

The Dangerous Stakes of De-Funding Foreign Aid

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Late last week, the House Appropriations Committee released its budget extensions for fiscal year 2011. Given the new Congress' tighter fiscal consensus, one might have assumed a rougher budget cycle. However, few foreign affairs observers could have expected that it would be this rough.

The House Republican leadership, which released its budget allocations last Friday, provided the State Department and foreign-operations programs with a total of \$44.9 billion for fiscal year 2011. The figure represents a 21 percent reduction in non-defense foreign affairs funding from 2010. In its allocation cut, the House leadership has cut U.S. contributions to peacekeeping activities by 15 percent, funding for international disaster response by 67 percent, and has eliminated the Complex Crises Fund, which enables the United States to mobilize quick responses to international humanitarian crises.

The U.S. government has made significant progress over the past two years in enhancing the United States' capacity to prevent and respond to international conflicts and complex humanitarian crises. The State Department and USAID have mobilized critical agency resources to review, reform, and restructure the U.S. government's approach to the use of civilian power. However, with the most recent budget developments, this progress could easily be all for naught.

The State Department and USAID's conflict prevention and response resources have played a critical role in U.S. engagement in foreign affairs, conflict resolution, and the promotion of U.S. national security. Last June, when civil violence broke out between the government of Kyrgyzstan and the country's ethnic Uzbek minority, flexible U.S. foreign affairs funding enabled the Obama administration to mobilize an active response to the evolving humanitarian crisis.

In Cote d'Ivoire, after weeks of violence between supporters of defeated president Laurent Gbagbo and of the internationally-recognized

winner of November's presidential elections, Alassane Ouattara, the UN Security Council deployed an additional 2,000 peacekeepers in support of the UN Operation in Cote d'Ivoire. U.S. support for UN peacekeeping has played a critical role in pulling the West African country back from the brink of civil war.

And in Sudan, which former Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair described last February as the most likely location for genocide and mass atrocities, high-level U.S. and international engagement in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement implementation process helped facilitate a peaceful referendum on Southern Sudanese independence. In the months leading up to the January referendum, the U.S. government dispatched diplomatic teams and development officers to support international peacebuilding efforts in Southern Sudan.

These conflict prevention and resolution efforts in Kyrgyzstan, Cote d'Ivoire, Sudan, and elsewhere could not have occurred without the sustained support of the U.S. Congress. As Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC) recently noted, support for diplomacy and development initiatives is essential to U.S. national security interests worldwide. Conflict prevention efforts can support U.S. counterterrorism priorities in critical regions, reduce the illicit spread of narcotics and small arms, and reduce the destabilizing costs of cross-border refugee flows.

Most importantly, Congressional support for robust foreign operations spending saves lives, to the tune of hundreds of thousands of civilians per year. The House leadership's foreign-operations allocation reductions will drastically reduce funding for necessary humanitarian initiatives: the present budget proposal reduces 41 percent of the U.S. food aid account and 45 percent of migration and refugee assistance.