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## The Importance of a Robust Foreign Aid Budget

The annual congressional budget process is now underway. House and Senate Budget Resolutions will set the parameters for how specific spending decisions will be made later in the appropriations process for all government programs, including foreign aid. The more Congress recommends for overall foreign aid early in the year, the easier it will be to secure vital security assistance for Israel later in the process.

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### **Q: Why does the budget resolution matter?**

**A:** Toward the beginning of each year, Congress approves a budget resolution that sets spending priorities for foreign aid and other areas of the federal budget for the rest of the year. While the budget resolution does not deal with specific programmatic details, it is nevertheless extremely important because it sets the parameters for how specific spending decisions will be made later in the process.

The more Congress recommends for overall foreign aid early in the year, the easier it will be to secure funding for Israel later in the process. Since Israel is slated to receive an increase of \$225 million in security assistance this year as called for in the 2007 U.S.-Israel Memorandum of Understanding, it is even more important for Congress to support a robust foreign aid budget at the levels requested by the president. Otherwise, Israel will be competing with other worthy programs for scarce budget dollars.

### **Q: I support aid to Israel, but why do I need to support a growing foreign aid budget?**

**A:** First of all, without a robust overall foreign aid budget, it will be extremely difficult to secure Israel's annual security assistance, which is vital as it faces increasing threats. Secondly, our support for foreign aid goes beyond the specific benefits to Israel: it is indispensable to American national interests. We believe that a robust foreign aid budget is essential for the United States to maintain its leadership role in world affairs.

In addition to a strong military, our country needs other tools to support our allies, fight poverty, disease and terrorism, promote economic stability, prevent more failed states and engage in diplomacy. Even our country's military officials acknowledge the critical role of foreign aid in helping to avoid military conflicts and in helping to rebuild countries in post-conflict situations. As Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said, "It has become clear that America's civilian institutions of diplomacy and development have been chronically undermanned and underfunded for far too long – relative to what we traditionally spend on the military, and more important, relative to the responsibilities and challenges our nation has around the world."

**Q: How can I justify to my constituents that we should support more foreign aid at a time of unprecedented economic turmoil at home?**

**A:** It is not in our interests to turn our back on the world even as we face an economic crisis at home. Our national security and our economic well-being depend on U.S. global leadership. We must continue to maintain a strong military but we must also ensure that our country has other tools available to help stabilize the global economy, advance American political interests, support American allies, prevent the collapse of failing states and open markets for American goods.

Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair recently testified before Congress that the global economic turmoil and the instability it could produce is a major threat to the United States. In other words, at a time of economic turmoil with global ramifications, other nations' economic health is directly related to our own. This is especially true since 1 in 7 American jobs depend on our overseas markets and these jobs pay an estimated 13-18 percent more than the national average. The fact that nearly all foreign assistance must be spent on American-produced items also adds jobs to the American economy.

**Q: At a time of growing deficits, how can I support foreign aid especially since there is so much wasteful spending?**

**A:** Foreign aid makes up slightly more than one percent of the entire federal budget and is only a small fraction of what we spend on national defense. Since it is relatively small, foreign aid clearly cannot be blamed for growing deficits. That does not mean that there are parts of the foreign aid budget that cannot be reformed or reduced. In fact, the government is completing a multiyear process to revamp our foreign aid programs so that they will operate more cost-effectively. Every area of the federal budget no doubt includes programs that individual Members of Congress don't support. But foreign aid is a smart and relatively cheap investment. Spending one penny of every federal dollar on preventing wars and the spread of terrorism, disease and poverty is a wise investment that ultimately saves the taxpayers money.