

# U.S. Aid to Arab Countries

*Phil Baum and Mark Bruzonsky*

President Nixon has submitted to the Congress a \$5.18 billion request for worldwide economic and military aid which includes a \$900 million aid appropriation to Middle East countries including Israel. For the first time since 1967 substantial U.S. aid is destined for a number of Arab countries including Egypt and possibly Syria. The aid request specifically earmarks \$350 million for Israel (this is in addition of course to the \$2.2 billion in emergency military aid to Israel during the Yom Kippur War), \$250 million for Egypt, \$207.5 million for Jordan, and a \$100 million contingency fund, some of which is thought to be destined eventually for Syria.

Of the new funds for Israel, \$50 million is designated as security supporting assistance and \$300 million is to be in the form of military credit sales. According to the President in his Foreign Assistance Message to the Congress, "Israel's continued ability to defend herself reduces the prospects of new conflict in the Middle East, and we must continue to assist her in maintaining that ability." Secretary of State Kissinger, in discussing the foreign aid package, has again stated that "the United States is committed to the security and survival of Israel, and this commitment has not changed."

The aid to Egypt comes amid reports that President Sadat has taken a major step in ending total military dependence on the Soviet Union and will be attempting to buy arms and receive military aid from the U.S. and other Western countries. So far there has been no U.S. agreement in the area of military aid. The Secretary of State has recently indicated that the "issue of military assistance to Egypt, whether sale or credit . . . has not been formally raised by the Egyptian government." Mr. Kissinger added that "we don't expect it to be raised in the near future. It will have

*PHIL BAUM is the director and MARK BRUZONSKY the research associate of AJCongress' Commission on International Affairs.*

to be considered in the light of the circumstances that exist when it is raised." The \$250 million now being requested from the Congress in economic aid for Egypt includes \$20 million to help clear the Suez Canal, \$80 million to help in the purchase of U.S. farm and industrial goods, and \$150 million for reconstruction of cities along the canal. According to Secretary Kissinger, "the \$250 million . . . requested for Egypt represents the assessment of this Administration that Egypt is sincerely attempting to bring about a constructive and peaceful solution to the problem of the Middle East." He further indicated that "one of the concerns frequently expressed during the disengagement negotiations by the Israelis . . . [was] the reconstruction of the Canal Zone." The majority of the funds are to be used to reopen the Canal and to rebuild the cities and the port facilities.

Jordan is to receive under the President's request \$77.5 million in security supporting assistance, \$100 million in military assistance grants, and \$30 million in military credit sales. According to the President, "Jordan has been a moderate force in the Arab world and these funds will enable her to maintain a position of moderation and independence which will be crucial to a permanent settlement in the area."

The possible aid to Syria is as yet unclear and appears to be firmly conditioned upon Syrian acceptance of a reasonable settlement in the Golan Heights. The Secretary of State has indicated that there have been no discussions to date with Syria on specific aid programs. It remains possible of course that the \$100 million in contingency funds could go to Egypt or be divided among other countries in the area.

A high State Department official describing the aid package has commented that it is "in part, a balancing act between Israel and the Arab states." The State Department summary of the aid program indicates that the United States "must . . . be in a position to assist Arab leaders

of nations who have the political courage to move away from armed confrontation and to take the first difficult steps toward negotiating a peaceful settlement with their Israeli neighbors."

American policy in the Middle East appears to be in a state of attempted friendship with all parties and this might be considered a positive development if in fact it can be converted into a long-term policy which can gradually contribute to peace and stability in the area. In these terms, these expenditures might be understood and justified notwithstanding the questions that have been raised about the wisdom and the necessity of supplying any aid at all to Arab countries in the light of the billions and billions of dollars in oil revenues now flowing into that part of the world.

There would, of course, be profound and legitimate apprehension about a decision to provide military aid to Egypt. Any arms sales to Egypt coming in addition to arms sale programs to Jordan and Saudi Arabia already under way, would justifiably raise profound doubts as to the real motives of the Arab countries and the overall policy of the United States. And these same doubts would be provoked by any escalation in the quality or degree of sophistication of the weapons presently being provided.

These fears would remain despite the realization that partial or total dependence by some or all of the Arab states on U.S. arms might in some circumstances be preferable to allowing these states to remain almost totally dependent on Soviet weapons. Reliance upon American military supplies arguably would enhance the United States influence and greatly increase U.S. capability to impose restraints during any future conflict. A halt to replacement of weapons, spare parts, and ammunition would make continuation of major fighting very difficult. The problem nonetheless continues to be that any initial supply of American arms which would significantly bolster the Arab military establishment or magnify its striking powers, might induce some governments to undertake another reckless military adventure.

There is further danger that arms provided one country might be transhipped to another country to whom our government might not wish to provide assistance. Presumably this