Iraq: U.S. Military Operations

Updated October 2, 2003

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# Iraq: U.S. Military Operations

| 1. REPORT DATE | OCT 2003 |
| 2. REPORT TYPE | |
| 3. DATES COVERED | 00-00-2003 to 00-00-2003 |
| 4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE | Iraq: U.S. Military Operations |
| 5. CONTRACT NUMBER | |
| 5b. GRANT NUMBER | |
| 5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER | |
| 5d. PROJECT NUMBER | |
| 5e. TASK NUMBER | |
| 5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER | |
| 6. AUTHOR(S) | |
| 8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER | |
| 9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) | |
| 10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S) | |
| 11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S) | |
| 12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT | Approved for public release; distribution unlimited |
| 13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES | |
| 14. ABSTRACT | |
| 15. SUBJECT TERMS | |
| 16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF: | |
| a. REPORT | unclassified |
| b. ABSTRACT | unclassified |
| c. THIS PAGE | unclassified |
| 17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT | Same as Report (SAR) |
| 18. NUMBER OF PAGES | 13 |
| 19. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON | |

Report Documentation Page

Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8-98) Preprinted by ANSI Bal Z39-18
Summary

Iraq’s chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons programs, together with Iraqi long-range missile development and support for terrorism, were the primary justifications put forward for military action. On March 17, 2003 President Bush issued an ultimatum demanding that Saddam Hussein and his sons depart from Iraq within 48 hours. On March 19, offensive operations began with air strikes against Iraqi leadership positions. By April 15, after 27 days of operations, coalition forces were in relative control of all major Iraqi cities and Iraqi political and military leadership had disintegrated. On May 1, President Bush declared an end to major combat operations. There was no use of chemical or biological (CB) weapons, and no CB weapons stockpiles have been found.

The major challenges to coalition forces are now quelling a persistent Iraqi resistance movement, restoring civil order, and providing basic services to the urban population. U.S. troops continue to come under sporadic attacks, primarily in central Iraq. Though initially denying that these attacks were the work of an organized resistance movement, DOD officials have now acknowledged there is at least regional organization, with apparently ample supplies of arms and funding. CENTCOM commander Gen. Abizaid, has characterized the Iraqi resistance as “a classical guerrilla-type campaign. DOD believes the resistance to comprise primarily former regime supporters, however others are concerned that growing resentment of coalition forces and resurgent Iraq nationalism, independent of connections with the earlier regime, may be contributing to the resistance. As of October 1, 310 U.S. troops have died in Iraq operations. Of these deaths, 173 have occurred since May 1, 2003.

Approximately 129,000 U.S. troops are in Iraq, with perhaps an additional 40,000 elsewhere in the region. Approximately, 20,000 of these troops are reservists, and an additional 10,000 reservists are on mobilization alert. DOD has not released an official and current list of other nations contributing forces, however press reports indicate that between 21,000-29,000 non-U.S. troops are also in theater, with Britain, Poland, Spain, the Netherlands, Italy, and the Ukraine being the largest contributors. Other nations reported to be contributing troops include: Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Estonia, Georgia (Gruzia) Honduras, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Mongolia, Nicaragua, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, and South Korea

Congress approved a $62.37 billion FY2003 supplemental budget request for Iraq operations (H.Rept. 108-76), and DOD currently estimates the cost of military operations to be $3.9 billion per month. President Bush has submitted an emergency supplemental FY2004 appropriations request for $87 billion, of which $51 billion is for military operations in Iraq.

