



## *Pentagon Trumps the Poor in the Bush Administration's Foreign Aid Proposals*

By Tamar Gabelnick

Reading the headlines about the new foreign aid budget—"Bush proposes huge increase in foreign aid" (AFP), "Bush Seeks Funds to Fight AIDS Globally" (AP)—one would think that the Bush administration had developed a new commitment to helping the world's poor and marginalized communities. But a closer look at the numbers shows quite a different story. Though the proposed foreign aid budget is \$2.4 billion more than last year's request, one-third of the total is not going to build new roads or schools, but to supply foreign militaries with U.S. arms and training. Even the sections of this budget designated as non-military aid are heavily targeted to critical states in the war on terrorism, reflecting the dominance of national security priorities over the foreign aid budget.

The administration has requested \$18.82 billion for the fiscal year (FY) 2004 foreign operations budget, compared to \$16.46 billion requested in FY2003. (A note to those out there who still think that foreign aid makes up a large portion of the U.S. budget: this year's foreign aid figure represents less than 0.9% of the \$2.2 trillion budget, or less than 0.2% of GDP.)

According to a White House Fact Sheet, one of the president's main goals with the FY2004 budget is "promoting compassion." But this assertion is not borne out by the figures. For example, the total request for basic education aid in developing states is \$212 million, whereas the increase alone in foreign military financing (FMF)—or funds given to states to purchase U.S. weapons—is \$307 million. The administration also scored big with its announcement of a new, "well-funded" effort to combat HIV/AIDS. But this program is to spend only \$3 billion a year on average (\$2 billion is budgeted for FY04). Compare that to a

hefty \$4.4 billion annual budget for FMF, plus about \$1.5 billion in additional security assistance for counternarcotics, counterterrorism, and other programs. In other words, given a choice between providing free drugs for AIDS patients or books for developing young minds, and giving away weapons to militaries of often-repressive regimes, the administration has chosen the latter.

The imbalance between economic and military aid is a natural outcome of a government that favors the use of force over diplomacy. One needn't look beyond the difference between the Pentagon's budget (\$380 billion, or \$15.3 billion more than last year) and the State Department's (\$8.1 billion, only a \$361 million increase) to see that the U.S. government looks mainly to the military to resolve the world's problems. The administration even favors military approaches to what should be domestic concerns. For example, in response to an American public health issue—continued high levels of drug use—the government is seeking \$731 million for the Andean Counterdrug Initiative, an interdiction program that relies largely on military aid to Colombia and its neighbors. On the other hand, President Bush is only proposing \$200 million for drug treatment in the United States, though treatment is found to be much more effective than stopping drugs at the source.

Even within the State Department's paltry budget, the Pentagon has managed to secure more money this year—a full third of the foreign aid budget—for what are effectively its own international assistance programs: weapons giveaways, military training programs, and other military assistance. This is the budgetary dimension of an increasingly militarized U.S.

foreign policy. In addition to the \$106.4 million specifically allocated for antiterrorism activities, much of the State Department's economic aid, and almost all of the military aid (apart from the large sums reserved for Israel and Egypt) is intended to support so-called "front-line states" in the "Global War on Terrorism" (or GWOT, as the State Department now calls it).

The emphasis on the war on terrorism means that traditional State Department goals—such as the promotion of human rights, democracy, and peaceful conflict resolution—are taking a back seat to forming strategic partnerships with countries that could play a role in the GWOT (though the administration has been somewhat creative in its definition of which states are critical to fighting terrorism). For example, while the Economic Support Fund (ESF) has always had a security bent to it, it previously targeted democracy promotion, the Middle East peace process, and economic development. The stated goal of this year's \$2.5 billion ESF request is to provide aid to front-line states and build "new relationships as

the campaign against global terrorism widens." Thus in Africa, funds are geared not toward the states with the greatest needs, but those with a potential role in chasing out terrorist groups from the continent, such as Kenya, Ethiopia, and Nigeria.

Hidden in the ESF budget is also \$60 million for Indonesia for "counterterrorism, police training, conflict mitigation, and public outreach and education," a euphemism for aid to security forces that are infamous for their harsh tactics and their inability to "mitigate" conflict in a peaceful manner. Turkey is also set to receive \$200 million in ESF and another \$50 million in FMF as part of an effort to buy its support for the war in Iraq. Military aid will also continue to go to the Central Asian states, Colombia, Georgia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Kenya, and even Nepal, all of which are supposedly critical to the war on terrorism. Yet aid to these states—all of which have been criticized for abuses in the annual State Department human rights report—undermines the State Department's efforts to promote human rights, as it shows that government repression

will not deter economic or even military aid.

Before the American public starts applauding the administration's new-found commitment to international development, it should look closely at where the aid is going and for what purposes. An increase in foreign aid would certainly be welcome, but only if it's going to address the world's most pressing needs: improving health care, reducing poverty, and protecting the environment. The more the Pentagon's imprint is felt on the State Department's priorities, however, the more the funds for these goals are going to be crowded out of an already miniscule foreign aid budget. Without a serious commitment to tackling these problems, the U.S. government is never going to significantly reduce the risk of terrorism.

*(Tamar Gabelnick  
<tamarg@fas.org> is director of the Arms Sales Monitoring Project of the Federation of American Scientists and writes regularly for Foreign Policy in Focus (online at www.fpif.org).)*