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CRS Issue Statement on State and Foreign Operations Appropriations

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The Department of State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs appropriations bill provides annual appropriations for the vast majority of U.S. diplomatic and foreign assistance activities. The legislation covers the Department of State and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) operating accounts, U.S. contributions to international organizations and peacekeeping operations, non-military international broadcasting, bilateral and multilateral U.S. foreign economic assistance, and assistance to foreign militaries. The bill also funds the Peace Corps, Millennium Challenge Corporation, and other entities and programs through which the U.S. engages with the world to protect and advance U.S. national interests.

Beyond providing funds, State-Foreign Operations appropriations bills in recent years have been an important means through which Congress has expressed its foreign policy priorities. In the absence of regular enactment of foreign aid and foreign relations authorization bills, these appropriations measures have routinely waived the requirement that State Department and foreign aid appropriations be authorized prior to their expenditure. As a result, State-Foreign Operations appropriations bills not only set spending levels, but can incorporate new policy initiatives that would otherwise be debated and enacted as part of authorizing legislation.

The 111th Congress in its first session passed both a supplemental (P.L. 111-32) and a regular appropriation (P.L. 111-117) for the State Department, Foreign Operations, and Related Agency funding. A request for supplemental foreign affairs funding may be considered alongside the regular FY2011 budget request for the Function 150 (foreign affairs) budget account in the second session. Both the supplemental and regular budget process likely will include testimony by administration officials, perhaps with an assessment of U.S. aid already provided to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and possible additional future aid commitments to Yemen and Haiti. CRS products on State-Foreign Operations Appropriations legislation for both FY2011 and any future reports on possible FY2010 supplemental requests will be updated to reflect the major stages of these processes.

Policy issues that may surface during the second session of the 111th Congress related to the State-Foreign Operations appropriations include debate on international family planning activities, whether or not to send additional foreign aid to Afghanistan and Pakistan as well as to failed or failing states where terrorism recruiting or safe havens exist, staffing needs of the Department of State and USAID, the impact of possible across-the board budget cuts on foreign policy agencies, development and implementation of the U.S. approach toward improving global food security, including food aid and agricultural policies, and development assistance to address global climate change.

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