This report will be updated as events warrant.
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Iraq: U.S. Military Operations

Background

Iraq’s chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons programs, together with Iraqi long-range missile development, and support for terrorism are the primary justifications put forward by the Bush Administration for military action. Since Iraq originally ended cooperation with U.N. inspectors in 1998, there has been little information on the state of Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction (WMD) arsenal; however, Administration officials were convinced that Iraq had reconstituted significant capabilities. Initially, leading Administration officials, most notably Vice-President Cheney, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld, and his Deputy Paul Wolfowitz, stressed that “regime change” or the removal of Saddam Hussein from power. Later in 2002, WMD disarmament was emphasized as the primary objective. Expanding on this theme, President Bush, in his speech before the United Nations on September 12, 2002 specified the following conditions for Iraq to meet to forestall military action against it:

- Immediately and unconditionally forswear, disclose, and remove or destroy all weapons of mass destruction, long-range missiles, and all related material.
- End all support for terrorism and act to suppress it.
- Cease persecution of its civilian population.
- Release or account for all Gulf War missing personnel.
- End all illicit trade outside the oil-for-food program and allow United Nations administration of its funds.¹

On March 17, 2003 President Bush issued an ultimatum demanding that Saddam Hussein and his sons depart from Iraq within 48 hours. On March 19, offensive operations commenced with air strikes against Iraqi leadership positions.

Military Planning & Combat Operations

The Department of Defense released only limited official information concerning war planning or preparations against Iraq prior to the onset of offensive operations. There were, however, frequent and significant news leaks which provided a range of details. News reports indicated that the military options that were under discussion varied significantly in their assumptions regarding Iraq military capabilities, the usefulness of Iraqi opposition groups, the attitude of regional governments, and the U.S. military resources that would be required.

¹ President Bush’s Address to the U.N. General Assembly, September 12, 2002.
Options Considered

In the wake of the successful operations in Afghanistan against the Taliban, some Administration officials advocated a similar operation, entailing use of special operations forces in cooperation with indigenous Iraqi opposition forces, coupled with an extensive air offensive to destroy Hussein’s most reliable Republican Guard units, command & control centers, and WMD capabilities. This approach assumed that the regular Iraqi army would prove unreliable, and could even join opposition forces once it is clear that defeat is imminent. To encourage this, significant emphasis would be placed on an intensive psychological warfare or “psyops” campaign to undermine the morale of Iraqi soldiers and unit commanders, persuading them of the hopelessness of resistance.2

While having the advantage of not requiring large staging areas (though some regional air basing would be required) or months to prepare, this was generally considered the riskiest approach. The weakness of Iraqi opposition military forces and their competing political agendas place their effectiveness in question, and predicting the behavior of regular Iraqi Army units under attack is problematic. This option also did not address the possibility of stiff resistance by Republican Guard units in the environs of Baghdad, nor the troop requirements of a post-conflict occupation.

This “lite” option stood in contrast to the operations plan originally offered by U.S. Central Command. This option, often called the “Franks Plan”, after Army Gen. Tommy Franks, the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) commander who first briefed it to the President, calls for a large-scale ground force invasion. News reports initially indicated, however, that this “heavy” approach did not receive the support of the DOD civilian leadership or White House advisors. Questions over the reliability of the regional support that would be necessary for staging areas and the length of time required for deployment were the major concerns.3 However, the White House rejection of the “Franks Plan” came prior to the decision to take the Iraq issue to the United Nations Security Council. When it became clear that Security Council deliberations and the re-introduction of U.N. inspectors to Iraq could delay the possibility of military action for several months, it was apparently decided that this interlude would allow time both to negotiate regional cooperation and to deploy more substantial forces to the Persian Gulf region, and military operations today appear to adhere closer to CENTCOM’s original recommendations. As the ground force offensive has slowed, however, there was increasing criticism of DOD’s civilian leadership for not permitting the deployment of even more ground forces prior to onset of operations.4

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Combat Operations Prior to May 1, 2003

Offensive operations combined an air offensive and simultaneous ground offensive, in contrast to the 1991 campaign which saw weeks of air attacks to soften Iraqi resistance. U.S. Central Command’s operational plan employed a smaller ground force than the 1991 Desert Storm operation, reflecting an assessment that Iraqi armed forces were neither as numerous nor as capable as they were ten years ago, and that U.S. forces are significantly more capable. This option depended upon the continued cooperation of regional nations for substantial staging areas/airbases and required months to deploy the necessary forces.

