

Obama to seek \$537 billion defense budget: Murtha

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During his speech to Congress on Tuesday, Obama said, "For seven years we have been a nation at war. No longer will we hide its price." -Pentagon press secretary Geoff Morrell said the White House Office of Management and Budget will announce a supplemental war request - on top of the regular military budget - on Thursday when it unveils the Obama spending plan for fiscal year 2010. "There will be a war supplemental for FY'10," he told reporters at a briefing, without disclosing budget numbers.

WASHINGTON - President Barack Obama will sketch out a robust U.S. military budget for next year totaling \$537 billion, a senior Democrat in the U.S. House of Representatives said on Wednesday.

Obama is scheduled to release on Thursday an outline of his budget proposal for fiscal 2010, which begins on October 1.

Representative John Murtha, the Pennsylvania Democrat who oversees defense spending in the House, told Reuters that "\$537 billion will be the base budget" for the Pentagon.

But he added that he was not sure whether the \$537 billion would include any money the Pentagon is expected to need to pay for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan next year.

The Pentagon's base budget - not counting most war funding - totaled \$515 billion for the current year.

Former President George W. Bush asked Congress for "emergency" funds for most of the money for the wars, leaving the bulk of the cost out of his regular budgets.

That arrangement has been criticized by Democrats, who accused the Bush administration of being less than transparent about the price of the Iraq war.

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Pentagon officials have estimated they will need an additional \$140 billion to pay for ongoing war operations and a major build-up of extra forces in Afghanistan.

Morrell said the budget package will also begin to shift war costs from supplemental spending to the Pentagon's base budget. The Pentagon's base budget includes equipment for soldiers, medical care and major weapons purchases.

Obama wants to bring an end to the Iraq war over the next 19 months or so.

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