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WASHINGTON CLOSE-UP

The Failure of Foreign Aid

By FRANK GETLEIN

The most obvious and sensationalist reason for a thorough review of the foreign-aid program is that the program has on occasion been suborned by the CIA for its own secretive purposes. It was, apparently, used as a CIA cover during the period when our war in Laos was a big secret to be kept from the American people at all costs.

And, according to the Costa-Gavras movie, "State of Siege," recently the subject of a scandalous cancellation at the American Film Institute, AID officers themselves have instructed the police of client nations in the delicate arts of the torture of political prisoners.

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Obviously, if these things are going on in the name of foreign aid, the taxpayers deserve to know about it fully and their representatives in Congress deserve the chance to vote openly for assassination, torture, secret wars and so on, rather than to do so in the illusion that they are voting for improved crop yield and birth control information in underdeveloped countries.

But all of that subversion of foreign aid has been the product of limited minds at CIA, the same sort of minds that participated so heavily in both the Bay of Pigs and the Watergate conspiracy and burglary. There are other, more serious reasons for questioning foreign aid and they are offered in a penetrating, depressing and completely convincing new book by Washington-based agronomists William and Elizabeth Paddock.

The Paddocks call their book "We Don't Know How,"

and the title sums it up.

With long experience in Central America in numerous branches of foreign aid, the Paddocks compiled, in Washington, a list of aid projects there that the home offices here regard as extraordinarily successful. Then they went back to Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador to look at these "successes." They also visited a number of other assorted enterprises in the region and a boomtown in Mexico.

Their conclusions are sobering, their details sometimes appalling.

Among the latter are statistics gathered in the same cheerfully casual ways as the celebrated "body-counts" of the first major phase of our Indochinese war, according to which we seemed to have killed off everybody three or four times.

But it is upon those statistics that present programs are continued, future ones devised.

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By looking, asking questions of the local people who really know how things are going and by comparing conflicting or complementary sets of statistics, the Paddocks have concluded that foreign aid is not only a failure but an inevitable failure.

One reason is simply that any effective improvement in economic conditions causes a much greater increase in population which wipes out the economic improvement and then some.

Sources of real, measurable improvement in living conditions often are somewhat embarrassing to liberal observers. They include: the

money brought home by wet-back agricultural laborers in the United States; the sheer proximity to the United States of one Mexican boomtown and the relative American accessibility of one in Honduras; and, of all things, the long-term economic benefits of the United Fruit Company, the feared and denounced "El Pulpo"—the octopus—long blamed as an imperialist exploiter.

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The Paddocks have no fool-proof plan to make foreign aid work. Indeed, the point of their book is: "I don't know. You don't know. Nobody knows." But they do offer two powerfully sensible suggestions.

The first is simply that, given our increased understanding of the size and the depth of our own "pockets of poverty," more of our money for reform should be put into American areas in need of it—for example, Appalachia, the inner city, Puerto Rico, Indian reservations and Congress, all of which societies cry out for structural changes of the kinds we have tried, unsuccessfully, to create elsewhere in the name of foreign aid.

Their second thought is to start putting money, unilaterally, into the United Nations as an actual peace-keeping force, reliable for small nations. Those nations, relieved of the crushing burden of armaments purchased from us or from the Russians as foreign aid, would then have at least the beginnings of the capital needed to tackle their own problems.

It makes sense—too much sense. That's why it will never be tried.