



America Needs a Robust Foreign Aid Budget

In a recent poll, Americans were tested on their knowledge of the U.S. foreign aid budget. Most respondents estimated that the foreign aid budget was 25 percent of the overall federal budget. A more reasonable amount to spend on foreign aid, the respondents said, would be 10 percent.

The respondents were probably shocked to learn that the foreign aid budget is a mere *one percent* of total federal spending. Most Americans dramatically overestimate the size of the U.S. foreign aid budget and underestimate its importance.

The United States faces extraordinary challenges to its preeminence in today's world. Our nation faces threats to its security and economic well-being. At a time of declining budgetary resources, foreign aid is a cost-effective and relatively small investment that pays off in the long run. Investing foreign aid dollars wisely today helps prevent the more costly wars, crises and disasters that might otherwise occur. The annual foreign aid bill includes security assistance to Israel and other U.S. allies. It also includes humanitarian assistance and development aid to countries across the globe.

Top U.S. defense officials agree that the United States needs to complement its military budget with a strong foreign aid budget. "Having robust civilian capabilities available could make it less likely that military force will have to be used in the first place, as local problems might be dealt with before they become crises," said Secretary of Defense Robert Gates.

Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, has also emphasized that the U.S. military cannot solve or prevent every problem around the globe. "It is my firm belief that diplomatic programs, as part of a coordinated strategy, will save money by reducing the likelihood of active military conflict involving U.S. forces," Mullen said. "The more significant the cuts, the longer military operations will take and the more and more lives are at risk."

America's foreign aid program embodies the core values of the United States: protecting the most vulnerable populations, especially when disaster strikes (such as the 2010 Haiti earthquake); promoting democracy, pluralism and human rights; and encouraging needy people and their governments to become self-sufficient and law abiding.

And let us not forget about the importance of foreign aid for U.S. workers. Foreign aid helps U.S. companies develop foreign markets, create jobs at home and build stable business environments in developing countries.

Congress should make sure that the United States has a robust foreign aid budget, which includes not only aid to Israel, but a variety of other vital programs.