

A Saving the U.S. Can't Afford

By

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Harry Shaw (editorial page, July 15) argues that the administration has overstated the seriousness of the \$5 billion cut in its request of \$22.6 billion for the international-affairs functions of the fiscal 1987 budget. Mr. Shaw contends that the administration can muddle through without dire consequences if we shave "big-ticket items" such as aid to Israel, Egypt, NATO and other allies who provide military facilities to us, and assistance to Central America; and if Congress gives the administration more flexibility in allocating foreign aid.

Mr. Shaw's analysis is a strategy of retreat. By concentrating only on 1987, he neglects the broader context and trends of our diminishing resources for foreign assistance. FY 1987 is the second straight year of major budget cuts in foreign aid funds, and there is every indication that the same restrictive budgetary environment will be with us in 1988 and beyond. The question is not whether we can adjust to a single year's budget problem--we could--but whether we can afford continuing erosion of the vital U.S. security interests that sustained lower foreign assistance levels will bring about.

Mr. Shaw mistakenly assumes that countries providing us military facilities will accept without question the deep reductions he contemplates. Our friends see their interests clearly--and they must now measure them in an environment of declining benefits of cooperating with the U.S. and rising costs in terms of threats to their security.

Our development and security assistance requests for \$16.2 billion in 1987 serve interrelated and crucial objectives:

- 34% would go to Israel and Egypt, reinforcing our search for Mideast peace.
- 26% would go to base-rights countries such as the Philippines, Greece and Turkey, and military-access states such as Kenya, Korea and Pakistan.
- 11% would go to Central America and the Caribbean.
- 17% would go to countries who share our democratic values, such as Colombia and India; where new democracies have emerged, such as Bolivia and Uruguay; and where basic economic reforms are occurring, such as Ecuador and Senegal.

The funding cuts that Congress would have us absorb would require us to turn our backs on critical countries in Africa and the Middle East when their need for U.S. support has never been greater. The resulting void in strategic areas encourages our adversaries to fill in behind us.

It would cost the U.S. many times the \$800 million Mr. Shaw claims we would save to replace the bases we could lose by "shaving" our security assistance. The political costs are equally daunting. Standing with the U.S. and supporting Western security interests can be risky. How do we explain to Egypt and Morocco that budget cuts are "inevitable" in light of the dangers they face because they are working with the U.S. toward peace in the Middle East? If countries support publicly U.S. interests and in return see they must stand alone as we work out our sums in the budget game Mr. Shaw would have us play, how can we advance our foreign policy interests?