
Hill Battle Lines Pit Foreign

By Thomas W. Lippman
Washington Post Staff Writer

Sen. Mitch McConnell (Ky.) is a Republican and he favors some reduction in U.S. foreign aid, but he drew the line at the wholesale reductions in U.S. international spending approved last week by the Senate Budget Committee.

Ticking off a long list of the good works and worthy causes he said are financed by the international affairs budget, McConnell said that "if the budget resolution passes as is, every one of these programs would be in jeopardy. Every one of these activities could face termination. At the end of seven years, the United States would have as visible and viable an international role as Ghana. Maybe not Ghana—maybe Burkina Faso," an African country that is poorer than Ghana.

McConnell was exaggerating for effect, but he was hardly alone in doing that last week as Congress began consideration of the international affairs budget—which includes foreign aid, State Department operations and other nonmilitary U.S. government operations abroad. The debate went far beyond money into the larger issues of the U.S. role in the world and the responsibility of the prosperous to care for the destitute.

Would it matter if some friendly but obscure countries had no U.S. embassy? Is it time to stop investing U.S. taxpayer dollars in Africa? Is it true that relatively small amounts of money spent keeping babies healthy today will pay off later in averted crises and perhaps in wars that don't break out? Would a sharp cutback in spending amount to forfeiture of a unique opportunity to shape the future of a world in which the United States has no serious rival for power?

Are Egypt and Israel forever entitled to the same amount of U.S. assistance every year, even if it means dropping entire continents from the aid program? Are taxpayer-funded cultural exchanges worth the money now that communism is no longer winning converts? Is diplomacy cost-effective?

These were the questions that swept across Capitol Hill as the budget debate began. Republicans—except for McConnell—generally argued that the key to U.S. strength in global affairs is economic stability, and that getting the deficit under control is the most urgent national security issue. Many Democrats, including senior officials of the Clinton administration, argued that the international affairs budget is a relative drop in the federal spending bucket and that cut-

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ting it as the Republicans propose would be shortsighted and counterproductive.

Noting that under the Senate Budget Committee's plan, discretionary international affairs and foreign aid spending would drop from the current \$18.9 billion a year to \$12.6 billion in 1999, McConnell said "that's \$12.6 billion for export promotion activities, economic reforms, nuclear reactor safety initiatives, the Camp David countries, disaster relief, agricultural export promotion support, refugee assistance, peacekeeping, parliamentary training, farmer-to-farmer exchange programs, military education programs, international crime control, counter-narcotics and containing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. . . . A \$12.6 billion budget will leave this president, the next president, our nation and our citizens with no global options other than sending in troops. We will be reduced to a country victimized by ad hoc crisis management."

But McConnell's was a lone voice among the Republicans. The majority view was expressed by Rep. Benjamin A. Gilman (R-N.Y.), chairman of the House International Relations Committee, a legislator whose long-standing commitment to foreign affairs

shields him from the charges of isolationism hurled about by some Democrats.

"The Cold War may be over but the world is still a dangerous place and our friends need material support," he said. "I wish we could do more. We will do what we can. But the American people have told us that the federal budget needs to move toward balance, and I agree with them. In that context, there is no way that the international affairs budget could be spared. There should be little question that our budget deficit is weakening us economically. And an America that is weak is not an America that can lead."

Judging from the early results in the budget and foreign affairs committees, it seems likely that the U.S. Agency for International Development and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency—and perhaps the U.S. Information Agency—are doomed to be trimmed in size and folded into the State Department, which would also be cut back. The Voice of America and the National Endowment for Democracy may be on the chopping block, along with U.S. participation in most United Nations development and aid activities other than UNICEF.

"In some areas it could be very detrimental to U.S. national interests" to cut spending on such a broad scale, former secretary of state

James A. Baker III said at a luncheon meeting with reporters. "But the real sources of our strength are our principles and our economic power. We have to get a handle on the deficit. Every other country is telling us to do that, and they can't complain when we do."

Democrats refused to accept the argument that international affairs money is the same as domestic money and must be reduced accordingly. They viewed it as seed money that would pay off in improved conditions overseas, higher living standards, more demand for U.S. goods and less need for U.S. military intervention. "The budget proposal amounts to a classic example of pennywise and pound foolish," said Sen. Patrick J. Leahy (D-Vt.).

"We're moving into a new era in development, world markets, we're going into GATT [General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade] and the NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement] treaties," said Rep. Donald M. Payne (D-N.J.), referring to international free trade agreements. Noting that similar agreements are planned in Asia, Payne said, "We're making an impact in those places. For us to withdraw . . . and to lessen our impact is just foolhardy, makes no sense, is bad business and will have an impact on our presence in the future."