**Despite Pompeo’s Call for ‘Swagger,’ Trump Slashes Diplomatic Budget**

By: Robbie Gramer & Colum Lynch

Foreign Policy

March 11, 2019

<https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/03/11/trump-federal-budget-steep-cuts-to-state-department-foreign-aid-development-diplomacy-pompeo/?utm_source=PostUp&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=11804&utm_term=Editor#39;s%20Picks%20OC>

It was less than a year ago that new Secretary of State Mike Pompeo spoke of restoring America’s diplomatic “swagger” and projecting the U.S. presence “in every corner, every stretch of the world.”

But on Monday, he presented a White House budget proposal calling for steep cuts to the State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development that would undercut U.S. diplomatic clout and foreign aid worldwide, according to Democratic lawmakers, former officials, and experts.

President Donald Trump’s fiscal year 2020 budget proposal, released on Monday, calls for a 23 percent cut for the international affairs budget. The budget proposal would hit international organizations hardest, imposing up to $1 billion in cuts for United Nations activities and slashing more than 30 percent in humanitarian assistance. It also appears to dismantle the State Department’s chief refugee protection bureau.

By defending the budget, Pompeo is demonstrating that “he is prepared to enfeeble his own department in the face of congressional opposition,” Eric Schwartz, the president of Refugees International, told Foreign Policy.

The proposal drew fierce backlash from Democratic lawmakers and some foreign-policy experts, as well as a cadre of former top military commanders who argue continued cuts to diplomacy and foreign aid harm U.S. national security.

“For the third year in a row, the president’s foreign affairs budget request is dead on arrival on Capitol Hill,” said Rep. Eliot Engel, a New York Democrat and the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. “I predict that once again the Trump Administration’s attempt to hollow out our international affairs budget will meet bipartisan rejection in Congress.”

All told, Trump is proposing almost 19 times as much money for national defense—$750 billion—as he is for diplomacy and foreign aid—$40 billion.

Pompeo, in a letter accompanying the budget proposal submitted to Congress on Monday, said the request reflected efficiency rather than parsimony. “At the core of our request is the guiding principle that taxpayer dollars must be used wisely,” he wrote. Pompeo touted funding for U.S. diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific region and State and USAID programming to protect religious minorities in northern Iraq and elsewhere as “a powerful display of the United States’ enduring mission as a force for good around the world.”

But Trump’s budget isn’t likely to go far on Capitol Hill, where lawmakers accuse the Trump administration of not getting the hint that steep cuts to the State Department and USAID are nonstarters. Sen. Patrick Leahy, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Appropriations Committee, also pronounced Trump’s budget “dead on arrival” and said it was “not worth the paper it is printed on.”

Congress rejected a 33 percent cut to the State Department in Trump’s full 2018 budget proposal and a 29 percent cut to State in his 2019 budget proposal.

“It seems a bit like groundhog day,” said one congressional aide who spoke to FPon condition of anonymity.

Embedded within the budget proposal is $1.8 billion in economic and security assistance for the Trump administration’s U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy to push back on China’s growing influence in the region; $6.3 billion in humanitarian assistance worldwide, including refugee resettlement funding; $661 million to counter Russian disinformation and propaganda in Europe, Eurasia, and Central Asia; and $150 million to protect religious minorities in the Middle East and elsewhere.

The budget proposal also includes about $1 billion in cuts to U.S. funding for international organizations, including more than $360 million in cuts to voluntary contributions for programs like the U.N. Development Program and UNICEF.

It would also reduce funding for U.N. peacekeeping operations by as much as $400 million and jack up U.S. peacekeeping arrears to around $1 billion.

“This is basically a slash and burn approach as it relates to the U.N. regular budget and U.N. peacekeeping,” said Peter Yeo, the executive director of the Better World Campaign, a U.N. advocacy organization. It would “basically realize the complete elimination of American support for organizations like UNICEF.”

On Sunday, ahead of the budget proposal’s release, a group of former top U.S. generals urged Trump not to slash funds to foreign aid and development, saying such cuts undermine U.S. national security. “As military leaders who have commanded regional combatant commands in the Middle East, Latin America, Europe, Africa, the Pacific, and North America, we know that the military alone cannot keep our nation safe,” 14 former top U.S. generals said in a letter released by the U.S. Global Leadership Coalition, a Washington-based nonprofit organization. “Diplomacy and development are essential to combating threats before they reach our shores.”

The letter was signed by retired Gen. David Petraeus, a former CIA director and commander of U.S. Central Command, and retired Adm. James Stavridis, a former commander of U.S. European Command and Southern Command, among others.

Schwartz of Refugees International noted the budget proposal would cut more than 30 percent in overall U.S. humanitarian assistance and effectively undermine the State Department’s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, which is responsible for the protection of refugees, by stripping it of authority to program overseas assistance.

“They are basically saying to Congress, ‘We don’t give a damn about what you guys have been telling us year after year—we are going to persevere in this effort [to gut humanitarian funding],’” Schwartz said. “What does this say about the secretary’s declaration that the United States is the international humanitarian leader around the world? Leaders don’t propose cutting life-saving relief by more than 33 percent at a time of global crisis.”

Another area that is expected to spark backlash from Congress is global health funds. The Trump administration proposed $6.3 billion for global health issues, a cut from the estimated $8.69 billion Congress allotted in fiscal 2019. That includes about a 30 percent cut to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria—an international financing organization that funds health initiatives—and a 22 percent cut to the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. The President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief is widely lauded as one of the most successful global health campaigns and retains significant support on Capitol Hill.

“Our global health investments have been some of the most successful in the development space for the U.S. government,” the congressional aide said. “To have that number further reduced certainly is troubling.”

But Deputy Secretary of State John Sullivan defended the budget in a press briefing at the department on Monday. He said the budget shows the United States is “retaining our place as a global leader in health assistance.” He added: “The United States will remain the single largest donor to global HIV/AIDS relief efforts.”

Other advocates for the programs disagree.

“Congress will forget this budget by Friday, but the signal it sends to the world’s poorest will be remembered,” said Tom Hart of the One Campaign, a nonprofit advocacy organization that focuses on poverty and disease. “It’s pretty simple: We can’t end the AIDS crisis by cutting programs proven to fight this disease.”