Though press reports differed somewhat, reportedly over 340,000 U.S. military personnel were in the Persian Gulf region (ashore and afloat). The 3rd Mechanized Infantry Division, the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), the 7th Cavalry Regiment, and the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force formed the bulk of the U.S. ground offensive. The 4th Mechanized Infantry Division arrived late in theater. Ships bearing its equipment remained off Turkey for weeks awaiting the outcome of negotiations to permit establishing a northern front attacking from Turkey, and then were diverted to the Persian Gulf when these negotiations fell through. The U.S. Navy deployed five of its twelve naval aircraft carrier battle groups. The Air Force had approximately 15 air wings operating in the region. Strategic bombers operated from the British airbase at Diego Garcia, and airbases in the Middle East, Europe, and the United States. The United Kingdom deployed over 47,000 personnel, including a naval task force, a Royal Marine brigade, a parachute brigade, a Special Air Service regiment, and a Special Boat Squadron. The majority of these British forces were engaged in southeastern Iraq, securing the Umm Qasr and Basra region. Australia deployed approximately 2,000 personnel, primarily special operations personnel, and one F/A-18 attack aircraft squadron. Poland had 200 special operations troops around Basra. (For more detailed information, see CRS Report RL31763, Iraq: A Summary of U.S. Forces and CRS Report RL31843, Iraq Foreign Stances Toward U.S. Policy)

The invasion of Iraq was expected to begin with a 72-96 hour air offensive to paralyze the Iraqi command structure, and demoralize Iraqi resistance across the military-civilian spectrum. Intelligence reports indicating the possibility of striking Saddam Hussein and his immediate circle led to an acceleration of the operations plan, and an almost simultaneously onset of air and ground offensive operations. CENTCOM air commanders stressed that significant efforts would be made to minimize civilian casualties and damage to Iraqi physical infrastructure, and they were mostly successful in this effort.

With twenty-five days of offensive operations, coalition forces had relative control of all major Iraqi cities, including Baghdad, Basra, Mosul, Kirkuk, and Tikrit. CENTCOM pursued a strategy of rapid advance, by-passing urban centers when possible, pausing only when encountering Iraqi resistance. CENTCOM spokesmen characterized Iraqi resistance as sporadic and uncohesive. Oilfields and port facilities throughout Iraq were secured, as have all major air bases in Iraq. Though a few oil wells were set afire, all were quelled, and there has been no widespread environmental sabotage. Allied forces did not encounter the mass surrenders characteristic of the 1991 campaign, however DOD reported that over 6,000 Iraqis
were taken prisoner, and believes that many more have simply deserted their positions. Iraqi paramilitary forces, particularly the Saddam Fedayeen, engaged in guerrilla-style attacks from urban centers in the rear areas, but did not inflict significant damage. Nevertheless, greater attention than anticipated had to be paid to protecting extended supply lines, and securing these urban centers, particularly around an-Nasiriyah and Najaf, and in the British sector around Umm Qasr and Basra.

Though CENTCOM commanders expressed confidence in the adequacy of their force structure in theater, the Iraqi attacks in rear areas and the length of the supply lines to forward units led some to suggest that insufficient ground forces were in place to continue the offensive while securing rear areas and ensuring uninterrupted logistical support. These critics faulted DOD civilian leadership for overestimating the effectiveness of a precision air offensive and curtailing the deployment of more ground troops, suggesting that an ideological commitment to smaller ground forces and greater reliance on high-tech weaponry had dominated military planning. With collapse of the Iraqi regime, however, this criticism muted.

