
National News

New Commission To Study Constitution's War Powers

Former Secretaries of State James A. Baker III and Warren Christopher will head a private, bipartisan panel to examine "how the Constitution allocates the powers of beginning, conducting, and ending war," according to a press release announcing the commission issued by the University of Virginia's Miller Center of Public Affairs Feb. 28. The other members of the commission will be Brent Scowcroft, Edwin Meese, Carla Hill, and Strobe Talbott. The Center asserts this private body will make "prospective" recommendations not applicable to the present Administration or Congress.

Walter Reed Scandal Tied To Cheney, Halliburton

The House National Security Subcommittee, chaired by Rep. John Tierney (D-Mass.), has uncovered evidence that the Bush Administration's drive to privatize government jobs may be a factor in the scandalous treatment of wounded soldier-outpatients at Walter Reed Army Hospital. The subcommittee posted a memorandum, apparently written in September 2006, warning of an exodus of "highly skilled and experienced personnel" brought on by the Army's decision to privatize support services at the hospital complex. As a result, the memo warned, "WRAMC [Walter Reed Army Medical Center] Base Operations and patient care services are at risk of mission failure."

Even worse, the firm that was awarded the \$120 million contract (after successfully protesting a finding that Army employees could do a better job at less cost) is IAP Worldwide Services. Not only is IAP one of the companies cited for problems during Hurricane Katrina recovery operations, but it is headed by Al Neffgen, a former senior Halliburton official who testified to the House Government Reform Committee in July 2004 in defense of Halliburton's exor-

bitant overcharging for gasoline shipments into Iraq. IAP took over facilities management at Walter Reed on Feb. 3, 2007, with 50 people to do the work that was being performed by more than 300 people at the time the contract was awarded one year earlier.

There's even an Al Gore connection to this mess. The A-76 process under which the Federal jobs at Walter Reed were completed, was begun in the mid-1990s as part of Gore's "Reinventing Government" scheme.

Senator Hagel Warns Against Attack on Iran

"A military attack on Iran would inflame the Middle East. It could not be in the interests of Israel," Sen. Chuck Hagel (R-Neb.), told the Jewish Public Affairs Council meeting in Washington, D.C. Feb. 28. The *Jerusalem Post*, reported that Hagel told the group that "The United States should engage directly with Iran and Syria. When countries do not engage, they make uninformed and dangerous decisions." Hagel said that, although the problematic behavior of Iran might preclude formal diplomatic relations at this moment, nonetheless, the United States should open a consulate to facilitate contact with the population. "Iran is not monolithic. We do not want to lose this pro-American generation; they're the future."

Hagel's comments were warmly received, the *Jerusalem Post* reported.

U.S. Religious Leaders Seek Dialogue With Iran

In a report-back press briefing in Washington, D.C. Feb. 26, a delegation of eight U.S. religious leaders discussed their week-long visit to Iran, during which they met with Muslim and Christian leaders, government officials, other Iranians, including a two-and-one-half hour meeting with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The delegation was led by Rev. Ron Flaming, the director of international programs for the Mennonite Central Committee.

"What the delegation found most encouraging from the meeting with President Ahmadinejad was a clear declaration from him that Iran has no intention to acquire or use nuclear weapons, as well as a statement that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can only be solved through political, not military means," said the statement issued by the delegation. "I have no reservation about conducting talks with American officials if we see some goodwill," Ahmadinejad told the group. They discussed a range of topics with him, including the role of religion in transforming the conflict, Iraq, nuclear proliferation and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The group is working closely with forces in Congress that are calling for dialogue. One of the ministers told *EIR* that the delegation will have meetings with Congress this week. Most Iranians the delegation talked to, from senior government officials down to taxi drivers and shopkeepers, he said, "are just hungry for some connection with the American people." He said they "hunger to be respected, and to be understood."

The delegation included representatives from the American Friends Service Committee, the Mennonite Central Committee, Pax Christi U.S.A., the National Council of Churches, the United Methodist Church, and the Episcopal Church.

Reid Backs Amendment Limiting Attack on Iran

Majority Leader Sen. Harry Reid (Nev.) would support an amendment to the war-funding bill that restricts an attack on Iran, according to wire sources. The amendment is being drafted by Senator Jim Webb (D-Va.) to be added to the upcoming war-funding bill, which could come to the Senate floor later this month. Webb's amendment would prohibit President Bush from spending any money on a unilateral military action in Iran without the express consent of Congress.

Webb says that he modelled his amendment on the resolution introduced into the House of Representatives by Walter Jones (R-N.C.), which makes clear that the Iraq war resolution passed by Congress in 2002 does not authorize the use of force in Iran.