
SECURITY ASSISTANCE LEGISLATION AND POLICY

The Future of Foreign Aid: Views From The Top

[Editor's note. The following correspondence, furnished by the Department of State, reflects recent high-level considerations regarding the need for a major policy review and readjustment of the U.S. foreign assistance program. This correspondence was initiated on 12 August 1992 when the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Foreign Operations of the Senate Appropriations Committee, Patrick J. Leahy (D-VT), wrote a detailed letter to President Bush and to then presidential candidate Clinton on this subject. The Leahy letter is reprinted herein, as are also the responses from National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft (for President Bush) and from Governor Bill Clinton.]

United States Senate
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
WASHINGTON DC 20510-8025

August 12, 1992

The President
The White House
Washington DC

Dear Mr. President:

As I face the prospect of once again attempting to guide a foreign aid funding bill through the Senate, the disintegration of the political consensus in Congress in support of foreign aid is starkly apparent. For the second year in a row, the United States foreign aid program will experience massive cuts. Even with these deep reductions, the political difficulties remain.

As Chairman of the Foreign Operations Subcommittee, with primary responsibility in the United States Senate for recommending the annual foreign aid spending levels, it has become patently clear to me that our international assistance program is exhausted intellectually, conceptually, and politically. It has no widely understood and agreed set of goals, it lacks coherence and vision, and there is a very real question whether parts of it actually serve broadly accepted United States national interests any longer. The principal delivery mechanism, the Agency for International Development, is noted for pervasive mismanagement. It has become a tired, weak, and dispirited agency in dire need of a top to bottom rejuvenation.

Even before the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact, the disappearance of the Soviet empire, and the end of the Soviet state itself, much of our foreign aid program was clearly out of step with global challenges to our national well-being. As a whole, it is failing to address adequately fundamental American interests in the global population explosion, international environmental degradation on a massive scale, and seemingly ineradicable poverty and hopelessness in the developing world. But

with the astounding transformation of international relationships in the last three years, our foreign aid program is fast becoming a dinosaur, relic of an era which is part of history.

A massive readjustment is urgently necessary. We need a total reexamination of foreign aid, with the conscious goal of redefining how and why this country should continue to send any of the American taxpayer's money abroad. Such a reexamination will, I believe, lead the American people to conclude that the United States, the only superpower and the richest nation in the world, has a responsibility to help resolve these global threats to our national well-being and to assist people less fortunate than we. They will accept that a restructured, bipartisan, and effective foreign aid program is an essential tool in carrying out that responsibility.

I have no illusions that in an election year we can agree on, much less enact, the fundamental changes needed in foreign aid. But as soon as the elections are over, regardless of which party controls the White House, I believe the President, as a top priority, should convene a conference on foreign aid. In my view, such a conference should be chaired by the Secretary of State, and attended by the National Security Advisor, the Secretary of the Treasury, the Administrator of AID, as well as the leaders of the key committees of Congress responsible for designing and funding the foreign aid program.

Such a meeting among those bearing the executive and political burdens of the foreign aid program should explore candidly the most basic questions, such as:

- In the absence of a global military threat to our national security, why should the United States continue to have a foreign aid program? In the post-Cold War era, what specific interests should it serve?
- What goals are we trying to achieve through foreign aid, and are we really making any progress towards those goals? How should our foreign aid program be rebuilt to attain those goals?
- If we are to continue to give foreign aid, how should we do so? What is the best, most cost effective mechanism for providing our aid?
- How do we explain and justify to the American people continued foreign aid?

If there is enough common ground on questions like these, I believe it is possible to create a consensus for a restructured foreign aid program. The President and Congress could then rewrite the basic foreign assistance legislation, redesign the Agency for International Development, establish a new bipartisan coalition in Congress willing and able to support foreign aid spending, and explain to the American people why their leaders believe it is the national interests [sic] to continue to send U.S. money abroad.

Without such a new consensus, I do not believe the American people are willing to let foreign aid go on as it is now.

Therefore, after the election I urge you to give the building of a new foreign aid program a top priority on your foreign policy agenda. Of course, I stand ready to work with you and my colleagues to carry out this urgently needed reform.

Sincerely

/s/ PATRICK LEAHY
United States Senator

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**THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON**

September 25, 1992

Dear Mr. Chairman

Thank you for your letter to the President expressing your support for a comprehensive reexamination of U.S. foreign assistance. I hope you noticed the President's speech to the United Nations General Assembly, in which he said "AID. . .needs to be fundamentally and radically overhauled." He also pledged to work with the Congress on a "top to bottom overhaul" of foreign assistance.

We have already begun the necessary preliminary work inside the Executive Branch. We appreciate your thoughtful comments and look forward to working with you and the Congress on this important effort.

Thank you for writing and sharing your thoughts.

Sincerely,

/s/ Brent Scowcroft

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[Clinton/Gore Campaign letterhead]

August 23, 1992

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
United States Senate
Committee on Appropriations
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Pat:

Thank you for your thoughtful letter of August 12th on the need to re-examine our foreign aid programs.

Clearly, in the wake of the Cold War, we must re-evaluate our foreign aid programs, and work to build a consensus for a restructured foreign aid program. The latent tendency toward a new isolationism in America must be countered with strong Presidential leadership that is prepared to make the case for the importance of remaining engaged in the world. Part of that task will involve committed leadership to develop bipartisan support for these important assistance programs.

If elected, I would welcome the opportunity to work with you to achieve this goal. The proposals you outline in your letter are steps the next President must take. We now have the opportunity to shift many of our aid programs away from unneeded security assistance and toward sustaining free market economic reforms, promoting economic growth in developing countries and strengthening the world's emerging democracies.

Again, thank you for your letter and insightful proposals. I look forward to discussing them with you further the next time we have a chance to get together.

Sincerely,

/s/ Bill Clinton

[Editor's note. Mr. Clinton added the following hand-written note below his signature: "I agree with you. Thanks."]