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DOES FOREIGN AID SERVE U.S. INTERESTS? NOT AT THE UNITED NATIONS

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Congress has tried unsuccessfully for several years to make fundamental reforms to the U.S. foreign aid program. Chief among these is abolishing the Agency for International Development (AID), which distributes most of this aid. Congress's attempts to pass foreign aid authorizing legislation that includes the elimination of AID and other substantial changes have been thwarted by threats of a veto by President Clinton. In fact, the entire U.S. foreign aid program has continued without the usual congressional authorization since 1985.

In its campaign to retain the foreign aid status quo, the Clinton Administration has relied on a number of ever-changing arguments. One of those most frequently heard is that foreign aid supports and advances U.S. interests overseas. The AID claims, for example, that foreign aid helps the United States gain influence with countries around the world and that foreign aid is necessary to gain foreign support for U.S. policy. AID Administrator J. Brian Atwood warned last year, "I fear we will undermine the ability of our nation to project its interests abroad if we discard a tool of foreign policy [AID] before determining if we still need it."¹

One measure of the U.S. foreign aid program's influence around the world is the voting records of U.S. foreign aid recipients in the United Nations (U.N.). Despite its many problems, the U.N. continues to be a forum in which the United States seeks international cooperation on vital U.S. interests.² An examination of the U.N. voting records of foreign aid recipients, however, reveals a

1 Statement of J. Brian Atwood, Administrator, U.S. Agency for International Development, before the House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, Export Financing and Related Programs, April 24, 1996.

2 In the most recently concluded U.N. session, several U.S.-identified vital policy issues were considered, including U.S.-sponsored resolutions on human rights, extension of the economic embargo on the rogue nation of Cuba, resolutions to open international trade, and U.S. initiatives to combat international crime, drug trafficking, and terrorism.

story very different from that told by Atwood and the Clinton Administration: Most recipients of U.S. foreign aid vote against the United States more often than they vote with it. Consider the following facts gathered from the 1996 U.N. session.

- **68 percent of U.S. foreign aid recipients** voted against the United States a majority of the time, up from 64 percent in the 1995 session.

Thus, two out of every three foreign aid recipients voted against the United States most of the time (see Table 1).³

- **India**, the sixth-largest recipient of U.S. foreign aid and receiving some \$154 million in 1997, voted against the United States in the U.N. 76 percent of the time, more than Iran and almost as often as Cuba.

	FY '97 U.S. Aid	Votes Against U.S. in U.N., 1996
1. Israel	\$3,000,000,000	5%
2. Egypt	2,116,000,000	61
3. Bosnia-Herzegovina	225,500,000	42
4. Ukraine	186,583,000	41
5. Russia	177,572,000	41
6. India	153,445,000	76
7. Peru	112,700,000	57
8. Haiti	109,526,000	56
9. Bolivia	106,833,000	55
10. Ethiopia	106,279,000	57
Total Aid	\$6,294,438,000	

- **Laos**, from which the Clinton Administration in 1992 lifted a decades-old U.S. restriction on the disbursement of foreign aid because of human rights abuses, will receive some \$2.5 million in U.S. foreign aid in 1997, even though it cast votes against the United States in the U.N. 74 percent of the time—more than did Libya.
- **Bangladesh**, receiving some \$70 million in U.S. foreign aid, voted against the United States in the U.N. 65 percent of the time.
- **The Philippines**, which despite remarkable progress in economic reform still will receive some \$65 million in U.S. foreign aid, voted against the United States in the U.N. 61 percent of the time.
- **Mexico**, whose economy was bailed out by President Clinton to the tune of some \$40 billion in 1994, will receive some \$26 million in U.S. foreign aid, despite siding against the United States in the U.N. 61 percent of the time.
- **Egypt**, the second-largest recipient of U.S. foreign aid at some \$2.1 billion, cast its U.N. ballot against the United States 61 percent of the time.
- **Colombia**, twice decertified by the Clinton Administration for not cooperating with the United States in the fight against international drug trafficking, voted against the United

3 The Clinton Administration often dismisses such statements by claiming that the figures are based only on “recorded votes” and not “consensus votes.” Yet this is a smoke screen to obscure the facts. The U.N. categorizes all votes into two broad groups, “recorded” and “consensus” votes. Recorded votes are taken on issues that most directly affect such international topics as nuclear weapons proliferation, organized crime, and drug trafficking. Consensus votes most often are on procedural matters relating to the internal administration of the U.N. and related issues, and thus often have little to do with foreign policy or a country’s vital interests. When measuring how countries support or oppose U.S. foreign policy initiatives, therefore, it makes little sense to consider consensus voting because most of these votes do not touch on the vital issues the Clinton Administration claims are advanced by foreign aid. Recorded votes are far more accurate in reflecting the positions of governments at the U.N.

States at the U.N. 61 percent of the time. Still, the Clinton Administration requested some \$26 million in U.S. aid for Colombia in fiscal year 1997.

- **Ethiopia**, receiving some \$106 million in U.S. foreign aid, stood against the United States in the U.N. 57 percent of the time.

- **Haiti**, where President Clinton sent U.S. troops to restore deposed President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 1994, will receive almost \$110 million in U.S. foreign aid. Even so, Haiti voted against the United States in the U.N. 56 percent of the time.

- **Of the ten largest U.S. foreign aid recipients**, six voted against the United States more than half the time (see Table 2).

- **To the top ten countries voting against the United States in the U.N. most of the time, the United States will give some \$323 million in U.S. foreign aid in 1997** (see Table 3).

There are many reasons for a country to vote with or against the United States at the U.N. But it is clear from these data that foreign aid does not win friends where it counts: supporting U.S. foreign policy initiatives. Supporters of an aggressive foreign aid program, most of whom are also strong proponents of the U.N., cannot dismiss such U.N. votes as unimportant or irrelevant. They are indeed important in gauging the general orientation of a member government's foreign policy.

Table 3

**Top Ten Countries Voting Against the U.S.
at the U.N. and U.S. Foreign Aid for FY 1997**

	FY '97 U.S. Aid	Votes Against U.S. in U.N., 1996
1. India	\$153,445,000	76%
2. Laos	2,500,000	74
3. Lebanon	6,575,000	73
4. China	893,000	70
5. Nigeria	7,500,000	69
6. Mauntania	2,410,000	69
7. Indonesia	57,457,000	68
8. Sudan	10,053,000	67
9. Ghana	57,459,000	66
10. Tanzania	25,418,000	66
Total Aid	\$323,710,000	

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