

Those mandatory federal budget cuts went into effect this week; every U.S. department and agency — without exception — must learn to get by on fewer dollars. That means fewer jobs for American workers.

Of course, the reductions apply also to foreign aid. This nation's client states will suffer along with federal employees — except Israel.

Of all countries helped by U.S. taxpayers, only Israel receives the bulk of its assistance up front. This funding at the beginning of the year enables Tel Aviv to augment its budget by interest. When the check runs about a billion dollars, that's a hefty boost — at only 5 percent, somewhere around \$50 million.

Should the interest go to the U.S. Treasury? I don't think so. These are economic assistance funds, intended to help Tel Aviv to establish a sound financial footing for its people. As a federal budget item, \$50 million is not a lot of money. It could make the crucial difference at this stage when Israel Prime Minister Shimon Peres appears to have turned around his nation's runaway inflation.

Still, I am bothered by the exemption and its impact on U.S. relations with other countries. Secretary of State George Schultz indicates future payments to Tel Aviv may be brought in line; but the Israelis have already taken exception to the notion. On the past record, their lobby will almost certainly make the exemption stick.

Failure to enforce the mandatory cuts will give Israel a further advantage; since most of the scheduled funds are for military assistance, this will lead to the further escalation of weaponry in the Middle East.

It would be different if there were a need to fight terrorism inside Israel; but by Tel Aviv's count, only 18 Jewish citizens died last year at what may have been Palestinian hands. That's about half the number of Frederick County traffic fatalities for 1985.

Furthermore, no one can say that all the Israeli deaths derived from political causes; most of the murderers were not caught. America's cities experience random crime all the time.

Nor can the case be made that Israel is losing its position as the "superpower" in its part of the world. At every testing, it triumphs — most recently when the Syrian Migs were downed.

No one can seriously believe that Israeli's existence is threatened any longer — especially since the treaty with Egypt. Tel Aviv's firepower is so superior that its lobbyists are forced to beat the empty barrel of "impending" Syrian attacks; such stratagems are necessary to keep U.S. arms flowing.

In reality, Syria's army is bogged down in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley; Damascus does not have enough strength to enforce its peace arrangement with the Lebanese militias. Israel's other neighbor, Jordan, has neither the means nor the mentality to start a war.

In other words, conditions could not be more favorable for the United States to lessen Middle East tensions by reducing the arms sent to Tel Aviv. This would trim the sails of Israel's war parties — notably the Likud — and encourage further Prime Minister Peres' peace campaign. For those who may have lost sight, Peres' Labor Party is the custodian of the legacy of Golda Meier and David ben-Gurion.

Make no mistake: it is the Labor Party that holds the key to a Middle East solution. Peres has not shown himself to be another ben-Gurion, or Meier; but he represents humanity's hope for an end to the killing.

Naturally, Shimon Peres can be expected to protest loudly at any suggestion of an arms cutback; but the Likud's Shamir and Sharon will more than yell. They know their political futures depend on convincing the electorate the United States backs their bloody violence. Implied American approval was necessary for that invasion of Lebanon that cost so many lives, some of them American.

The U.S. "blank check" policy for Israeli arms costs more than the money; its reversal would benefit all of mankind, including the average Israeli.

Reducing the weapons shipped to all parties involved could be a major step toward peace. Under the new budget cuts, Egypt and other countries will receive less U.S. aid, including arms. Israel must be granted no exemption.

The mandated federal tightening of the purse-strings serves as a convenient reason for Washington to re-examine its aid policies. As South Africa's Bishop Desmond Tutu said of his own unhappy country, "The cycle of violence must be broken." The same goes for the Middle East.



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Viewpoint

Israel and the

budget cuts

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