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Daniel S. Greenberg

# Finessing AID in the Jonestown Body Lift

An appropriately bizarre postscript has quietly been appended to the Jonestown massacre and the ensuing U.S. Air Force body lift from Guyana to Dover, Del.

The cleanup, transport and body-storage costs, now \$3.1 million and climbing, are to be paid by the U.S. Agency for International Development—which is understandably hard-put to comprehend the relationship between corpse removal and economic development.

The officially settled, but so-far unannounced, decision to send the bill to AID—though the agency played no part in the macabre Jonestown operation—originated in the jungles of Washington, where the foreign-aid organization was successfully stalked like an uncombative kid with pockets full of candy.

As the bills for Jonestown mounted, and the Air Force insisted on reimbursement, the problem of how to provide the money came up against the fact that there is actually very little loose change in the U.S. government's budget of some \$500 billion a year. And what there is, in the form of various contingency and emergency funds, is dearly coveted by the agencies that possess it.

Seeking ways to pay the Jonestown costs, an interagency committee convened by the Office of Management and Budget took a look last month at the \$5 million that the Defense Department has for "emergency and extraordinary expenses." But a check with the congressional armed services committees drew a sour

response concerning the suitability of using defense money to finance the transport and storage of Peoples Temple bodies.

Then it was noted that AID has a \$25-million fund for interna-

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tional disaster assistance. But AID dodged the threat by insisting that all previous uses of the fund were for relief of foreigners in distress, and that using it to pay for the problems of Americans abroad—even dead ones—would be a bad precedent. Possibly thinking of financially broke American tourists demanding handouts from AID, the White House mandarins of management and budget again looked elsewhere.

What they then noticed is that, in addition to its disaster fund, AID also possesses a rarely used contingency account of \$3 million. (Richard Nixon once used it for a helicopter gift to Egypt, and last year, \$700,000 from the fund was devoted to a malaria-eradication project in Turkey; but the fund usually goes unspent.)

The \$3 million wouldn't be enough to cover the Jonestown bill, which has already passed that figure and is on the way to an estimated total cost of at least \$3.5 million. But OMB, over the screams of AID officials, decided not only to scoop up the \$3 million, but also to charge the balance off to AID's economic-support fund.

The rationale for this, as explained by an OMB official, is that, if the bodies remained in Guyana, they might inspire pilgrimages by Peoples Temple mem-

bers; this, in turn, might lead to disorders, which might be destabilizing for Guyana and detrimental to its economic development.

The Jonestown episode is so grotesque that almost any administrative legerdemain is acceptable for dealing with its aftermath. What's interesting to observe, however, is how nimble the supposedly clodhopping federal bureaucracy can be when it so chooses.