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Bremer: Iraq Effort to Cost Tens of Billions

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Wednesday, August 27, 2003; Page A01

Iraq will need "several tens of billions" of dollars from abroad in the next year to rebuild its rickety infrastructure and revive its moribund economy, and American taxpayers and foreign governments will be asked to contribute substantial sums, U.S. occupation coordinator L. Paul Bremer said yesterday.

▼ ADVERTISING Bremer said Iraqi revenue will not nearly cover the bill for economic needs "almost impossible to exaggerate." Just to meet current electrical demand will cost \$2 billion, Bremer said, while a national system to deliver clean water will cost an estimated \$16 billion over four years.

The figures, which must be added to the \$4 billion the Pentagon spends each month on military operations in Iraq, offer the latest evidence that the price of the Iraqi occupation is growing substantially. A State Department official said the Bush administration is preparing to seek a "huge" supplemental spending bill from Congress. Administration sources also said the U.S.-controlled Coalition Provisional Authority is running so low on funds that the White House is considering seeking an emergency infusion next month to cover the organization's bills.

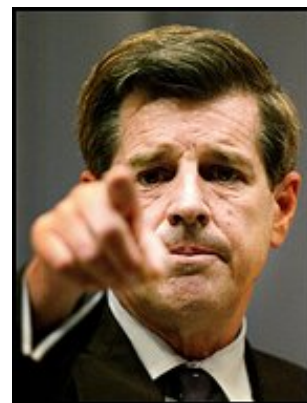
Bremer's comments, in an interview with Washington Post reporters and editors, came on a day when the Congressional Budget Office said the federal government will post a record deficit next year of \$480 billion. Wary of revealing specifics, neither Bremer nor President Bush -- who referred to "substantial" new costs in a St. Louis speech -- would give details.

To tap one source of cash, a "very intense dialogue" is underway with Iraq's 25-member governing council about the need to open the country to foreign investment, Bremer said. That includes deciding the fate of 192 state-owned enterprises -- most significantly the oil industry, which Bremer believes should remain in Iraqi hands.

The administration is eager to draw money and manpower from foreign governments. But a number of countries have said they would remain reluctant unless the United Nations is given greater authority in managing postwar Iraq. Bremer, citing progress in the U.S.-led reconstruction effort, strongly questioned the wisdom of shifting significant responsibility to the United Nations.

"What exactly is it that happens on the ground that makes things better if the U.N. is in charge of reconstruction?" Bremer said. "How does the situation on the ground get better?"

Bremer met yesterday with national security adviser Condoleezza Rice and Secretary of State Colin L. Powell before starting a vacation, taking his first days off since he was dispatched to run Iraq nearly four months ago. He is pressing for support at a perilous and



Iraq is "not a country in chaos and Baghdad is not a city in chaos," says occupation coordinator L. Paul Bremer. (Peter Andrews -- Reuters)

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pivotal time.

Bombs and hostile fire have killed 63 U.S. troops since May 1, while Islamic fighters and operatives of the militant Ansar al-Islam organization pose a "growing terrorist threat," Bremer said. He said that someone tried to bring down a U.S. C-130 transport airplane in recent days by firing a surface-to-air missile near Mosul. It missed the plane.

Covering a range of topics, Bremer described a "massive undertaking" to get Iraq functioning again. He said the project will take years and countless billions of dollars, but he described conditions in Iraq as better and more hopeful than the media often suggest. "I keep reading stories about it's a country in chaos. This is simply not true," Bremer said. "It is not a country in chaos, and Baghdad is not a city in chaos."

Bremer said it will take until next summer for the Coalition Provisional Authority to meet Iraq's daily 6,000-megawatt electricity demand -- longer, if sabotage continues on the country's 19,000 kilometers of power lines. He said the country is producing about 3,300 megawatts, less than the 4,000-megawatt prewar average.

Calling electric power "in many ways the key to reconstruction," he said authorities have ordered a 400-megawatt generator for Baghdad, plus 1.5-megawatt emergency generators for 36 water pumping stations. Engineers have told him Iraq should spend \$13 billion over five years to put the aged system in good order.

Oil revenue is lower than U.S. planners had hoped, afflicted by antiquated facilities, power shortages and severe looting. Bremer said Iraq produced 1.7 million barrels on Monday, down from a prewar range of 2.5 million to 3 million barrels a day. His goal is to return production to prewar levels by October 2004.

Even when Iraqi deliveries return to 2002 levels, the industry will not produce enough revenue for reconstruction, Bremer said. The Bush administration is preparing for a donors conference in Madrid in October, where it hopes to raise significant sums from around the world.

Some potential contributors have said they are uncomfortable with the amount of control exercised over Iraq by the United States. Bremer maintained, however, that his office plays an effective coordinating role and delivers help where it is needed. He said 15 countries have representatives on the Baghdad-based Council for International Coordination, which reports to him.

"We already have 45 countries which have pledged money to the reconstruction. It's not a small number of countries," said Bremer, who argued that a central reconstruction authority is needed. "There ought to be some logic to the whole thing."





Rep. Jim Kolbe (R-Ariz.), chairman of the House Appropriations subcommittee that funds foreign aid, said the administration appears to be "essentially out of funds" for reconstruction and has appeared hesitant to give a swift accounting of what else is needed. "They erode their support when they don't have their act together or don't level with us," he said in a telephone interview.

On other matters, Bremer said the United States is prepared to deliver 37 former Iraqi leaders in U.S. custody to a new government once a court has been established and charges filed. He said Iraqis are drafting a proposal for a special five-judge court staffed by Iraqis.

"We're anxious for them to be seen trying their own people," Bremer said.

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Asked whether he would rather capture former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein dead or alive, he replied with a smile, "Yep."

While security is a persistent problem, Bremer said the attacks on U.S. forces by Baathist fighters are small and almost entirely confined to the area between Baghdad and Tikrit, north of the capital, where Sunni Muslims loyal to the ousted government predominate.

"They pose no strategic threat to the United States or to the coalition forces," Bremer said, "and they do not represent a major effort by the Iraqi population against the coalition."

More worrisome, he said, is what he called a growing danger posed by militants associated with Ansar al-Islam, a fundamentalist group that administration officials say has links with al Qaeda, and by foreign fighters with documents from such countries as Syria, Yemen and Sudan. He said Ansar members have been filtering into Iraq, noting that their camp in northern Iraq was destroyed by U.S. forces during the war.

U.S. commanders have begun replacing heavy armored cavalry units with lighter, more mobile infantry units capable of staging fast raids.

"We have a noble task before us," Bremer said. "It's difficult, it's costly, but it's absolutely achievable. I wouldn't be there if I didn't believe that we could succeed. I'm optimistic about the future of Iraq."

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