



State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Background & Talking Points Memo

Updated: September 2023

Background

The State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs (SFOPS) appropriations bill funds American diplomacy and development through appropriations to the Department of State, USAID, the Peace Corps, and other government agencies. It also provides funding for U.S. contributions to multilateral institutions and programs, including the United Nations, the World Health Organization, and international peacekeeping operations. SFOPS appropriations make up the overwhelming majority of the International Affairs (IA) budget – the Food for Peace program is the largest IA budget item funded through a different appropriations account (Agriculture).

This summer, the House Appropriations Committee prepared a partisan [SFOPS bill](#) that would reduce topline IA budget levels from FY23 by \$7.2 billion, including large cuts to USAID and development assistance and the elimination of all voluntary contributions to UN. In contrast, the Senate Appropriations Committee passed a bipartisan SFOPS bill that, while reducing topline funding by [\\$1.2 billion from FY23](#), is consistent with the overall budget deal made in May 2023.

In the runup to the SFOPS and Agriculture appropriations bills being considered on the House floor, Republicans **made over two billion in [additional cuts](#)** to the IA budget, apparently to garner more support for the bill from its most extreme members.

Talking Points

Principled U.S. Leadership in the World

- For too long, the United States has under-resourced our tools of diplomacy, development and other non-military means of engaging the world.
- SFOPS funding supports American diplomacy, strengthens our ties with our allies around the world, and sends the message to authoritarians and despots that the United States will fight for human rights, democracy, and the sovereignty of other nations.
- From the climate crisis to mass migration, the United States must work with the rest of the world to address today's most pressing challenges. The draconian cuts to diplomacy and development proposed in the House – over nine billion dollars – would be **catastrophic to American leadership in the world and create an opening for authoritarians** to step in, flex their power, and gain influence.
- At a time of multiple global crises, **we cannot afford to cut contributions to international agencies like the UN that support the rules-based international order that has benefitted Americans for generations.**

Cuts Harm the World and the U.S.

- The House-proposed cuts to the SFOPS budget would result in devastating reductions in disaster assistance, girls' education, and health care around the world. These programs are not only a humanitarian necessity; they also support global stability and

economic productivity.

- Many of these programs support health workers and infrastructure in ways that can reverberate globally—such as by preventing the kind of global economic stagnation and instability experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cynical and Politicized Attacks on International Climate Finance

- The House SFOPS bill bars funding to the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and Clean Technology Fund, which support developing countries' efforts to decarbonize and adapt to the impacts of climate change. The bill includes no directed bilateral funding for clean energy, adaptation or sustainable landscapes, accounts that have traditionally received bipartisan support. What's more, it includes an unprecedented prohibition on recognizing cross-cutting co-benefits of climate-informed investments in food security, women's equality and empowerment, democratic governance, and water and sanitation.
- A [bipartisan letter](#) from earlier this year and the October 2021 [National Intelligence Estimate on Climate Change](#) underscore the profound linkages between the support we provide to countries on the front line of the worst and most immediate impacts of climate change and our own national interests and security concerns.
- Politicized attacks on programs and initiatives that address the security implications of climate change, including U.S. Government planning around climate risk, send a powerful and disturbing signal that the United States is content to remain willfully blind to a threat that is [already impacting millions of its own citizens](#).
- Allies and partners around the world continue to raise the need for increased U.S. support for developing country climate efforts, and when the United States fails to deliver on climate finance, it compromises our ability to work with these countries, not just on the existential threat posed by climate change, but in other areas as well.
- To maintain and strengthen our diplomatic, economic, and security partnerships in an era of mounting geopolitical competition, we must demonstrate that we are serious about addressing the priorities that they raise with us directly. This is particularly true with regard to Pacific Island Countries and critical mineral producing countries across Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America.
 - At the recently held African Climate Summit, Kenyan President Ruto and African Union Commission Chair Mahamat stressed, "Developed countries must deliver on their historical commitments, including ... ensuring a strong replenishment of the Green Climate Fund."
 - The Climate Vulnerable Forum, a partnership of 68 highly climate vulnerable countries, emphasized in its [July 2023 High-Level Communiqué](#) that a strong GCF replenishment for vulnerable countries "would send a powerful signal that developing nations are not being forgotten amidst competing and interrelated global crises."
 - At last year's Shangri-La Dialogue, the preeminent Asia-Pacific security forum with both Chinese and American defense leaders in the room, then Fijian Defense Minister Inia Seruiratu stated clearly and forcefully that "In our blue Pacific continent, machine guns, fighter jets, gray ships and green battalions are not our primary security concern. The single greatest threat to our very existence is climate change."

