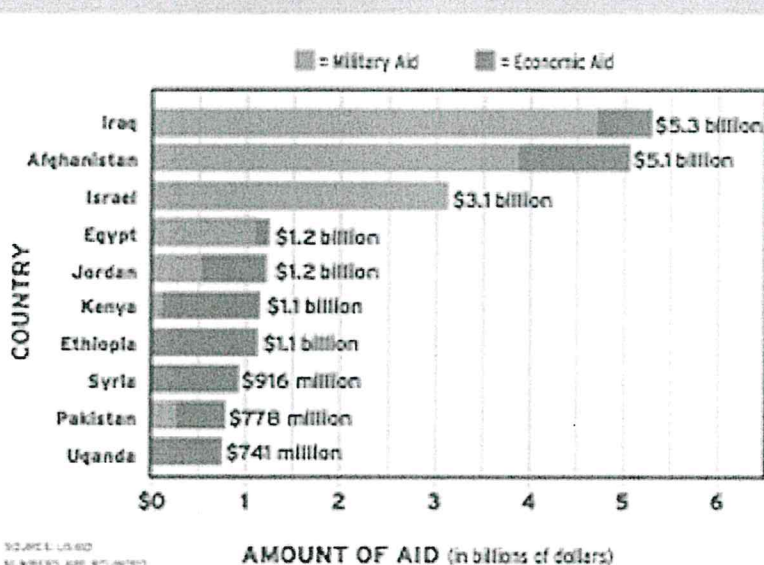


# Should the U.S. Continue Giving Billions in Foreign Aid?

Last year, the U.S. spent \$42 billion on foreign aid. About 35 percent of that was for military assistance, but all the rest provided economic and humanitarian aid to developing countries. No other nation spent more. Most recent American presidents have seen foreign aid as a way of promoting American values abroad and preventing international challenges from flaring up into crises.

But President Trump, who ran for office on an "America First" platform, has proposed cutting U.S. foreign aid by about a third, to less than \$30 billion. Two experts—a researcher from an organization that promotes international development and a scholar from a conservative Washington think tank—square off about whether foreign aid is a good investment or a waste of taxpayer money.

Top 10 Recipients of U.S. Aid (2016)



**YES** Foreign aid makes up a tiny fraction of the U.S. budget. For every dollar the government collects in federal taxes, just one penny goes to help people in developing countries. But that investment in things like vaccines, providing school supplies, and helping rebuild after natural disasters has had a huge impact. In the past 25 years, the proportion of people living in extreme poverty worldwide has dropped by two-thirds, and U.S. aid helped make this a reality.

The money we spend overseas not only helps those in far-off places, it also has benefits here at home. A U.S. program to fight malaria has saved more than 6 million lives since 2000. A program to fight the AIDS epidemic has prevented nearly 2 million babies from being born with HIV. Fighting disease outbreaks in poor countries also helps prevent those diseases from spreading across our own borders.

In addition, foreign aid boosts the U.S. economy and protects our national security. By helping people in poorer countries become healthier, more educated, and more

optimistic about the future, we're encouraging people to see Americans as allies rather than enemies—and ultimately as potential business partners. In fact, in 2015, American businesses sold 51 percent of their products to customers in developing countries. South Korea, once an impoverished country and a recipient of U.S. aid, is now one of America's largest export markets.

