**Cash for Clinton — in the U.N.'s New Haiti Peacekeeping Budget**

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The United Nations' peacekeeping mission in battered Haiti is one of the most expensive in the world — and it's about to get even more so. One of the reasons being given this time is the need to add support for the U.N.'s special envoy to Haiti, former President Bill Clinton.

Just exactly how much more expensive, however, the U.N. is not prepared to say. It now claims the situation is too "fluid" for the world organization even to produce a detailed budget covering the next six months — half the period normally covered in its normal financial calculations.

Nevertheless, in a back-of-the-envelope estimate that he has sent to the U.N. General Assembly, Secretary General Ban Ki-moon is asking for $380.4 million to cover the period from July 1 to December 31 of this year.

That would be $760.8 million at an annualized rate — roughly double what the U.N. allocated for the mission in its first full year of operations, starting in 2004.

In a terse, six-page submission to the U.N. General Assembly, Ban says a "comprehensive and integrated planning effort" is still required to add up the real budget figures for Haiti the 2010-2011 period. (U.N. budgets for peacekeeping run from July 1 to June 30 of the following year.)

But even so, his sketchy six-month total would be $28.4 million higher, on an annualized basis, than the record-breaking $732.4 million budget for the 12 months that end June 30.

That budget included a 20 percent overall hike to account for emergency operations in the wake of Haiti's devastating Jan. 12, 2010 earthquake.

And if history is any guide, it will soon grow even further, after the "comprehensive and integrated planning effort" that Ban promises. Traditionally, peacekeeping budgets — as do most other U.N. budgets — expand in the period between preliminary estimates and later, more detailed accounting.

Among other things, the latest peacekeeping estimate includes more than $800,000 that the Haiti mission is spending as its share to support the efforts of the U.N.'s special envoy in Haiti, former President Bill Clinton.

According to a spokesman for U.N. peacekeeping, Clinton's expanded role will include taking the lead over "international coordination efforts. He will also "provide strategic guidance to the U.N.'s involvement in the recovery and relief efforts that have now become a key focus" of the peacekeepers.

Ironically enough, the latest Haiti budget estimate is the organization's effort to show that the U.N. is tightening its belt in the wake of its post-earthquake, even as the number of soldiers, police and U.N. civilian staffers has surged to some 15,000.

In response to questions from Fox News, a U.N. peacekeeping spokesman replied that the bigger post-earthquake numbers were "one-off requirements and they were not intended to be a permanent requirement."

But there are signs of fudging. In a few brief paragraphs justifying its seat-of-the-pants estimates, Ban's submission says the much smaller numbers for support costs for the mission take into account "standard" reimbursements for troops and police, but "exclude, at this stage, direct costs such as rotational travel," which presumably includes mandatory R and R for the forces in place — which was included in its last budget — as well as future troop and police replacement.

The Haiti mission's first post-earthquake spending request included $5 million for planning and initial preparation for a "longer-term reconstruction program" for U.N. peace-keeping facilities, which were themselves partially destroyed in the quake. The bill for that reconstruction is likely to be hefty: simply replacing damaged U.N. peacekeeping equipment and supplies cost $20.25 million in the first post-quake budget.

But the new estimates for the next six months still don't include any reconstruction spending. That tab, according to the U.N. peacekeeping spokesman, would be "outlined in the context of the full detailed budget for the 2010-2011 period," when it appears in "forthcoming months."

The same kind of alleged austerity has been applied to emergency U.N. spending in support of the beleaguered citizens of Haiti themselves. In its post-quake figuring, the U.N. included some $12.9 million for so-called "community violence reduction" programs and "quick-start" cash-for-work programs for Haitians who had lost work and sustenance in the disaster, over and above about $3 million already budgeted.

In the latest figuring, the quick-impact and community violence reduction total for the next six months has been cut by half, to $6.5 million. According to the U.N. peacekeeping spokesman, the $12.9 million earlier hike was only required to respond "to the most urgent needs of the mission's community violence reduction efforts, in order to minimize the risk of a descent into lawlessness in the most at-risk areas of Haiti."

That risk has apparently gone down significantly. The new figure, says the spokesman, "is commensurable" with the overall spending for 2009-2010.

Click here to see the latest peacekeeping budget estimate.

By coincidence, the $6.5 million that the U.N. peacekeepers intend to spend on the most stricken Haitians over the next six months is exactly the same as the amount they intend to keep spending — but in three months — on an 11,000-ton Venezuelan passenger vessel, the Ola Esmeralda, moored in Port au Prince harbor.

The Ola Esmeralda provides comfortable, subsidized housing, hot meals and laundry service for a relatively small number of U.N. peacekeeping officers, police and other Haitian rescue personnel. According to the U.N. peacekeeping spokesman, about 280 U.N. staffers were living on the vessels of May 19, which has capacity for 482 passengers.

As Fox News revealed in April, Ola Esmeralda was rented for $72,500 per day — or $6.5 million for a three-month contract — by the United Nations World Food Program (WFP). WFP's contractor was a Miami-based firm called Lighthouse Ship Management LLC. But the actual owner is a firm called Servicios Acuaticos de Venezuela, C.A., or Saveca, three of whose top five officials are retired Venezuelan naval or Merchant Marine Officers.

Saveca claims on its website to have an "alliance" with a firm owned by the government of Venezuela's anti-American Marxist strongman, Hugo Chavez.

A WFP spokesman told Fox News at the time that Ola Esmeralda won its contract strictly on the basis of cost competitiveness, among ten contending vessels.

In April, Ola Esmeralda was moored with a smaller companion vessel, the Sea Voyager — known in some official U.N. documents as the Love Boat — which WFP was renting for another $40,000 per day.

The Love Boat's contract has since expired, and it has left Haiti.

The U.N. peacekeeping spokesman says the Ola Esmeralda, on the other hand, is needed as a "stop-gap measure." The latest U.N. budget shows its contract running through August 31.

If it does, the U.N. will have spent about $13 million overall on renting the ship.

That is about the double the amount that the peacekeepers intend to spend on community violence reduction and emergency cash-for-work programs for all of Haiti's 9.5 million devastated citizens during the next six months.

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