

Senate in 'Mad Rush' To Pass Iraq \$87 Billion

by Carl Osgood

Even as Senate Appropriations Committee chairman Ted Stevens (R-Ak.) was moving to ram the \$87 billion Iraq War Supplemental budget request through the Senate, signs were showing that it might face trouble. The request arrived on Capitol Hill as questions about the Bush Administration's policy in Iraq were increasing, and the debate on the bill is feeding into that process. The questions revolve around the Administration's reconstruction plan—if it even has one, though officials, including Coalition Provisional Authority head Paul Bremer and Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, were protesting that there had been sufficient planning for post-invasion reconstruction and security.

Bremer, often alongside top Pentagon officials, testified at seven hearings from Sept 22-25, trying to drum up support for the supplemental, but he was unable to quell suggestions that the reconstruction money should be in the form of a loan, secured by future Iraqi oil revenues. This is being put forward by some nervous Republicans, such as Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Penn.), who claim they're are being asked by their constituents why Iraq cannot pay for its own reconstruction given its huge oil reserves. Securitizing Iraq's oil reserves, however, is not an idea that originated with Congressional Republicans. Export-Import Bank president Philip Merrill has been promoting the idea since early September, although he downplayed it during a speech on Sept. 25, because of its inherent political and legal difficulties. The loan idea has gained enough currency among Democrats, however, that they plan to make an issue of it during Senate floor consideration of the supplemental.

A visiting delegation of the Iraqi Governing Council also raised concerns that turning the reconstruction money into a loan would create the appearance that the U.S. invaded Iraq for its oil, rather than to liberate the country from Saddam Hussein. Ahmad Chalabi, sometimes called the Pentagon's favorite Iraqi, told reporters, after the delegation met with Senate leaders on Sept. 30, that a loan might re-open that debate, "And this is something we want to avoid at all costs."

The surprise the Senate received from the Iraqi delegation, however, was not that they want the reconstruction money in the form of a grant, but rather, their complaint that they were not consulted on its allocation. Senate Armed Services Committee chairman John Warner (R-Va.) told reporters that he was caught "somewhat by surprise." He said that when he asked the Iraqis if they were consulted by Bremer, "they left enough doubt in my mind, and I'm going directly back to the

Secretary of Defense and ask him to refine for the Senate, very clearly, the process by which Bremer works with that group, and the extent that Bremer does take into consideration their views." That U.S. policy in Iraq might be for some interest other than that of the people of Iraq was indicated by Bremer's own effusive praise of the extreme free-trade, anti-state economic and financial policies he is implementing in Baghdad (see *EIR*, Oct. 3).

The almost lone voice in opposition remains that of Sen. Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.), the presently longest-serving member of the Senate, and self-described champion of the U.S. Constitution. During the Sept. 22 hearing, he noted that he was one of the 23 votes "against giving the President the power which the Constitution does not give him—the power to declare war." He separated the Afghanistan war from the Iraq war, noting that in Iraq "we attacked a sovereign country by the order of the commander in chief. That country did not attack this country. That country did not represent an imminent threat to this country, but we deliberately attacked that country in furtherance of the doctrine of pre-emption."

Byrd credited President Bush with getting the UN weapons inspectors back into Iraq, but even as the inspections were going forward, "the President was apparently bent upon going to war in Iraq." He recalled how Karl Rove, Bush's political guru, "addressed Republican Committee members in January of last year. . . saying that, in essence, we should make this war on terrorism our strategic centerpiece, or words to that effect, for the political campaign."

Byrd also ridiculed the idea that the reconstruction plan that is to be financed by the supplemental, in any way, was comparable to the post-World War II Marshall Plan, a comparison constantly being made by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, among others. During a Sept. 24 hearing, in which Rumsfeld was a witness, Byrd noted that in World War II, the United States was attacked by Japan, and Germany then declared war on the America, and so the post-war occupation of those two countries was the result of a widely-supported defensive war. "We're seeing none of this in Iraq," he said. "For one, the war in Iraq was not defensive. It was a pre-emptive attack. Secondly, we have alienated most of the international community in fighting the war. Third, the Germans and the Japanese did not resist the U.S. occupation through sabotage, assassinations, and guerrilla warfare." Byrd then described how thoroughly the Marshall Plan legislation was examined by the Congress. "There has been a rush, a mad rush to move forward on this bill," Byrd said.

Stevens, however, was able to ram the bill through the Appropriations Committee after one week of hearings. The bill hit the floor on Oct. 1, but with possible threats to its quick passage looming. The bill is moving a little more slowly in the House, with the House GOP leadership expecting to take the bill to the floor around Oct. 8 or 9. However, the loan idea has support among some Republicans there, too, with a spokesman for House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) telling Reuters, on Oct. 2, that he would accept a loan provision.