

New Supplemental Bill Will Make the World Safe for Oil, But Not Safe for Us

By Tamar Gabelnick

Since September 11, the war on terrorism has become the new rationale for doling out military assistance to repressive and politically unstable foreign governments. And just like during the cold war, the millions of dollars slated for our new allies in the war on terrorism have more to do with promoting American geostrategic interests than with protecting U.S. territory from external threats.

The fiscal year 2002 supplemental funding bill awaiting final passage in Congress is proof of this. It contains over \$1 billion in emergency counterterrorism security assistance for a wide range of countries. In a written statement to Congress in April, the State Department justified much of this aid to states by vaguely describing their political instability or the presence of Muslims on their territories. Others are simply being rewarded for general pledges of support for Operation Enduring Freedom. Rarely is there a clear description of how the aid will reduce the threat of terrorism in America.

In another throwback to cold war times, much of this military aid is designed to help certain foreign governments battle internal enemies. For example, after already having received tens of millions of dollars in free U.S. weapons, the Republic of Georgia will get another \$20 million in Foreign Military Financing (FMF) to fight a handful of "Arab" combatants taking refuge in northern Georgia from the war in Chechnya.

The Philippines will also receive more aid and arms to fight the Abu Sayyaf, a small, rag-tag group of Muslim rebels seeking independence from Manila. And the supplemental spending bill will give the Bush administration the authority to expand military aid to Colombia—currently restricted to counternarcotics

efforts—to include "antiterrorism" aid. This translates into direct support for operations against leftist rebels in the country's 30-year-old civil war.

Not so coincidentally, oil seems to be a key geostrategic factor in many these post-Sept. 11 relationships. The Bush administration is seeking millions of dollars to train and equip troops to protect the Caño Limón oil pipeline in Colombia, partly owned by U.S.-based Occidental Petroleum and regularly attacked by leftist rebels. Likewise, the Pentagon admits that security assistance to Azerbaijan is mainly intended to help Baku protect its oil reserves in the Caspian Sea from possible threats from Iran.

Access to oil may also explain the aid to Georgia, as the U.S. government wants to build a new oil pipeline from the Caspian Sea through Georgia and Turkey, while sending American soldiers to the Philippines ensures a physical U.S. presence in the oil and natural gas-rich South China Sea. And the Bush administration is looking to resume generous aid to Indonesian army—protector of the Atlantic Richfield oil company in strife-torn West Papua—even though all military assistance was blocked by Congress in 1999 due to massive human rights abuses by the army and its proxies in East Timor.

Most of these new allotments of aid are not being debated vigorously enough on Capitol Hill. Before a final vote on the 2002 supplemental funding bill, Congress should ask President Bush to explain how close military ties with politically dicey regimes, such as oil-rich Uzbekistan and natural gas-rich Kazakhstan, will help to combat terrorism. And Congress needs to strengthen its oversight

mechanisms to avoid U.S. aid being used by our post-Sept. 11 allies to repress political dissent or intensify local conflicts. In Georgia, the government is already talking about using U.S. arms and training to recover the break-away province of Abkhazia, while arms and training for Colombia, the Philippines, and Indonesia will likely stoke, not allevi-

ate, the internal unrest in those countries.

An antiterrorism policy based on promoting geostrategic interests at the expense of the well-being and human rights of others will not make Americans safer from terrorists in their own country, nor promote the more stable, prosperous international environment necessary to deflate the global terrorist threat.

*(Tamar Gabelnick
<tamarg@fas.org> is director of the Arms Sales Monitoring Project at the Federation of American Scientists and a military analyst for Foreign Policy In Focus, a joint project of the Institute for Policy Studies and the Interhemispheric Resource Center online at fpif.org.)*