
Jeffrey Sachs: Washington Leaves Millions To Die

The wonder of our world is that scientific knowledge is now so powerful that we can save millions of children, mothers, and fathers from killer diseases each year at little cost. The [Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB, and Malaria](#) has mobilized that knowledge over the past decade to save more than 7 million lives and to protect the health of hundreds of millions more. Yet now the Global Fund is under mortal threat because of budget cuts approved by President Obama and the Congress.

The Obama Administration had pledged \$4 billion during 2011-13 to the Global Fund, or \$1.33 billion per year. Now it is reneging on this pledge. For a government that spends \$1.9 billion every single day on the military (\$700 billion each year), Washington's unwillingness to follow through on \$1.33 billion for a whole year to save millions of lives is a new depth of cynicism and recklessness.

As a result of US budget cutbacks, and me-too cutbacks by other countries, the Global Fund this week [closed its doors](#) on providing new funds to impoverished nations. It was supposed to accept proposals next month from the poorest countries for an 11th round of disease-control funds. Instead, it has scrapped any new funding until 2014 at the earliest, and will only fund the continuation of the coverage of existing programs. US officials will prevaricate, noting that the US spends this amount or that amount. History will treat such excuses with the scorn they deserve.

Millions of people are now at risk of death in the coming years as a result of Obama's lassitude and neglect. Hundreds of thousands of children who would have been saved will now die of mosquito bites. They will die because they live in poor tropi-

cal environments where a mosquito bite kills, and where their impoverishment makes it impossible for them to afford a \$5 bed net, \$1 diagnostic test, \$1 dose of anti-malaria medicine, or access to a clinic. Countless others will die because they cannot get AIDS or TB treatments to stay alive.

If you think that money spent on the Global Fund is money down the drain, think again. The Global Fund was created a decade ago because the world needed to respond to the uncontrolled epidemics of AIDS, malaria, and TB. It has been a historic success, proving the skeptics wrong. The Global Fund keeps alive 3.2 million people on anti-retroviral treatment. It has financed 8.2 million courses of TB treatment and the distribution of 190 million insecticide-treated nets. [You can read an overview here.](#)

The Global Fund money has reached millions of people in need. When its programs have been hit by corruption, audits have paused the funding and reoriented the programs. The result of this practical approach is great success in many of the world's poorest places. Malaria has come down sharply, averting an estimated 400,000 deaths per year in Africa compared to the baseline path as of the year 2000. Yet there are still around 700,000 malaria deaths each year that can be prevented if the Global Fund has the means. [Read here](#) about the remarkable progress against malaria. Similar progress is [being made](#) against AIDS. Now that progress is at dire risk.

Reorienting less than 1 day's military budget to help save millions of lives (in conjunction with the efforts of other countries) is not only a great humanitarian step but also the most cost-effective step we can take for our own security. Countries like Yemen or Somalia are falling apart because they cannot meet

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their most basic needs. We send in drone missiles -- each one at the cost of at least 20,000 bed nets -- but we will find no real security until we help address the problems of disease, poverty, and hunger that destabilize these regions.

It is painful to recall the campaign promises made by Obama and Secretary Hillary Clinton. Both promised that they would step up the fight to control AIDS, TB, and malaria. Empty words. President Obama's aides tell him that foreign assistance is bad domestic politics and he listens. On this issue even George W. Bush knew better.

The head of the Foreign Affairs Committee in Congress, Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, is not quiet. She is an aggressive and outspoken foe of foreign assistance, pretending to her constituents that cutting a \$1 billion to the Global Fund is the way to balance the budget. Great, we're now 0.001 of the way there.

The United States Government, I noted earlier, is not alone in the collapse of morality, decency, and common sense. Each government that once contributed to the Global Fund takes refuge in the budget cuts by the US and the others. The apparent belief of the politicians is that there is safety in numbers if they all starve the Global Fund together.

We live in a country where the Federal Government doesn't think twice about the fate of impoverished and dying people. Such a government won't act to save your life or mine. Politicians so brazen and irresponsible need to be voted out of office. In the meantime, I will join the efforts around the world to find new means and new leaders to continue the struggle against the killer diseases. I hope that you will do so too.

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