



SEARCH:

[Search Options](#)[News](#) > [Opinion](#) > [Columnists](#) > [Colbert I. King](#)

Colbert I. King

Columnist



Wanna Buy a Bridge?

By *Colbert I. King*

Saturday, October 4, 2003; Page A19

"And on a rough recollection, oil revenues of that country could bring in between \$50 and \$100 billion over the course of the next two or three years. We're dealing with a country that can really finance its own reconstruction, and relatively soon."

▼ ADVERTISING -- Deputy Secretary of Defense and key Iraqi war

architect Paul Wolfowitz, March 27 (from the Oct. 1 Congressional Record).

Now, would you buy a used car from that man?

Because if you are willing to buy what he and his Bush administration colleagues are selling, they have a new deal for you to swallow: \$87 billion in "emergency" supplemental appropriations for Iraq and Afghanistan, including \$20 billion in U.S. taxpayer-financed grants to rebuild post-Saddam Hussein Iraq. But wait, you may ask, wasn't it only five months ago that Wolfowitz was saying Iraq could pay for its reconstruction?

Well, yes. But by now, it ought to be plain beyond question -- even to the most ardent Bush loyalist -- that when it comes to Iraq and the aim of transforming the Middle East, this administration will say and do just about anything to get its way.

One day it's the imminent threat from Hussein and his weapons of mass destruction:

"The gravity of this moment is matched by the gravity of the threat that Iraq's weapons of mass destruction pose to the world . . . they are real and present dangers to the region and to the world. Leaving Saddam Hussein in possession of weapons of mass destruction for a few more months or years is not an option."

-- Secretary of State Colin Powell, Feb. 5

So we went to war.

Now we learn this week that CIA weapons expert David Kay and his 1,400-member team of searchers have found no chemical or biological weapons in Iraq and have concluded that Saddam Hussein's nuclear program was in "the very most rudimentary" state.

Today's Op-Eds

- [A Serious Game](#) (Post, Oct. 5, 2003)
- [Fascism, Alive and Abroad](#) (Post, Oct. 5, 2003)
- [Fiscal Doomsday in the Offing](#) (Post, Oct. 5, 2003)
- [Being There](#) (Post, Oct. 5, 2003)
- [The Long Haul](#) (Post, Oct. 5, 2003)

What's Your Opinion?

- Share Your Views About Editorials and Opinion Pieces on Our [Message Boards](#)
- [About Message Boards](#)



More King

- [Democracy Denied Redux](#) (The Washington Post, Sep 27, 2003)
- [Baghdad, Birmingham and True Believers](#) (The Washington Post, Sep 20, 2003)
- [Drafting a Better Anti-Terror War](#) (The Washington Post, Sep 13, 2003)
- [About Colbert King](#)

[an error occurred while processing this directive]

Free E-mail Newsletters

- [News Headlines](#)
- [News Alert](#)

[Subscribe to](#)

The Washington Post

- [E-Mail This Article](#)
- [Printer-Friendly Version](#)
- [Permission to Republish](#)

Are you still willing to buy what this bunch is selling? Rest assured, they have plenty of it, piled high, wide and deep, and ready to go.

And they have no shame.

They tell us with straight faces that our national security interests and the future of Iraqi freedom are riding on the U.S. taxpayer: buying pickup trucks for Iraqis at \$33,000 each; purchasing 600 radios and telephones for Iraq at \$6,000 a piece; spending \$54 million for a comprehensive consulting technical study for the Iraqi postal system; shelling out \$800 million to train 1,500 Iraqi police officers at \$530,000 per; building \$400 million maximum security prisons at \$50,000 a bed; spending \$100 million to enroll 100 Iraqi families of five in a witness protection program at \$200,000 a person; buying 40 garbage trucks at \$50,000 apiece; shelling out \$100 million to pay for 500 experts to investigate crimes against humanity at \$200,000 a person; and spending \$1.5 million for museums documenting Iraqi atrocities.

Spend anything less than the \$20 billion in this year alone, the administration tells us, and Iraqi confidence will be hurt, extremists will be strengthened and Iraq's democratic future will face certain doom. Believe that?

Here's something you can believe. That kind of spending is going to make some folks rich, and they aren't Iraqis. We've already seen lucrative no-bid contracts let to influential U.S. firms, and we've read stories of Bush administration cronies establishing consulting companies to serve as go-betweens for contractors seeking to hop aboard the Iraq gravy train.

That greed is matched by the audacious way in which they are selling the American public on the \$20 billion reconstruction package (which will be borrowed from the Social Security trust fund and other trust funds and repaid by our grandchildren). The administration, which has wrapped the emergency spending package (the museums, garbage trucks, consultants, etc.) in the U.S. flag, is now poised to question the patriotism of any member of Congress vigilant and brave enough to ask whether all of that spending is necessary.

They have even resorted to revisionist history. For instance, they liken the Iraq package to a latter-day version of the Marshall Plan, which rebuilt postwar Europe. Fortunately, Rhode Island Democratic Sen. Jack Reed set the record straight this week.

Reed pointed out during Senate debate that the Marshall Plan wasn't whisked through Congress in a few weeks. The program was thoroughly examined and kept on a short leash so Congress could annually authorize and appropriate the funds.

What's more, noted Reed, the Marshall Plan was not a giveaway to war-torn Europe. "The Marshall Plan required a dollar-per-dollar match by the recipient. It was not an unconditional grant from the Treasury of the United States," he said. About 10 percent of the aid, Reed observed, was in the form of loans that required repayment. And unlike what's going on in Iraq, the Marshall Plan "was based on transparency, not secret contracts to companies favored by the administration," Reed said.

He also observed that there was a robust U.S. presence in Germany after the war -- a deployment that drove home to Germans the scope of their defeat. That can't be said of Iraq today.

What can be said is that the Bush administration is putting the United States on the hook to spend not only \$20 billion this year on Iraqi reconstruction but billions more in the years to come. And here's how it extorts the payments: Don't spend the money and chaos will descend upon Iraq. Continued chaos, and troops can't come home.

What an exit strategy!

Now you may ask why Iraq, which sits on the world's second largest oil reserves, can't help pay for its own reconstruction and rehabilitation? Iraq has huge international debts and can't afford to take on more liabilities, says the administration, which favors making the \$20 billion and the billions that must follow outright gifts. Apparently it matters not that Iraq's debt was run up by Saddam Hussein, who built palaces and took care of his cronies and did little for his own people. Or that his international creditors are the likes of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, France, Russia and Germany. Forget all that, says the White House: Be good Americans and just give them the money.

But as three to six soldiers are killed and 40 are wounded each week, and our treasury is being drained by the Middle East, consider this future scenario: Deficit-ridden Uncle Sam goes further into debt to correct Hussein's neglect of his own country. Thanks to our spending, Iraq's petroleum sector is rehabilitated and Iraqis sell oil on the open market and keep the proceeds. Finally up and running and flourishing in financial health, Iraqis begin repaying Hussein's debts to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the three European countries that didn't lift a finger to take that tyrant's boot off their necks.

Uncle Sam, or did you say Uncle Sap?

This administration would call the whole thing a smashing success.

kingc@washpost.com

© 2003 The Washington Post Company

[News](#) > [Opinion](#) > [Columnists](#) > [Colbert I. King](#)

GO

GO

SEARCH:

[Search Options](#)

washingtonpost.com

[Personalize Your Post](#) | [Go to mywashingtonpost.com](#)

[Home](#)

[News](#)

[Politics](#)

[Entertainment](#)

[Live Discussions](#)

[Photos](#)

[Marketplace](#)

[Jobs](#)