

Government Report Slams "Emergency" War Funding Request

By Jason Leopold
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Nearly half of the \$94 billion in emergency funding President Bush says Congress needs to immediately make available to continue to pay for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan would actually be used to finance non-urgent items related to the so-called "longer war on terror." The revelation once again casts further doubt on the president's assertion that the Army will run out of funding this month for US troops fighting in those regions, according to a report issued by the nonpartisan research arm of Congress.

The president and officials at the Department of Defense appear to be using a bulk of the emergency spending request sent to Congress more than two months ago to pay for items unrelated to the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. And moreover, using the emergency budget request to escape Congressional scrutiny to finance measures deemed controversial, according to the report, "Fiscal Year 2007 Supplemental Appropriations for Defense, Foreign Affairs, and Other Purposes," released earlier this month by the Congressional Research Service.

"When the president submits an emergency supplemental request, the authorizing committees are bypassed," said Ryan Alexander, president of Taxpayers for Common Sense, a nonpartisan federal budget watchdog group. "The request goes directly to the appropriations committees, and they are pressured by the need to act quickly so that troops in the field do not run out of funds. The result is a spending bill that passes Congress with perfunctory review."

"Since 9/11, Congress has passed at least one emergency bill to cover war costs, making supplemental spending the method of choice for the majority of funding for operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the

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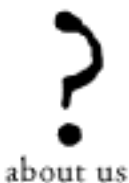
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war on terror," Alexander added. "Of the \$510 billion spent thus far, \$331.8 billion (about 65 percent) has come from supplemental spending legislation. If the so-called "bridge fund" included in the fiscal year 2007 appropriations bill is included, the total rises to \$401.8 billion. That means nearly 80 percent of all funding for these wars was the result of emergency and supplemental spending, not regular budgetary means."



The total funds requested by the Defense Department for emergency spending is \$163.4 billion, including \$70 billion already provided as part of DOD's regular fiscal year appropriations plus a new supplemental request of \$93.4 billion.

"If enacted, DOD's funding would increase by 40 percent above the previous year and would more than double from the FY2004 funding level," the Congressional Research Service (CRS) report says.

A large portion of the emergency funding, according to the report, would be used by the administration to pay for non-urgent matters unrelated to the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, calling into question whether the supplemental request represents a true emergency.

According to a copy of the supplemental bill, \$695 million in emergency funding would be used to send an additional aircraft carrier and Marine Expeditionary Force to the Persian Gulf, which many critics interpret as sending a hostile message to Iran. Furthermore, the Bush administration intends to use \$10 million of the supplemental to help the State Department finance the US-established Alhurra Television (the free one) into 22 Middle Eastern countries. The channel, which broadcasts a wide variety of programs in Arabic from a studio in Springfield, Virginia, is seen as a propaganda tool whose messages are controlled by the Bush administration, according to a report in the Columbia Journalism Review.

The report added that "the request asks for additional authority for DOD to help Iraq restart factories that could be controversial." However, when asked to elaborate, CRS could not provide further details and Congressional representatives did not return calls for comment.

The Congressional Research Service report says the non-urgent items the administration included in its emergency supplemental request and is asking Congress to pay for "appears to be based on a new and expanded definition of war costs that permits the services to fund not only operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, but also the 'longer war on terror.'"

"There is no specific definition of the 'longer war on terror,' now one of the core missions of the Department of Defense," the report says. "This new guidance may be the primary reason for the 40 percent increase over [fiscal year] 2006 funding that DOD is proposing for [fiscal year] 2007. The new definition constitutes a significant shift from long-standing DOD financial regulations that require that costs be necessary to carry out specific operations."

The Congressional Research Service report recommended that Congress scrutinize the administration's funding requests, or perhaps remove language from the proposed legislation entirely, that goes above and beyond money needed to keep additional troops on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan.

"Congress may want to consider whether this expanded definition is appropriate for an emergency supplemental request intended to meet urgent needs," the report added. "Many of the items proposed in the [fiscal year] 2007 supplemental request may not appear to be truly urgent needs, strictly tied to [Operation Iraqi Freedom] and [Operation Enduring Freedom] operations, or likely to be executed within the fiscal year."

Finally, the Defense Department has also included a request for \$500 million to expand its inventory of spare and repair parts, a "reflection of DOD's decision to expand the scope of costs permitted in supplemental requests to include costs of the 'longer war on terror' and not just emergency war costs."

This week, the Democratic-controlled Congress intends to hammer out the final details of the emergency legislation, HR 1591, and send it to President Bush who said he would veto it because it includes specific benchmarks for withdrawing troops from Iraq as well as earmarks for agriculture and other issues some members of Congress inserted into the legislation. However, even after the bill was amended by both Houses late last month, the funding for the administration's policies for the "longer war on terror" was still left in place.

The report says that despite the rhetoric disseminated by Bush and other White House officials about funds drying up this month, the Pentagon has enough money to continue to fund the war until June or July, while Congress and President Bush try and come to an agreement about legislation lawmakers passed last month in which money to fund the Iraq war going forward is contingent upon a clear-cut exit date from the region. Bush has said he will veto the measure, and has stated publicly that additional funding for the war has now reached the point of urgency, a claim Congressional researchers say is untrue.

"The Army is currently claiming that the supplemental needs to be enacted by the end of April to avoid such problems. In this year's bridge fund, however, Congress provided \$28.4 billion to meet the Army's operational needs, some \$7 billion higher than last year's bridge fund. The additional funds could reduce the pressure to pass the supplemental quickly. Using DOD data, CRS estimates that the Army could cover its operational costs until June or July 2007 by using war funds in the bridge, temporarily transferring procurement funds to operations, and tapping monies in its baseline budget that would not be needed until the end of the year," the report says.

Jason Leopold is a former Los Angeles bureau chief for Dow Jones Newswire. He has written over 2,000 stories on the California energy crisis and received the Dow Jones Journalist of the Year Award in 2001 for his coverage on the issue as well as a Project Censored award in 2004. Leopold also reported extensively on Enron's downfall and was the first journalist to land an interview with former Enron president Jeffrey Skilling following Enron's bankruptcy filing in December 2001. Leopold has appeared on CNBC and National Public Radio as an expert on energy policy and has also been the keynote speaker at more than two dozen energy industry conferences around the country.

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