



Trump Administration's Efforts to Shut Down USAID

Tech billionaire Elon Musk, whom President Trump has made head of the newly-formed Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), announced earlier this week that the administration is seeking to shut down the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). In the time since Trump's inauguration, thousands of USAID employees have been laid off and many of its programs around the world halted, as the president has instituted a broad freeze on foreign assistance over accusations of wasteful spending. Administration officials have also discussed the possibility of placing USAID under the authority of the State Department, with Secretary of State Marco Rubio tapping Pete Marocco, the director of foreign assistance there, to run USAID. Several lawmakers and legal experts have pushed back against the efforts to shut down or alter the agency, expressing that the attempted remake of the federal government is unlawful and requires the approval of Congress. A group of elected officials including U.S. Senator Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) and U.S. Representative Gerry Connolly (D-VA) held an event outside of USAID headquarters where they pledged to fight the dismantling of USAID on multiple fronts.

USAID is an agency of the U.S. government that is responsible for providing civilian foreign aid and development assistance, having been established in the early 1960s under the premise that American security was tied to stability and economic advancements in other countries. USAID's programs cover billions of dollars in humanitarian aid overseas and focus on areas such as fighting disease and food insecurity, reducing poverty, and offering relief to those impacted by conflicts and natural disasters – most of which was upended after President Trump froze foreign assistance upon his return to the White House. As the Trump administration seeks to slash government spending, critics of the move highlight the lifesaving aid that has been hindered as a result. Many organizations that provide vital care for needy and vulnerable people around the world have been forced to halt operations, as they have been unable to secure waivers to continue their work uninterrupted. Additionally, the Trump administration's efforts to shut down USAID have also elicited concern that the United States will lose its standing on the global stage and allow other countries to fill the void. Analysts have warned that the action could lead to the diminishing of American influence, especially in Asia, Africa, and South America – where USAID programs address a range of important needs. Others have stated that U.S. national security interests might be negatively affected as well, due to sudden changes to development programs risking instability in various places across the globe.

As some observers have sought to crucially draw attention to, the reason why there has been a significant degree of resistance and alarming concern regarding the efforts to shut down USAID is because much of its work is humanitarian in nature. While one can certainly levy fair criticism towards the exorbitant amount of foreign military aid given to countries like Ukraine and Israel, the purely humanitarian programs that provide food and medicine in other geographic locations should not be impeded. On the contrary, these should be protected and allowed to continue, and it is excessive foreign military spending mechanisms that instead warrant an overhaul and reduction. USAID operates as the world's largest single donor of [international food assistance](#), supports HIV/AIDS initiative programs like the United States President's Emergency Plan For AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) that have saved more than 25 million lives, and funds education for schoolgirls in Afghanistan, among other things. Overall, the agency oversees humanitarian, development, and security programs in approximately 120 countries. The prospect of agency closure not only puts humanitarian aid at risk, but also threatens the jobs of Americans working

abroad and here at home in the United States. Experts have noted that much of the money provided by USAID is helping foreign countries grow and develop stronger commercial ties with the U.S., and thus, shutting down the agency would – as one put it – “leave the door wide open for China to continue exerting its influence in Africa, jeopardizing American business interests and values.”

Trump administration officials have labelled USAID “a waste” and accused it of “advancing liberal social programs,” while supporters of the work that the agency does have argued that it plays a crucial role in disease prevention, counterterrorism, and humanitarian assistance globally. There appears to be a fair amount of bipartisan agreement regarding overspending on foreign-related issues, however, the [general dissent along party lines](#) is over whether USAID’s funds and policies should be autonomously controlled by the agency or subject to more government control. The [majority of the American public agrees](#) that the United States spends too much money on foreign aid, and as a result, too little on domestic affairs. In one of the latest developments this week related to the efforts to shut down USAID, the agency recently announced that thousands of employees would be placed on leave starting late Friday night, as personnel outside of the country – barring those given exceptions – would be recalled back from their postings within 30 days.