Without permission to use Turkish territory, CENTCOM was unable to carry out an early ground offensive in Northern Iraq. However, Special operations forces, the 173rd Airborne Brigade, and air-lifted U.S. armor, operating with Kurdish irregulars seized Mosul, Kirkuk, and Tikrit. Cooperation with Kurdish militias in the north has been excellent. Even a mistaken airstrike against a allied Kurdish vehicle convoy, killing or wounding senior Kurdish leaders, did not adversely affect this cooperation. Potentially complicating the situation in the north, was a Turkish desire to possibly augment the 8,000+ troops it has had stationed in Kurdish-held territory in order to block possible Kurdish refugees and influence the accommodations made to the Kurds in a post-conflict Iraq. Turkish military spokesmen have indicated that no additional Turkish forces will move into Iraq at this time. The U.S. has assured Turkey that the Kurdish forces involved in seizing Mosul and Kirkuk would be withdrawn and replaced with U.S. troops.

**Post-May, 2003 Operations**

With the onset of widespread looting and the breakdown of public services (electricity, water) in the cities, coalition forces were confronted with the challenges of restoring public order and infrastructure even before combat operations ceased. Though U.S. forces have come under criticism for not having done more to prevent looting, the transition from combat to police roles is a difficult one, particularly when an important objective is winning popular support. Harsh reactions risk alienation of the population, yet inaction reduces confidence in the ability of coalition forces to maintain order. Indicative of the seriousness of the civil disorder, U.S. officials in Iraq authorized U.S. troops to shoot looters if necessary. In addition to looting,

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6 “U.S. Military Chief Vows More Troops to Quell Iraqi Looting”, *New York Times*, May (continued...
coalition forces also have to ensure that factional violence and does not derail stabilization efforts. U.S. forces, however, are spread relatively thin throughout Iraq, and many argue that additional troops in theater could improve the pace and breadth of stabilization operations.

The attitude of the Iraq population is the key element, and depends upon a variety of factors, such as the nature and extent of infrastructure damage and economic dislocation, the demands of ethnic and religious minorities, and the speed with which a credible government can be established. A short-term post-war occupation was initially expected by some Administration officials, however it is now considered likely that a continued deployment of substantial military ground forces will be necessary for several years. For comparison, in the relatively benign environment and considerably smaller areas of Bosnia and Kosovo, after eight years of peacekeeping operations, NATO still maintains a deployment of about 60,000 troops.

**Iraqi Resistance**

Coalition troops continue to come under sporadic attacks, primarily in central Iraq. Though casualties have been relatively light, the potential for attack affects the pace and mode of reconstruction and stabilization operations. Troops must assume a potentially hostile environment, yet try to avoid incidents or actions that erode popular support. In addition to continuing attacks on coalition personnel, there have been attacks on infrastructure targets (e.g., oil/gas pipelines, electrical power stations and lines) hindering efforts to restore basic services to the civilian population. Attacks on oil pipelines also threaten to further delay the use of Iraqi oil exports to fund reconstruction programs. Though it is virtually impossible to fully protect these pipelines from sabotage, it is hoped that ongoing efforts to recruit a civilian Iraqi militia will provide coalition troops some assistance in this mission.

Though initially denying that these attacks were the work of an organized resistance movement, DOD officials have now acknowledged there is at least regional organization, with apparently ample supplies of arms and funding. CENTCOM commander Gen. Abizaid, has characterized the Iraqi resistance as a classical guerrilla-type campaign. DOD believes the resistance to comprise primarily former regime supporters such Baathist party members, Republican Guard soldiers, and paramilitary personnel. However, others are concerned that growing resentment of coalition forces and resurgent Iraq nationalism, independent of connections with the earlier regime, may be contributing to the resistance. There are also reports of bounties of from $1,000-$5,000 being offered for killing coalition troops, taking advantage of the severe economic dislocation which has many Iraqis with no regular income. Captured documents have given some indication that

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6 (...continued)
15. p. 21.
preparations for a resistance movement were made prior to the war, including the caching of arms and money.

In response to these attacks on coalition forces, CENTCOM has undertaken operations to locate and detain suspected resistance members. These operations have resulted in the detention of hundreds of individuals, the capture of some high-ranking officials of the former regime, the seizure of very substantial caches of weapons and money, and the deaths of Saddam Hussein’s sons. These operations have, in some cases, engendered significant resentment among the local populations, and have been scaled back to reduce tensions with local populations.

