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U.S. IN IRAQ TO HELP WITH RECONSTRUCTION AND SECURITY, SAYS POWELL

Defends coalition removal of Ba'athist regime in BBC interview

Secretary of State Colin Powell said that although he expects violence to continue in Iraq, he hopes it will dissipate once the Iraqi people see their own government running the country, and recognize that the United States is only there to provide reconstruction assistance and security.

Speaking in a June 24 interview with the BBC's Jon Leyne, Powell said, "We have to keep making the point to the Iraqi people that we are there with billions of dollars in reconstruction money for your schools, for your hospitals, for your sewers, for your power plants, for your oil infrastructure; we are there to help you and your own forces are now being built up to protect you."

He said suspected al Qaeda operative Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and others who do not wish to see a free society in Iraq will "do everything they can to disrupt" the reconstruction effort, said Powell. But al-Zarqawi does not offer a positive alternative to the Iraqi people, he said.

"Is he there to help the Iraqi people? Is he there to put up hospitals? Is he there to create a political system so the Iraqi people can vote for their leaders? Is he there to help write a constitution?" asked Powell.

“He’s there for death and destruction, the death and destruction of the Iraqi people and the death and destruction of the dreams of the Iraqi people,” he said.

Pledging that coalition and Iraqi forces will get the country’s security under control, Powell said, “We will not let the remnants of this regime deny the people the benefits of the destruction of the regime.”

Asked to comment on U.S. unpopularity throughout the world, the secretary said his country would overcome it. “[W]e did the right thing,” he said. “We got rid of a terrible regime that did terrible things to their people and caused great instability in that part of the world.”

The United States has experienced international opposition before, he said, recalling strong opposition to the decision to deploy Pershing and GLCM missiles in Europe during the 1980s.

“We believe that if our policies are right, and if we have done the right thing, that ultimately, people will see we have done the right thing,” he said.

Secretary Powell also defended his February 5, 2003, presentation before the United Nations in which he accused the former Iraqi regime of possessing weapons of mass destruction and having ties to terrorist organizations.

“[W]hat I did on the 5th of February was present the facts as we knew them,” he said, but he admitted being subsequently distressed that some of the information he had presented has not been adequately sourced.

However, Powell said his assertions that Iraq never gave up the intent to possess WMD, continued to have the capability to develop them and did not answer the United Nations’ longstanding questions about its weapons programs have “not been challenged.”

“The failure in my presentation subsequently is that we have not found weapons stocks. We have not found the stocks -- yet,” Powell said.

Alternatively, he argued, if Saddam Hussein’s regime “had escaped judgment,” all the constraints against his weapons programs would be gone.

“Saddam Hussein would still be there, he would still have the intention, he would still have the capability, and he would be producing weapons of mass destruction and

that would be a real and present danger,” he said.

U.S. OFFICIALS INVESTIGATING ALLEGATIONS OF GENOCIDE IN DARFUR, SUDAN

Secretary Powell to Visit Region, Meet with Sudanese Officials

By Tara Boyle
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- The question of whether genocide is taking place in the Darfur region of Sudan is “not a matter of debate” for the U.S. government, a senior official in the Bush administration said June 24, it is merely a matter of confirmation.

Pierre-Richard Prosper, the U.S. ambassador-at-large for war crimes issues, told members of Congress that U.S. officials are trying to gain access to Darfur so that they can confirm definitively that genocide is occurring.

“We are collecting all the information that we can to make a conclusive determination, so we’re prepared to call it as we see it. And again, one of the things that we want to do...is to get in and do a bit of fact-finding, because once we pronounce [that genocide is taking place], it’s official and it’s final,” he explained.

“And we’re prepared to do it,” he added.

Prosper’s comments came during testimony before the House Subcommittee on Africa, immediately after an announcement by the State Department that Secretary Powell will travel to Darfur and meet with Sudanese officials following next week’s NATO summit in Turkey.

According to estimates by international humanitarian organizations, at least 1.2 million people in Darfur have been forced from their homes and scores have been terrorized or killed by Arab militias known as the Jingawit. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has warned that at least 320,000 people will likely die in the coming months from hunger and illness as a result of the violence.

Prosper said in his testimony that the United States is working to determine the guilt of seven alleged Jingawit

commanders and coordinators and those who support them. The U.S. has also warned Sudanese officials that they could face targeted sanctions -- including travel restrictions and the seizure of assets -- if they do not work to end the violence in Darfur.

“We’re looking at this. We’re looking to see what we as an administration can do. We are also looking to see what the United Nations can and should do in this matter. ... Our mind is open because when we take this action, we’ll want to make sure that we do so properly and effectively,” Prosper said.

In addition to the crisis in Darfur, the hearing also addressed the question of whether former Liberian President Charles Taylor, who is currently in exile in Nigeria, should be handed over to the Special Court for Sierra Leone to face a war crimes indictment.

Prosper said that the international community should “speed up the timetable” for turning Taylor over to the Court, and that he has urged Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo to do so. The United States and the transitional government of Liberia also have agreed to work together on a “joint strategy” for dealing with Taylor, he said.

Howard Jeter, a former U.S. ambassador to Nigeria who also testified at the hearing, offered a different perspective on Nigeria’s decision to offer exile to Taylor. President Obasanjo made the asylum offer to Taylor to prevent further violence in Liberia, Jeter said, and should be lauded for his actions, he said.

Jeter also said he was not concerned that Taylor still remains a threat to Liberia. “It’s my understanding that Taylor is pretty isolated and pretty miserable,” he said.