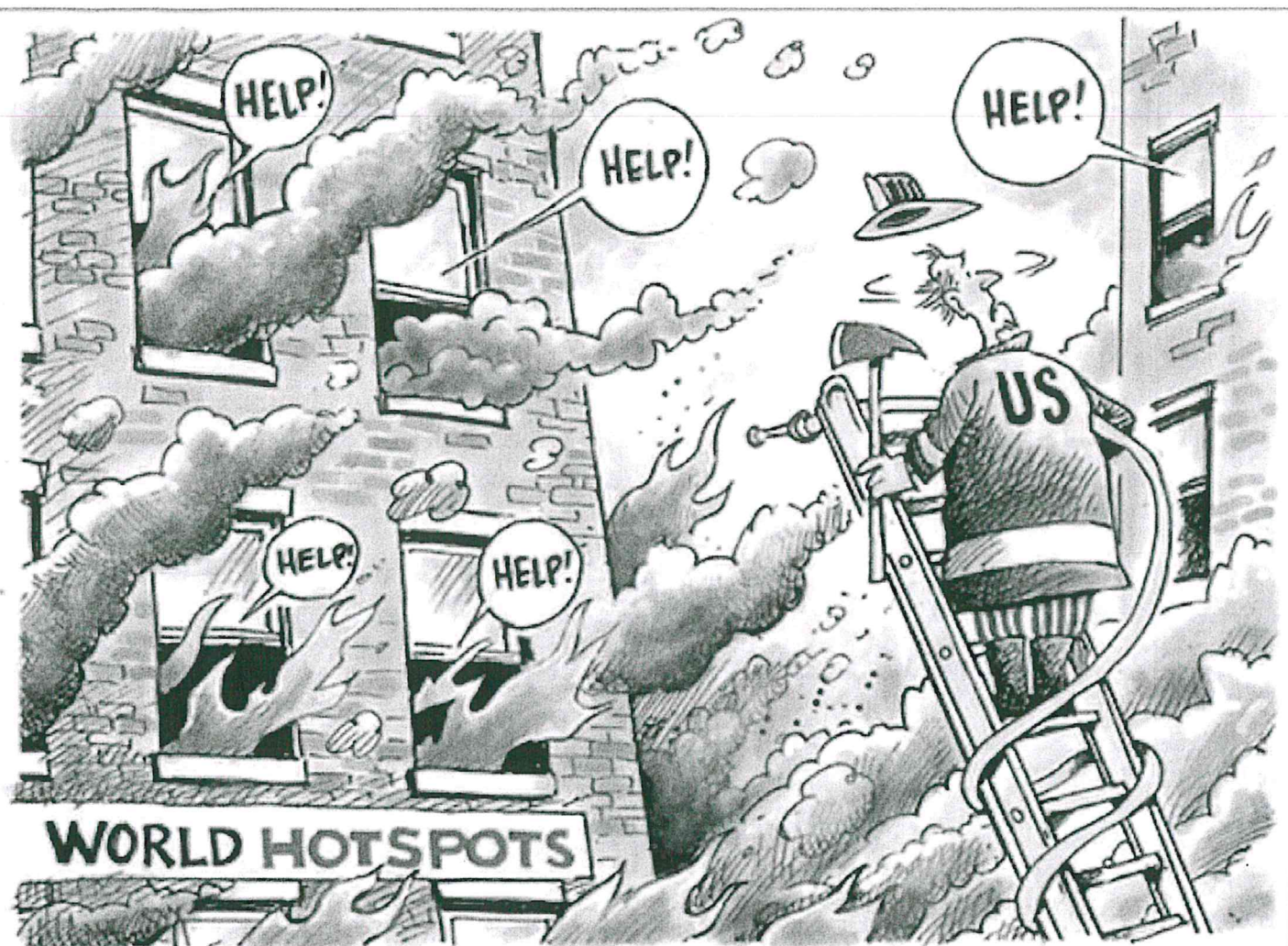
Providing aid to those who need it also fundamentally reflects our American values. We are a nation of compassion and resources. We like to think we solve problems. And despite all the progress made in the past few decades, the world still has enormous problems: Globally, 15 million school-age girls never set foot in a classroom, and 25 percent of children who do go to school never learn to read. Smart U.S. foreign aid can help change that.

Foreign aid can help make the world a safer and more prosperous place, and we should continue investing in it. ↘

—SCOTT MORRIS

Senior Fellow, Center for Global Development

**U.S. foreign aid has helped reduce extreme poverty substantially.**



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**NO** Since the end of World War II, American taxpayers have watched their government spend more than \$3 trillion on foreign aid. The time has come for significant cuts. That's because most aid projects have failed to solve the long-term problems of poverty and bad governance, and they will never be able to succeed.

The biggest problem with foreign aid is that it often goes to countries that have troubled histories and deeply entrenched problems. In many of these countries, the most basic functions of government are totally unreliable. For example, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Pakistan, and Haiti have received billions in U.S. aid in recent years but remain corrupt, unstable, or undemocratic.

Too often, foreign aid actually reinforces these problems, making it harder for countries to fight corruption and establish more-democratic institutions. That's because foreign aid can help corrupt regimes remain in power by giving them money and good-paying jobs for them to hand out as perks. Sometimes when unscrupulous regimes receive American

foreign aid funding to fight against corruption in their governments, they use it to target their political enemies. Sadly, we see this happening in South Sudan right now.

When USAID, the agency that distributes foreign aid, was set up in the early 1960s, it was the height of the Cold War. Foreign aid was a key weapon in the battle with the Soviet Union for the "hearts and minds" of people in developing countries. But the Cold War is over, and that rationale for official government aid is gone.

There have been some notable foreign aid successes, such as helping to fight malaria and halt the spread of HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa. But unfortunately, the overall track record of U.S. foreign aid is mixed at best.

At the end of the day, the goal of American foreign aid agencies should be to put themselves out of business by helping countries to succeed on their own. In that sense, the end of foreign aid can't come soon enough. \*

— JAMES M. ROBERTS  
Research Fellow, The Heritage Foundation

**Foreign aid can make it harder for troubled countries to fight corruption.**