

*(Updated February 3, 2025)*

## **Backgrounder on the Trump/Musk Attempted Destruction of America's Foreign Assistance System**

The [stop-work order](#) on foreign assistance programs remains in place even as the Trump administration's attempt to unlawfully freeze all federal funding is tied up in litigation. Meanwhile Elon Musk and his team spent the weekend and today feverishly racing to undermine America's capacity to deliver foreign aid by dismantling the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The Musk destruction of USAID puts American families at increased risk by unilaterally pulling the plug on one of America's most successful and cost-effective tools for influencing the world and addressing global threats like pandemics, terrorism, and migration.

### **Key Points:**

- Elon Musk's weekend attacks on USAID showed that he and his 20-year-old DOGE cronies are in charge, not President Trump or Secretary Rubio. **And Musk's goals are clear: to destroy America's capacity to deliver foreign aid while beta testing his strategy for exercising control over the rest of the federal government.**
- **Elon Musk must immediately provide answers** for why and under what legal authority they took down USAID's website without warning in the middle of a Saturday night, breached security protocols to force their way into classified areas of the agency, and barred employees from entering the building on Monday.
- USAID is a **statutorily created independent organization** that makes Americans safer and more prosperous by promoting stability and economic opportunities around the globe.
- While every president has the prerogative to set their administration's priorities, federal funding is appropriated by Congress and **a president cannot circumvent the will of the people's representatives by unilaterally withholding funds**, much less abolishing an entire agency.
- The Trump administration could have reviewed programs without stopping critical work and putting people's lives at risk, but it chose not to. **Americans deserve to know why.**
- The Trump administration's **reckless freeze** on foreign assistance funding stiffs our international partners who have agreements with the United States to tackle transnational threats like fentanyl trafficking, pandemics, and terrorism – **Americans will be less safe as a result.**
- The freeze and ensuing chaos are **a gift to the Chinese Communist Party**, which seeks to sow doubts about America's reliability. They could not be happier with the Trump administration's incompetence on display.

## Programs Affected:

- Counter-narcotics programs and security cooperation
  - Even though the U.S. is grappling with an opioid crisis, the stop-work order would affect \$1.45 billion in funding for disrupting and reducing illicit drug markets and transnational crime and combating illicit financing to reduce transnational crime. ([Dafna Rand, Just Security](#))
  - In Somalia, the security of weapons stockpiles used by government forces in Mogadishu is overseen by local nationals impacted by the stop-work order. ([Wall Street Journal](#))
- Global health assistance
  - Monitoring of avian flu has been suspended, despite its spread to 49 countries, including the United States. One American has already been killed by the flu on home soil. Additional efforts to combat a deadly outbreak of Marburg virus in Tanzania and a widespread mpox outbreak in West Africa have also been suspended. ([Center for Disease Control](#); [Congressional Letter to USAID](#))
  - There is no U.S. participation in or support for a managed response to an outbreak of Ebola in Kampala, Uganda – a city of 1.9 million with a large international airport. ([Congressional Letter to USAID](#))
  - In Myanmar, the delivery of critical supplies, including rapid tests and malaria drugs, have been frozen. Cases of malaria in Myanmar surged from 78,000 in 2019 to 850,000 in 2023. The freeze also devastated local health organizations, leaving no workers left to distribute the supplies even if they arrive. ([New York Times](#))
  - More than 2.4 million already manufactured anti-malaria bed nets are stuck in production facilities in Asia, rather than being put to use in sub-Saharan Africa. Additional reporting suggests that contracts for eight million more nets are also on hold. ([New York Times](#))
  - 600,000 people in Sudan are at grave risk of cholera, measles, and malaria as a result of the freeze. ([AP](#))
  - HIV testing and mpox surveillance throughout Africa were suspended. ([ProPublica](#))
- Global food assistance
  - In Mozambique, 2,000 metric tons of U.S. food commodities (valued at \$3.5 million) risk spoilage if they don't reach the 99,000 people for whom they were procured. ([Devex](#))

- Fewer Net – a US-funded famine early warning system – has been suspended and taken offline. The network helps direct the effective distribution of food aid to tens of millions of people around the globe and is an essential tool at a moment when hunger levels are nearing an all-time high. ([The Guardian](#))
- Stabilization and humanitarian crises
  - Critical food, water, and sanitation services to the 40,000 person Al-Hol refugee camp in northern Syria were interrupted, not only worsening humanitarian conditions for vulnerable refugees, but serving as a recruitment tool for Islamic State militants. ([BBC](#))
  - In Ukraine, deliveries of firewood to frontline residents were halted in the middle of winter. ([New York Times](#))
  - In Afghanistan, where humanitarian aid organizations provide almost all critical services, 50 national and international aid organizations suspend operations, partly or entirely, across the country. Approximately 15 million Afghans, mostly women and children, are in dire need of food aid. ([NPR](#))
  - On the Thai-Myanmar border, where nearly 140,000 refugees are sheltered across nine refugee camps, 20 civil relief groups providing healthcare (including AIDS treatment and testing) with USAID assistance are now at risk of being suspended. ([Radio Free Asia](#))
  - More than 400 Burmese students abruptly lost their scholarships for higher education (provided through the Development and Inclusive Scholarship Program). Over a quarter of the students had fled Myanmar following the military coup. ([Voice of America](#))
  - The demining operations of nearly 100 teams in Cambodia were to be partially suspended. ([AFP](#))

#### **Additional Context:**

- The United States is the largest provider of humanitarian assistance in the world, which at [\\$68 billion](#), comprises less than 1% of our federal budget ([\\$1.79 trillion this fiscal year so far](#)) and just 1 cent of every [taxpayer dollar](#).
- The Trump administration has repeatedly prioritized and touted efforts to curb mass migration and deport undocumented migrants who fled to the United States to escape violence, instability, and democratic backsliding in their home countries. Freezing foreign aid and suspending programs designed to [address the root causes of migration](#) – including strengthening economic development in Mexico, reducing crime and corruption in Guatemala, and providing humanitarian assistance in Venezuela – is a self-inflicted wound and contrary to the stated goals of the administration.

- China’s Belt and Road Initiative – a massive development and investment initiative to broaden China’s economic and political influence – has spent nearly [\\$679 billion on infrastructure projects](#) in nearly 150 countries from 2013-2021. In the same period, the U.S. spent [\\$440 billion](#).
- Long-term implications of this freeze will be significant and increase exponentially the longer it continues. Even brief interruptions in critical services will likely be felt years into the future, as missed dosages and setbacks in educational and economic attainment will produce lasting setbacks that any resumption in funding won’t fix.
- Organizations around the world have “[no clarity at all](#)” on how the limited exemptions announced by Secretary of State Marco Rubio apply to them, with many unsure of whether they can continue their life-saving work.
- Nearly [60 senior career USAID officials](#) have been put on administrative leave for likely termination—including its general counsel and ethics lawyers. USAID implementing partners and nearly [400 contractors](#) will likely be forced to make cuts to their staff, creating a hallowing out of our development workforce that will cause lasting damage to American foreign aid efforts.

#### **Additional Resources:**

- [Trump’s Pause of U.S. Foreign Assistance to Latin America: An “America Last” Policy](#), Washington Office on Latin America
- [Stop-Work Order on US Foreign Aid Puts China First and America Last](#), Michael Schiffer, Just Security
- [Can the President Dissolve USAID by Executive Order?](#), Tess Bridgeman, Just Security
- [X thread](#) from Atul Gawande, former USAID global health official
- [The foreign aid freeze poses risks to US interests in Syria](#), Diana Rayes, the Atlantic Council