

WE SPEND \$1 BILLION/YEAR FIGHTING EACH AL QAEDA MEMBER IN AFGHANISTAN

Think Progress does the math on Panetta's admission that there are just 100 al Qaeda members in Afghanistan, and discovers we've got 1,000 American troops in Afghanistan for each al Qaeda member.

The U.S. has committed nearly 100,000 troops to the mission in Afghanistan. ABC This Week host Jake Tapper asked CIA Director Leon Panetta how big is the al Qaeda threat that the soldiers are combating:

TAPPER: How many Al Qaeda, do you think, are in Afghanistan?

PANETTA: I think the estimate on the number of Al Qaeda is actually relatively small. **I think at most, we're looking at 50 to 100, maybe less. It's in that vicinity.** There's no question that the main location of Al Qaeda is in the tribal areas of Pakistan.

The 100,000 U.S. forces that have been tasked to dismantle the 100 or so al Qaeda members – a ratio of 1000:1 – is complicated by the fact that we are also engaged in operations going after the Taliban leadership.

Now let me add to their math. Even Afghan war fans admit that it costs \$1 million a year—on top of things like salary—to support a US

service member in Afghanistan.

Michael O'Hanlon, a defense analyst at the Brookings Institution, says one useful way to break down these huge numbers is to look at how much it costs to send just one soldier to war.

"We are at a point where it's unbelievably costing us close to a million dollars, in additional costs – above and beyond salaries and the equipment that's already in the inventory – per soldier or Marine per year," he says.

Fighting in Afghanistan means fighting in one of the most remote regions on Earth, and that plays a large role in the seemingly astronomical figure.

Dov Zakheim, a former chief financial officer for the Defense Department, says the \$1 million price tag includes getting the soldier to Afghanistan, getting his equipment to Afghanistan, and moving the soldier around once in the country.

So 1,000 US troops per al Qaeda member, at a cost of \$1 million each. That's \$1 billion a year we spend for each al Qaeda member to fight our war in Afghanistan.

This sort of adds a new twist to that old Einstein quip about the definition of insanity being doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. Because we're doing the same thing over and over again—at a cost of \$1 billion a year per nominal opponent—and expecting anything other than bankruptcy.