Last Minute Cuts

- Just when we thought it couldn't get any worse, House Republicans are now proposing billions more in cuts to the International Affairs budget to get this fantasy legislation passed solely on partisan lines.
- The newest **cuts include over \$1 billion to the Food for Peace program**, a vital assistance program that provides [tens of millions](#) with desperately needed food aid.

These cuts are unfathomable given the **global food security crisis** exacerbated by Russia's unprovoked and unjustified invasion of Ukraine.

- House Republicans also propose an additional billion in cuts to contributions to peacekeeping operations and State and USAID's general operating budgets. These cuts could lead to hiring freezes, staff reductions, and painful decisions to pause critical diplomatic and development initiatives.

Reactive Q&A

Q. We are running a trillion-dollar deficit; shouldn't we be fixing our own problems instead of sending taxpayer money overseas?

A. Our foreign aid is an investment in America's future. Using just a tiny fraction of the federal budget, we can stabilize entire regions of the world, leading to more reliable food and energy supplies; we can open new markets to U.S. workers and businesses; and we can build up the capacity of other countries to proactively address transnational challenges, like pandemics, terrorism, and irregular migration, before they reach America. With this kind of return on investment, we'd be foolish to cut foreign assistance.

Q. What about our own border and the threat to territorial sovereignty posed by illegal immigrants?

A. Diplomacy and foreign assistance are crucial to addressing the underlying causes of irregular migration. Working with partner countries, civil society, and the private sector, the United States must pursue programs that root out corruption in the region, promote local development, and combat violence. We will never be able to get a handle on our immigration challenges without addressing these larger regional issues.

Q. There are many problems with how foreign aid is spent, including corruption. Shouldn't we cut SFOPS spending until we can ensure increased efficiency?

A. We should always demand the highest integrity in our foreign assistance programs. Congress must ensure that oversight mechanisms—including watchdogs at State, USAID and the Government Accountability Office—are fully funded. Congress is right to scrutinize aid, but wholesale cuts to these vital programs unnecessarily endanger lives and damage U.S. credibility around the world.

Q. The world seems to be getting more dangerous, between Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the tension between the U.S. and PRC over the future of Taiwan. Shouldn't we focus on funding national security, not diplomacy or aid?

A. Funding national security means funding diplomacy and development. For example, the United States used diplomacy to build a massive coalition of likeminded countries to provide security and economic assistance to Ukraine and hold Russia accountable for its aggression. Key pillars of our strategy on China similarly involve shoring up alliances and partnerships. As General Mattis said in 2013: "If you don't fund the State Department fully, then I need to buy more ammunition."

Items to Amplify:

- Secretary of State Tony Blinken's September 13, 2023, Remarks on "the Power and Purpose of American Diplomacy in a New Era," <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-remarks-to-the-johns-hopkins-school-of-advanced-international-studies-sais-the-power-and-purpose-of-american-diplomacy-in-a-new-era/>
- US Global Leadership Coalition's Comparison of House and Senate Funding Levels for the FY24 International Affairs Budget: <https://www.usglc.org/the-budget/comparison-of-house-and-senate-funding-levels-for-the-fy24-international-affairs-budget/>

- CARE USA urges swift bipartisan action from U.S. Congress to fully fund lifesaving global programs: <https://www.care.org/news-and-stories/press-releases/care-usa-urges-swift-bipartisan-action-from-u-s-congress-to-fully-fund-lifesaving-global-programs/>

Have more questions? Contact:

Brian Volsky, Diplomacy Policy Advisor, FP4A – Brian.Volsky@FP4America.org

Bill Monahan, Senior Policy Director, FP4A – Bill.Monahan@FP4America.org

Andrew Albertson, Executive Director, FP4A – Andrew@FP4America.org