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Obama Links Effects of War Costs to Fragility in the Economy

By [JEFF ZELENY](#) and [MICHAEL COOPER](#)

CHARLESTON, W. Va. — Senator [Barack Obama](#) on Thursday blamed the fragile economy on “careless and incompetent execution” of the [Iraq](#) war, imploring voters in this swing state to consider the trickle-down economic consequences of the war as they choose a successor to President Bush.

“When you’re spending over \$50 to fill up your car because the price of oil is four times what it was before Iraq, you’re paying a price for this war,” Mr. Obama said to an audience at the University of Charleston. “When Iraq is costing each household about \$100 a month, you’re paying a price for this war.”

One day after Senator [Hillary Rodham Clinton](#) campaigned here, Mr. Obama arrived in [West Virginia](#) for his first trip before the primary on May 13. The state is also likely to be a general election battleground, and Mr. Obama delivered a critique of Senator [John McCain](#), the presumptive Republican presidential nominee.

“No matter what the costs, no matter what the consequences, John McCain seems determined to carry out a third Bush term,” Mr. Obama said. “That’s an outcome America can’t afford. Because of the Bush-McCain policies, our debt has ballooned.”

Although the contest for the Democratic presidential nomination is far from settled, Mr. Obama barely mentioned Mrs. Clinton as he sought to remind voters here that domestic priorities of education, health care and even the construction of new roads and bridges had been placed on a back burner because of the high costs of the Iraq war.

Mrs. Clinton campaigned across central and southern [Indiana](#) on Thursday, drawing sizable crowds. In Terre Haute, elderly residents and schoolchildren lined the route of her motorcade. At a rally with several thousand people in Anderson, she briefly touched on her plans to withdraw American troops from Iraq and raised concerns about the high cost of the war.

“We spend \$12 billion a month in Iraq, and that does affect the economy,” Mrs. Clinton said. “That’s one of the reasons we’ve gone into more and more debt. We’ve got to begin not only to withdraw our troops, but bring that money back home. We need to put that money to work here in Indiana.”

A year ago in the opening phase of his candidacy, Mr. Obama tried to appeal to voters because of his opposition to the war. As the economy emerged as voters’ chief concern, Mr. Obama argued that the two were undeniably linked.

“The more than \$10 billion we’re spending each month in Iraq is money we could be investing here at home,” Mr. Obama said. “Just think about what battles we could be fighting instead of fighting this misguided war.”

Mr. McCain, who met European leaders on a Congressional fact-finding tour, responded with forceful criticism of Mr. Obama’s plan to remove combat troops from Iraq.

“Senator Obama would rather rehash the past than look forward with resolve to address fundamental challenges and opportunities we have today to secure our future,” a spokeswoman for the campaign, Jill Hazelbaker, said. “He has embraced an irresponsible policy of withdrawing our troops from Iraq without regard for the conditions on the ground, the advice of our military commanders or the consequences of failure.”

In London, Mr. McCain’s overseas mission briefly morphed into a fund-raising mission. For several days this week, as he met, and was photographed with, leaders in Iraq, Jordan, Israel and Britain, Mr. McCain pointed out that he was traveling as part of a Congressional delegation that taxpayers pay for, and not as a presidential contender.

But he left his Senate staff behind and held a fund-raiser at Spencer House, an 18th-century house built by ancestors of [Princess Diana](#). Behind an imposing façade and out of a cold, damp rain, 100 donors lunched on duck salad and plates of fish on beds of greens and asked Mr. McCain questions about the Middle East, North Korea, [global warming](#) and a host of other issues.

His campaign said it would reimburse Congress for the political part of the trip.

Mr. McCain and his wife, Cindy, did not make remarks when they emerged from the lunch, which drew American expatriates and tourists.

Back in the United States, Mr. Obama’s assessment of the American racial divide continued to reverberate two days after his speech on race. In an interview with a sports station in Philadelphia, WIP-AM, Mr. Obama tried to explain his point about not being able to disown his grandmother, whom he called “a typical white person,” any more than he could disown his minister for making controversial statements about the United States.

“If she sees somebody on the street that she doesn’t know,” Mr. Obama said, “there’s a reaction that’s been bred into our experiences that don’t go away and that sometimes come out in the wrong way. And that’s just the nature of race in our society.”

Jeff Zeleny reported from Charleston, W. Va., and Michael Cooper from London. Patrick Healy contributed reporting from Terre Haute, Ind.