



POLITICS

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## Trump plans 28 percent cut in budget for diplomacy, foreign aid

Arshad Mohammed



WASHINGTON (Reuters) - President Donald Trump's proposed 28 percent budget cut for U.S. diplomacy and foreign aid next year would preserve \$3.1 billion in security aid to Israel but reduce funding for the United Nations, climate change and cultural exchange programs.

Trump's budget: winners and losers

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The budget proposal for the fiscal year beginning on Oct. 1 is a first shot in a battle with Congress - which controls the government purse strings - that will play out over months and may yield spending far beyond Trump's requests.

Congress, controlled by Trump's fellow Republicans, may reject some or many of the proposed cuts to the U.S. State Department and Agency for International Development (USAID) budgets for maintaining America's diplomatic corps, fighting poverty, promoting human rights and improving health abroad.

The White House is proposing a combined \$25.6 billion budget for the State Department and USAID, a 28 percent reduction from current spending, according to documents the White House provided on Thursday.

"This is a 'hard power' budget. It is not a 'soft power' budget," Mick Mulvaney, Trump's budget director, told reporters, referring to the president's desire to prioritize military power over the influence that can flow from development aid.

In Tokyo, U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson defended the cuts as a necessary correction to a "historically high" budget for the State Department that had grown to address conflicts abroad in which the United States was engaged as well as disaster aid. Tillerson said there would be a "comprehensive examination" of how the State Department's programs are executed and how the department is structured.

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Trump's budget proposes spending \$54 billion more on military spending and sinking more

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Senator Ben Cardin, the top Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said he was deeply disappointed and dismayed at Trump's proposal to slash foreign affairs spending.

David Miliband, president and CEO of the International Rescue Committee, said the roughly one-third cut in foreign aid endangered U.S. values and interests abroad.

“What's more, the U.S. foreign assistance budget makes up a mere 1 percent of the federal budget - a tiny category of discretionary spending which saves lives and spreads goodwill around the world,” he said.

More than 120 retired U.S. generals and admirals urged Congress in a letter last month to fully fund diplomacy and foreign aid, arguing the functions were “critical to keeping America safe.”

The budget also requests \$12 billion in “Overseas Contingency Operations,” or OCO, funding for extraordinary costs, chiefly in war zones such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. No comparison was provided for the current year's OCO spending.

The White House did not provide many details in its “skinny” budget proposal, a precursor to a more detailed budget submission the White House has said it will produce in May.

The budget would provide \$3.1 billion “to meet the security assistance commitment to Israel ... ensuring that Israel has the ability to defend itself from threats” and maintain its military superiority over more populous Arab neighbors.

It would also “maintain current commitments and all current patient levels on HIV/AIDS treatment” under PEPFAR, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, the world's largest provider of AIDS-fighting medicine. The program has been credited with saving millions of lives and enjoys bipartisan support.

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Without giving specifics, the documents laid out areas where the White House plans to save money, including by reducing U.S. funds to the United Nations and affiliated agencies “by setting the expectation that these organizations rein in costs and that the funding burden be shared more fairly among members.”

U.S. President Donald Trump’s overview of the budget priorities for Fiscal Year 2018 are displayed at the U.S. Government Publishing Office (GPO) on its release by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in Washington, U.S. March 16, 2017. REUTERS/Joshua Roberts

The United States would cut its contribution to the U.N. budget by an unspecified amount, and the U.S. government would not pay for more than 25 percent of U.N. peacekeeping costs, the documents said.

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Trump also plans to save money by eliminating the U.S. Global Climate Change Initiative, which among other things seeks to foster low-carbon economic growth, and by ceasing payments to U.N. climate change programs via the Green Climate fund.

He proposes cutting funds to multilateral development banks such as the World Bank by about \$650 million over three years from the Obama administration's commitments; reducing money for the State Department's Educational and Cultural Exchange Programs; turning some foreign military aid into loans from grants; and reorganizing the State Department and USAID.

Reporting by Arshad Mohammed; Additional reporting by Michelle Nichols at the United Nations, Roberta Rampton, Patricia Zengerle and Yara Bayoumy in Washington and Elaine Lies in Tokyo; Editing by Leslie Adler and Howard Goller

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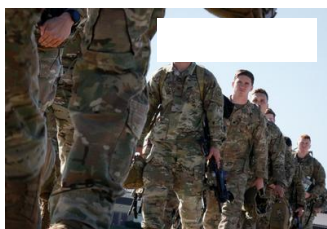
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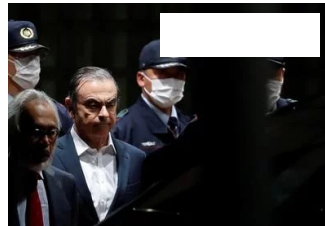
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