**Force Level Debate**

The question of how many military personnel are required for stabilization operations has been a subject of controversy since well before the onset of operations. This controversy reflects the great difficulty in predicting how the political and military situation in post-war Iraq will evolve, and how long a military presence will be required before an acceptable and stable Iraqi government can be established. The continued Iraqi armed resistance has reinvigorated the debate over whether the United States has committed sufficient troops to the Iraqi operation. The rapid success of the combat offensive quieted critics who argued that a substantially larger ground force should have been deployed, but the question is now being raised whether a more robust military presence in Iraq is needed to bring stability. Secretary Rumsfeld and out-going CENTCOM commander Gen. Franks both maintained in congressional testimony that the number of troops in Iraq is adequate for the mission, though CENTCOM is currently reviewing troop requirements under its new commander, Gen. Abizaid. If it is decided that additional forces are required, this will present a challenge to the Army. Of its 33 combat brigades, 16 are already deployed in Iraq, and three of the remaining brigades have other assigned missions (e.g., Afghanistan, the Balkans, Korea) or are in strategic reserve. Thus, even at current levels, troop rotation has proven problematic. This was demonstrated when two brigades of the 3rd Infantry Division had their return to the United States twice postponed. DOD has now prepared a rotation plan for duty tours in Iraq, which calls for units to spend a one-year tour of duty in the region. It will, however, require much greater use of National Guard and Reserve units, and may require the participation of U.S. Marine units in stabilization operations. A Congressional Budget Office report has examined manning options available to DOD, and concluded that “the active Army would be unable to sustain an occupation force of the present size beyond about March 2004 if it chose not to keep individual units deployed to Iraq for longer than one year without relief.”

The possible need for additional troops in Iraq has rekindled the debate over whether the U.S. Army personnel end-strength should be increased. Currently, the congressionally mandated end-strength is 480,000. In reporting the FY2004 Defense Authorization Act, the House Armed Services Committee noted the “inadequacy of military manpower, especially active component end-strength, as indicated in the

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need to activate 33,000 reservists annually”. The report further noted that the Army had estimated its manpower shortfall to be between 41,000 to 123,000 personnel. DOD’s civilian leadership intends to address shortfalls in specific functions by moving personnel from lower priority assignments, and by increasing the use of civilians in some functional areas to free up active duty military personnel. The newly confirmed Army Chief of Staff, Gen. Schoomaker, has indicated that a further review of Army personnel requirements is underway, and will provide recommendations in the context of the FY2005 DOD budget request.

**Non- U.S. Forces**

A key element in the Defense Department’s consideration of troop requirements in Iraq is the willingness of other nations to contribute ground forces. DOD has not, however, released an official or current list of other nations’ force contributions to operations in Iraq. Press reports based upon unattributed DOD officials indicate that between 21,000-29,000 non-U.S. troops are in theater, with Britain, Poland, Spain, the Netherlands, Italy, and the Ukraine being the largest contributors. Other nations reported to be contributing troops include: Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Estonia, Georgia (Gruzia) Honduras, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Mongolia, Nicaragua, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, and South Korea. Most of these nations have deployed relatively small numbers of troops, and questions remain about their operational capabilities. Some nations that the United States has approached for assistance (e.g. Turkey, Pakistan, India, and Japan) have indicated that their participation would be dependent upon, at a minimum, a United Nations resolution authorizing operations in Iraq.

Unlike stabilization operations in Bosnia and Kosovo, where contributing nations assume the cost of their troop deployments, in Iraq the United States is assuming much of the cost for non-U.S. force deployments. In July, Deputy Secretary of Defense Wolfowitz estimated that maintenance of 15,000 foreign troops for six months would cost $276 million. The President’s FY2004 supplemental budget request includes $1.4 billion for the support of non-U.S. forces, however this amount also includes funding for operations outside Iraq, and the Administration has not released a break-out of funding specifically for non-U.S. forces in Iraq. Additional funds dedicated to the transport and maintenance of non-U.S. forces may also be included in the Operations and Maintenance accounts of the individual armed services.

