

## **AID TO HASHEMITES IS UNDER A CLOUD**

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By Eli Lake

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Jordan could lose up to \$250 million in American economic aid because it has not yet signed an agreement that exempts Americans on its territory from the International Criminal Court.

The House version of the foreign aid bill moving rapidly through Congress would place further restrictions on assistance to governments that have not promised to protect American citizens from prosecution by the court at The Hague created in 2002. Last year's foreign-aid budget provided President Bush with a waiver on this provision for non-NATO allies such as Jordan. This year's bill, however, does not.

"We have to know the implications of a broad provision without a major waiver," Rep. Nita Lowey, a Democrat of New York, said yesterday. "This could end up cutting off monies for Jordan, Cypress, and Mexico and many other countries." Ms. Lowey, who is the ranking Democrat on the House subcommittee that oversees foreign operations, added, "Jordan is a key partner in the Middle East peace process, we don't want them to be penalized."

Ms. Lowey met with colleagues yesterday in the House and Senate to iron out the differences in the foreign aid bills between the two chambers. The legislation this week will likely be rolled into several other appropriations bills that will comprise the federal budget for the next fiscal year.

On May 6, 2002, the State Department informed the United Nations that America was essentially withdrawing from the Statute of Rome, the international treaty that created the International Court. Since then, the State Department has signed nearly 100 agreements with countries based on Article 98 of that treaty that exempts Americans from the court's purview. But America's diplomats have yet to make such a deal with the Hashemite Kingdom, where American spies and soldiers are training their Iraqi colleagues for the new government.

An official from Jordan's embassy in Washington told The New York Sun yesterday that both the State Department and the Foreign Ministry in Amman were negotiating an Article 98 agreement. Jordan's King Abdullah is due to meet Mr. Bush in Washington in the first week of December.

On June 23, the American mission at the U.N. tabled a resolution that would provide such blanket protection for American peacekeepers, after the U.N. secretary-general, Kofi Annan, and European members of the Security Council said they would oppose the resolution in light of the brewing Iraqi prison abuse scandal making headlines at the time. The assistant administrator for the U.S. Agency for International Development, Ed Fox, told the Sun yesterday that he was assured verbally by the chairmen of the House and Senate appropriations committees that various stipulations on American aid would not hold up the flow of humanitarian relief.

"We will try to address the concerns of various members, but we're also trying to keep humanitarian assistance flowing," he said. Three other staff members said they expected the final version of the foreign aid bill would allow the White House enough wiggle room to deliver the Jordanian assistance.

The Senate and House versions of the aid bill would provide \$1 billion for the Millennium Challenge account, a massive foreign aid policy that ties the receipt of assistance to political

and economic reforms. Unlike the reduced foreign aid budgets of the 1990s, the White House has requested an increase in the Millennium Challenge account to \$1.2 billion.

This week, the White House has also told lawmakers negotiating the aid bill to include \$20 million in new assistance for the Palestinian Authority to help fund the elections. Europe and America are pushing the Palestinian leadership to hold after the death of Yasser Arafat.

The budget request from the White House asks that no restrictions be placed on the American money to the Palestinian Authority, a request that has drawn opposition from some lawmakers. Next month, the countries that have funded the Palestinian Arabs since the 1993 Oslo accords will meet in the Norwegian capital to discuss new funding for Palestinian institutions. Secretary of State Powell is scheduled to meet with the interim Palestinian leader, Mahmoud Abbas, on Monday.

"The White House wants Powell to be able to arrive in Ramallah with the \$20 million in his pocket," an administration official told the Sun yesterday.

Yesterday, the Senate passed by a vote of 52 to 44 a provision to raise the debt ceiling by \$800 billion, prompting the vanquished Democratic presidential candidate, Senator Kerry of Massachusetts, to quip that his election year opponent was presiding over "the worst fiscal turnaround in our nation's entire history."

But inside the conference session for the foreign aid bill, congressional appropriators from both parties were cordial. The usually cantankerous Senator Byrd, a Democrat from West Virginia, congratulated the Senate Appropriations chairman, Senator Stevens from Alaska, on his tenure in the committee. He even wished the Republican lawmaker a happy 81st birthday.