And just how much of our Air Force's assets does this represent? McWethy continued, "Military sources say that represents more than one-third of the Air Force's entire inventory of these planes that are ready to fly on any given day." As an interesting comparison, the U.S. Air Force has used only about **a dozen** planes to execute the most recent humanitarian relief effort to Mozambique — where millions of lives were at stake, according to the same newscast.

The Marines also were called in to support this jaunt, as noted by the *Washington Times* on March 24:

"The U.S. military sent 10 CH-53 helicopters to India and Pakistan to support President Clinton's ongoing road trip. The large helicopters flew from the Marine Corps base at Kanehoe Bay, Hawaii, to ferry Mr. Clinton, daughter Chelsea and other friends of Bill.

"The helos arrived via giant U.S. Air Force C-5 transport aircraft. In addition, the Marines dispatched about 100 troops for air crews and support."

It is unclear whether ABC's or *Air Force Times*' estimate included the costs of these helicopters flown in from Hawaii, which — according to the General Accounting Office (GAO), the official auditor for Congress — cost \$3,658 per hour to operate.

Pentagon Typically Pays for Large Portion of President's Overseas Trips

Previous investigations into President Clinton's travel record have found that a significant share of the cost of overseas trips comes out of the Pentagon's budget — which the Clinton/Gore Administration has underfunded year after year. For instance, last year the GAO found that President Clinton's three trips in 1998 to Chile, China, and Africa alone cost a total of \$72 million — of which \$60.5 million, or 84 percent, came out of the U.S. defense budget. And these figures include only incremental costs to the government, expressly excluding such ongoing expenses as payroll.

But the price tag is only one factor. Equally important is that these trips also tax our already stressed military assets, consistently deployed on far-flung, non-traditional military missions by this administration. Again, looking back to last year, one newspaper reported the President's travels throughout Africa required the Air Force to cancel or refuse 26 air missions that it would have flown in its regular duties, and postpone 30 others [*St. Louis Post Dispatch*, 1/10/99]. For the President's most recent excursion, so much of the Air Force's fleet was dedicated to the President's entourage that the Air Mobility Command was forced to send out "regrets" to other officials requesting aircraft [*Air Force Times*, 3/27/00].

The Air Force reportedly was to dedicate about 460 flying missions to the recent South Asia trip [*Air Force Times*, 3/27/00]. Compare that to the President's very costly 12-day trip to Africa in 1998 when the military flew 214 missions, as documented by GAO.

Security Costs Are Over and Above Transportation and Logistical Costs

In its extensive review last year, the GAO expressly did not include costs related to assuring the President's security. Secret Service costs, for example, are classified. And, so likely such costs are not included in the estimate recently cited by ABC News and *Air Force Times*. But, clearly there are additional costs, especially when traveling to such countries as Pakistan. The logistics for the President's arrival in Islamabad, Pakistan alone are mind-boggling. The *Washington Post* [3/26/00] reported the extraordinary measures taken to ensure the President's safety:

“In Pakistan, the officially marked plane landed first and taxied to the welcoming spot in front of journalists, and, as cameras clicked and whirred, several men in suits got off. The first, a large man with thick gray hair, bore a resemblance to Clinton but was actually a Secret Service agent.

“Suddenly, the unmarked plane approached the airport — from the opposite direction from which the marked plane had come — and made a swift, low landing. Before Clinton disembarked, a large black limousine pulled between him and the platform of journalists.”

This example is merely illustrative of the security measures required for this one stop on this trip, and is not meant to criticize the need to ensure the President's safety during overseas travels.

It's a Privilege, Not a Perk

No one disputes the need for the President of the United States, as the leader of the free world, to travel overseas. However, Clinton as the most traveled President ever, who is spending extraordinary sums of limited defense dollars in the process, appears to consider these events as one long road trip, rather than an executive privilege. Recall the White House's Joe Lockhart noting to the press corps last fall that Panama was among the few nations Clinton had not visited, but then cavalierly remarked, “There are a few places still left on the list he hasn't been, **and we have 15 months to rectify that**” [*Federal News Service*: White House briefing, 10/19/99]. Given his track record, we expect they will.

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