U.S., SPAIN PRAISED FOR HELPING EL SALVADOR ERADICATE CHILD LABOR

Envoy says fewer Salvadoran children perform dangerous jobs

By Eric Green
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- The government of El Salvador has praised the United States and Spain for helping the Central American nation eradicate the worst forms of child labor.

In a June 24 letter to the Washington Post, El Salvador’s ambassador to the United States, Rene Leon, said that with the support of the U.S. and Spanish governments, “some 10,000 [Salvadoran] children and parents have been assisted and removed from dangerous jobs,” and that 35,000 more people are expected to receive help through 2005.

El Salvador, said Leon, “is working hard to eradicate child labor and create an environment in which all children complete their education.”

Leon added that the U.S.-Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) will broaden labor protections for his country and for the other four Central American countries that have signed the agreement. CAFTA, Leon wrote, “will be a powerful catalyst for strengthening institutional reforms and El Salvador’s ability to ensure implementation of core labor standards.”

Leon’s letter was in response to a June 10 Washington Post article, “El Salvador Scarred by Child Labor,” which the ambassador charged “contained no information about El Salvador’s progress in eradicating child labor.”

In his rebuttal to the Post article, Leon said that since 1992, El Salvador has undergone a “dramatic transformation” from poverty, oppression, and civil war to economic growth, democracy, and political stability. Leon said his government has rebuilt the “industrial labor relations system and improved implementation and enforcement of labor laws, including those banning child labor.”

In addition, the envoy said El Salvador was among the first countries in the Western Hemisphere to ratify a U.N. International Labor Organization (ILO) convention “on

the worst forms of child labor and the first to eliminate child labor under a new ILO initiative.”

For its part, the United States has provided since 2001 over \$25 million in grants to help 14 countries in the Americas combat child labor in commercial sexual exploitation, agriculture, small-scale mining, domestic service and fireworks production.

As part of that assistance, the United States funds the Child Labor Education Initiative (EI) to improve the accessibility and quality of basic education for children who have been involved in the worst forms of child labor or are at risk of becoming involved. EI projects are devoted exclusively to supporting education as a powerful intervention for combating child labor. In the Americas, EI programs totaling \$7 million are in place in El Salvador, Peru and Bolivia, with other programs planned for Brazil and the Dominican Republic.

The U.S. Department of Labor is also playing a key role in the negotiation of the labor provisions of free-trade agreements. This includes supporting the negotiation of free-trade agreements through capacity-building technical assistance projects aimed at strengthening labor law administration and compliance, and combating exploitative child labor. In fiscal year 2003, the Labor Department awarded \$13.6 million in technical assistance grants aimed at strengthening labor law compliance in support of free-trade negotiations in Central America, and elsewhere around the world.

The ILO estimates that about 246 million children are involved in child labor around the world. One in eight of these children are reportedly exposed to conditions that endanger them physically, mentally or morally.

HIV/AIDS, FOREIGN AID SPENDING BOOSTED IN PRELIMINARY HOUSE BILL

But appropriations panel cuts Bush's overall spending request

By Berta Gomez
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- A House of Representatives panel has approved a \$19.4 billion spending bill that would boost U.S. foreign aid, including for overseas HIV/AIDS programs, though it falls short of President Bush's overall spending request for the coming year.

The measure approved June 23 by a House Appropriations subcommittee would cut the Bush administration's foreign aid request for the fiscal year starting October 1 by \$1.9 billion but would increase spending by \$1.9 billion as compared to the current fiscal year.

The subcommittee action is a preliminary step in the appropriations process. A bill must be passed by the entire appropriations committee, the House and the Senate and signed by Bush before it becomes law. The 2005 fiscal year (FY2005) covered by the draft bill runs from October 1, 2004, through September 30, 2005.

Subcommittee members voted to approve the president's request of \$2.2 billion to fight HIV/AIDS and other major diseases overseas, and Representative Jim Kolbe, Republican subcommittee chairman, was quoted as saying that another \$600 million would be provided in a separate appropriations bill, raising U.S. spending for AIDS programs to \$2.8 billion in FY2005.

The funding is part of a major Bush administration push to increase U.S. spending on health crises in poor countries. In 2003, Bush signed legislation committing \$15 billion to combat AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria worldwide over five years.

Funding for a separate Bush administration initiative aimed at helping poor countries -- the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) -- would be \$1.25 billion in 2005, up from \$1 billion this year but only half of the \$2.5 billion requested by the president.

The MCA was established in 2003 as a platform for providing additional U.S. aid to poor countries that govern well, invest in their citizens and adopt market-based eco

conomic reforms. Under Bush administration plans, MCA spending would reach \$5 billion a year by 2006.

The committee also cut the administration's request for the World Bank's International Development Association (IDA), which provides grants and low-cost loans to the world's poorest countries. Under the draft bill, IDA would receive \$850 million -- \$211 million less than Bush's budget request and \$90 million less than in the current year.

The subcommittee measure would increase aid to Poland, a key U.S. ally in Iraq. It also includes military assistance to Pakistan and money to support that country's anti-terrorist operations.

The House panel approved \$311 million for humanitarian assistance for victims and refugees from the Darfur region of Sudan, but prohibited any funds from going to the Sudanese government until it halts sponsorship of the violence in Darfur.

Representative Nita Lowey of New York, the ranking Democrat on the subcommittee, said she expected that an amendment to restore U.S. funding for the U.N. Population Fund would be offered during the full Appropriations Committee consideration of the bill. Current U.S. law, dating back to the Reagan era, bars aid to international family planning organizations that perform or promote abortions even if they use their own funds to do so.

The full committee is expected to consider the foreign operations measure in early July.