**Costs**

Predicting the cost of military operations is a task that DOD did not undertake prior to the peace-keeping deployments to the Balkans, and it remains a somewhat conjectural exercise. Learning from the attempts to estimate costs for military

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operations in the Balkans and elsewhere, DOD has now developed a computer model based upon previous actual costs (Contingency Operations Support Tool). Though initially Secretary Rumsfeld expressed his opinion that “it is unknowable what a war or conflict like that would cost”, in early 2003 he estimated a cost of under $50 billion. Other DOD officials anticipated an $80-85 billion cost, assuming a 6-month follow-on occupation.\textsuperscript{12}

On March 25, 2003 The Administration submitted a $74.7 billion FY2003 supplemental appropriations request, of which $62.6 billion was for Department of Defense expenses related to the war in Iraq through September 2003. Specifically, this request included funds for preparatory costs incurred, costs associated with military operations, replenishing munitions, and funds to support other nations. The Administration stated that this supplemental request was “built on the key assumption that U.S. military action in Iraq will be swift and decisive.”\textsuperscript{13} Both the House and Senate approved the legislative conference report to H.R. 1559 (H.Rept. 108-76), which provided $62.37 billion. DOD now estimates that Iraq military operations are costing $3.9 billion a month.

On September 17, President Bush submitted an $87 billion emergency FY2004 supplemental budget request, of which $51.8 billion is for military operations in Iraq (Operations and Maintenance- $32.3; Personnel $18.5). (For a detailed discussion, see CRS Report RL32090 — FY2004 Supplemental Appropriations for Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Global War on Terrorism: Military Operations & Reconstruction Assistance)

Prior to the war, a number of cost estimates were put forward. Michael O’Hanlon of the Brookings Institution, pegged a 250,000-strong invasion at between $40-$50 billion with a follow-up occupation costing $10-$20 billion a year. Former White House economic advisor Lawrence Lindsay estimated the high limit on the cost to be 1-2% of GNP, or about $100-$200 billion. Mitch Daniels, Director of the Office of Management and Budget subsequently discounted this estimate as “very, very high”, and stated that the costs would be between $50-$60 billion, though no specific supporting figures were provided for the estimate.\textsuperscript{14} In its most recent cost estimate, the Congressional Budget Office put deployment costs at about $14 billion, with combat operations costing $10 billion for the first month and $8 billion a month thereafter. CBO cited the cost of returning combat forces to home bases at $9 billion, and the costs of continued occupation of Iraq to run between $1-4 billion.\textsuperscript{15}

The American Academy of Arts and Sciences has published a much more wide-ranging report which covers the possibility of an extended occupation, in addition to


\textsuperscript{15} Congressional Budget Office. \textit{An Analysis of the President’s Budgetary Proposals for Fiscal Year 2004: An Interim Report}. March 2003
potential long-term economic consequences and concludes that potential costs could range from $99 billion to $1.2 trillion. For comparison, the cost to the United States of the Persian Gulf War in 1990-91 was approximately $60 billion, and almost all of this cost was offset by international financial contributions.

**Legislation**

**P.L. 108-87, H.R. 2658**

**H.R. 1588 (Hunter)**

**H.R. 3132 (Thompson, Mike)**
Requires amounts appropriated under any Act making emergency supplemental appropriations for the reconstruction of Iraq and Afghanistan and the war on terrorism for fiscal year 2004 to be made available in allotments and in accordance with certain reporting requirements. Introduced September 17, 2003; referred to Committees on International Relations, and Armed Services September 17, 2003.

**S. 1689 (Stevens)**
An original bill making emergency supplemental appropriations for Iraq and Afghanistan security and reconstruction for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2004, and for other purposes. Introduced September 30, 2003; laid before the Senate October 1, 2003.

**Additional Reading**


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For a full listing of available CRS reports concerning Iraq, see the CRS homepage: [http://www.congress.gov/erp/legissues/html/isfar12.html]