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Squeezing the Military Through the Emergency War Supplemental

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As Congress begins consideration of the second emergency supplemental spending bill for Iraq and Afghanistan—a bill that provides funding for the last six months of fiscal year (FY) 2009—Members must scrutinize the request to ensure all of the military's needs are met.

Congressional Quarterly is reporting that Representative John Murtha (D-PA) is considering providing an additional \$10 billion to the \$75.5 billion portion of the request specifically for the military. A back-of-the-envelope calculation and some common sense indicate that \$10 billion will be the minimum additional amount needed above the President's request to meet current military requirements. Congress should support an emergency supplemental request that adds significantly more funding, specifically for military procurement.

Reduced War Funding Request, Yet Missions Are Increasing. Before Congress can accurately consider the pending second 2009 supplemental, it should review previous supplementals. According to the Congressional Research Service, “while Congress provided \$188 billion for war costs in FY 2008—\$17 billion more than the prior year—this total was \$14 billion less than the Administration's initial request, including both reductions in DoD's investment accounts and substitutions of almost \$6 billion in non-war funding.”¹ During the two years that covered the “surge” of forces into and out of Iraq, Congress provided \$171 billion in 2007 and \$188 billion in 2008. By comparison, this year—a year when the U.S. is also sending additional forces

into combat, only this time to Afghanistan—President Obama is proposing a total of \$141 billion (which includes the enacted supplemental for the first half of the year submitted by President Bush).

President Obama's proposal constitutes a reduction in supplemental spending for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan of about \$44 billion from FY 2008. Granted, some of the supplemental funding for personnel was moved to the base defense budget where it belongs, thereby reducing the need for at least \$10 billion in the war funding bill in 2009. Yet this reduced supplemental request is supposed to fund a military that is now being asked to do even more: The bill must cover all ongoing operations, a significant 21,000-troop increase in Afghanistan, and the beginning of a troop drawdown in Iraq.

Congress must realize that any potential savings from the reduction of operations in Iraq will not be realized within the next year and most likely not the year after either. If U.S. military force levels are reduced in Iraq, the cost of redeploying combat forces will likely be significantly more expensive than maintaining current force levels. According to scenarios run by the Congressional Budget Office, the cost of reducing the number of forces deployed

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in and around Iraq by 50,000 over one year and then continuing declining until all troops are withdrawn within two years would require an additional \$166 billion over a nine-year period.²

In addition, force levels are currently scheduled to grow in Afghanistan even before any troops are scheduled to return from Iraq—also increasing war-related costs for the rest of 2009 and undoubtedly 2010. Finally, Congress must be reminded that during numerous budget hearings, members of the Joint Chiefs have repeatedly testified that the services—particularly the U.S. Army—will continue to need billions of dollars for at least three years after Iraq operations wind down in order to repair and replace equipment damaged during combat operations.

All Indicators Show the Current Supplemental Request Is Too Small. These mission changes, combined with force increases in Afghanistan, confront Congress with the question of whether the current supplemental request for the military provided by the White House is sufficient. An analysis by James McAleese of McAleese & Associates, P.C., indicates that the White House proposal included major funding reductions in the pending supplemental request that target both Army tracked combat vehicles and communications along with Navy and Air Force aircraft procurement before arriving on the Hill. The premature contraction of funds in the supplemental spending bill for procurement has already hurt the Army, particularly in regard to programs for wheeled and tracked vehicles like the Abrams, Bradley, and Stryker.

The analysis continues by noting that President Obama is attempting to save money through the warfighting supplemental by only extending funds for operations and maintenance on a flat-line basis while cutting procurement to below 2007 levels needed to match the pace of operations. Reports indicate that the White House has reduced the military's procurement request for the 2009 supplement-

tal by a startling \$27 billion. Given the procurement cuts being proposed by Secretary Gates in the forthcoming core Pentagon budget request for fiscal year 2010, the procurement cuts in the supplemental request are even more disturbing. A clear pattern may be emerging where President Obama embarks on a procurement holiday similar to that of the 1990s.

Congress Must Stop the Ambush on the Military's Procurement Accounts. The military's procurement account funds equipment and weapons systems. This critical pot of money buys new trucks, tanks, helicopters, drones, fighter jets, cargo and transport aircraft, and ships. It also helps reset the equipment that has been heavily used at wartime rates or damaged from military operations. Resetting Army and Marine Corps equipment and vehicles is not a luxury; it is a necessity.

Therefore, Congress must draw a stark line in the sand and oppose the White House's proposed procurement cuts in the pending warfighting supplemental request. Congress should support early efforts by Chairman Murtha to add an additional \$10 billion—at least—in procurement funds to the emergency supplemental spending bill. Providing a penny less than the full funding needed to protect America's armed forces would be unfathomable and unconscionable. The Joint Chiefs of Staff must not be muzzled in providing their open and honest assessment of current military needs and what may be lacking in the White House request. Congress must first ask the military directly what it needs to stay protected and prevail in combat. Then, Congress must provide the appropriate additional funding—quickly.

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1. Amy Belasco, "The Cost of Iraq, Afghanistan, and Other Global War on Terror Operations Since 9/11," Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, RL33110, October 15, 2008, at <http://www.fas.org/sfp/crs/natsec/RL33110.pdf> (April 26, 2009).
2. Donald B. Marron, CBO letter to Rep. John M. Spratt, Jr., Ranking Member, Committee on the Budget, U.S. House of Representatives, July 13, 2006, at http://www.cbo.gov/ftpdocs/73xx/doc7393/07-13-IraqCost_Letter.pdf (April 26, 2009).