



News from Congresswoman

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State and Foreign Operations Subcommittee Evaluates International Affairs Budget Request

(WASHINGTON) – Congresswoman Nita Lowey, Chairwoman of the Appropriations State and Foreign Operations Subcommittee, today delivered the following opening statement at a hearing to evaluate the Administration’s Fiscal Year 2009 International Affairs budget request:

I want to welcome Secretary Rice to the Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs hearing on the President’s fiscal year 2009 International Affairs budget request. I believe this might be your last hearing before this subcommittee as Secretary of State and I thank you for your service.

Madam Secretary, I commend you for a budget request that seeks to strengthen our diplomatic and development corps, the heart and soul of our foreign policy, and expand assistance that advances American interests and projects American values around the world.

You are seeking a total of \$38.3 billion in funding for state department operations and foreign assistance funds within the jurisdiction of this subcommittee, an increase of \$2.8 billion or 8% over what Congress appropriated in FY2008. I strongly support the increased international affairs request as well as increased funding for the development assistance account which funds programs like basic education. However, I am disappointed by proposed cuts for essential programs such as family planning and child and maternal health. The significant shortfall of humanitarian assistance in the President’s request and the serious cut to UN peacekeeping are also concerning.

It seems the Administration finally recognizes the need to strengthen USAID, the agency with primary responsibility for our foreign assistance programs. However, the proliferation of programs and authorities related to foreign assistance outside of USAID has created a disjointed and uncoordinated approach to foreign aid. The civilian stabilization initiative is the latest in a long line of initiatives which the Administration has chosen to house in the State Department rather than USAID. Yet USAID has the primary responsibility for providing humanitarian and post-conflict reconstruction assistance. With the State Department increasingly engaged in running aid programs, is anyone left to do the work of diplomacy?

I would also like your thoughts on the expanding role of the military in providing aid, often without adequate direction and coordination with USAID.

Additionally, I remain concerned that too much of our assistance, especially in Africa, is governed by Presidential initiatives that are not part of the country planning process originating in the field. This initiative-based approach has prevented a more integrated and comprehensive assistance strategy to advance broad development and political governance objectives. The recent violence in Kenya and the political impasse there points to one of the shortcomings in our assistance. I know this is a region that you care deeply about and I commend you for personally engaging to help resolve the Kenya crisis, but I would also like to hear from you on how we can prevent such crises.

Let me now touch upon a few regional programmatic and policy concerns.

While we are seeing some political progress in the DRC and northern Uganda, I am far less hopeful about the prospects for Darfur, particularly without a more robust deployment of UNAMID and a revitalized Darfur peace process. The Khartoum government's continued obstruction of this force and failure to fully implement the Comprehensive Peace Agreement threatens to throw Sudan back into civil war. While the President has declared this genocide and spoken out against it, I urge you to engage in more forceful diplomacy with nations such as China, South Africa and Indonesia that have often opposed strong UN Security Council resolutions, and to engage with troop-contributing nations to do their part. It is unconscionable that this genocide continues after four years and I urge you and the President and all of the cabinet secretaries to speak of it daily and address it in all meetings with foreign governments.

In Latin America, while I note the robust funding you are seeking for the Merida Initiative, I am concerned that it does too little for Central America. Once again it seeks to combat the drug problem without addressing the underlying economic and societal issues that are exacerbating a surge in narcotics and other illegal trafficking.

In South Asia, we are reaping the grim rewards of decades of a short-sighted policy. For too many years, with too many administrations, U.S. policy towards Pakistan was focused on short-term security interests neglecting the long-term needs of building civil society, empowering and educating women and girls, and developing democratic institutions. In the process, we have advanced neither security nor stability, as evidenced by the escalating terrorist violence in Pakistan today.

While I certainly recognize and have supported the important security relationship between the United States and Pakistan, for too long our economic assistance has primarily been in the form of budget support. I am convinced that in order to achieve a more stable Pakistan, the United States must engage more broadly with the Pakistani people. I am pleased that the FY2009 request for Pakistan moves away from budget support, and I hope it will lead to a more balanced relationship with Pakistan.

In Afghanistan, as I mentioned last week with Deputy Secretary Negroponte, I fear that we are losing the window of international consensus and commitment to help the country gain a strong foothold on its long climb out of conflict. Donor fatigue is resulting in fewer donors fulfilling their pledges. Yet we cannot afford to fail again in Afghanistan. I understand that there are some encouraging preliminary indications that a more robust alternative development strategy combined with aggressive counter-narcotics enforcement and interdiction is starting to bear fruit. While we have yet to see evidence of that in the annual UN drug report, I hope that we can build upon and expand successful programs.

Finally, I know you are just returning from a trip to the Middle East and I look forward to hearing your assessment of the current situation in Gaza and your discussions with President Abbas and Prime Minister Fayyad.

As you know, I placed a hold on the \$150 million in cash transfer assistance for the PA because of specific process requirements that had not been fulfilled by the State Department and USAID—specifically receiving a copy of the Memorandum of Agreement that would govern the disbursement of these funds and a certification that the conditions included in the ESF section of the Fiscal Year 2008 bill had been met. I also expressed concern about President Abbas' commitment to peace in light of his recent comments.

I have since received a copy of the draft Memorandum of Agreement and your assurance that the Palestinian leadership is committed to peace with Israel. While I remain skeptical about the political will of a Palestinian leadership that all too often lapses into inflammatory rhetoric that belies their stated commitment to peace, I want no one to doubt the commitment of the United States to pursue peace when Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas have once again publicly affirmed their commitment to the peace process. Based on these events, I lifted the hold on \$100 million in cash transfer assistance. Madam Secretary, I have maintained my hold on the additional \$50 million pending the certification that I understand is forthcoming.

Madam Secretary, I was disturbed to hear Deputy Secretary Negroponte defer repeatedly to General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker in response to questions from this committee on the status of training of Iraqi security forces, the transition from a military-led to a civilian-led reconstruction and stabilization effort, and State Department planning for a U.S. diplomatic and development presence in a post-military environment. While I appreciate that Crocker and Petraeus are our diplomatic and military field commanders, is the State Department not responsible for orchestrating our foreign policy?

Madam Secretary, as always, you have a very full plate. I know that recent events in Serbia and Armenia have added to your challenges and I look forward to your testimony.

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