

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 15, 2025

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro  
Comptroller General  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street NW  
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Comptroller General Dodaro:

I write to request that the Government Accountability Office conduct a comprehensive audit of the foreign policy and national security implications of the Trump administration's recent actions, including the decision to freeze foreign assistance, downsize the State Department, and attempt to dissolve the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). These actions by the Trump administration, without the consent of Congress, are not only illegal, but unconstitutional.

For decades, U.S. national security objectives have been guided by three pillars: defense, diplomacy, and development. USAID's programs, like all foreign assistance, play a central role in combating extremism, promoting stability, mitigating disease, and protecting our homeland.

On January 20, President Trump signed Executive Order 14169, titled "Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid," which mandated a 90-day pause on all U.S. foreign development assistance programs. On February 26, the Office of Management and Budget issued guidance on agency reduction in force and reorganization plans to implement the President's February 11 Executive Order on Workforce Optimization.

These EOs have resulted in the termination of over 80% of foreign assistance programs administered by the State Department and USAID and appropriated by Congress. The shuttering of USAID has led to nearly 5,500 federal employees being furloughed subject to reduction in force actions.

Previous presidents have historically placed importance on foreign assistance as a tool to deliver national security value. The Trump administration's recent cuts have had severe humanitarian consequences and eroded U.S. influence globally. They have diminished America's ability to project soft power, advance national interests, and maintain relevance in an increasingly competitive geopolitical landscape.

Since the Trump administration has decided to retain a limited number of programs, I am concerned that U.S. disengagement will provide an opening for adversaries such as the People's Republic of China to make substantial political gains, undermine democratic values, and create economic dependencies that will harm U.S. interests over the long-term. As another example, the Trump administration's exit from the World Health Organization and leadership in global health responses is a huge setback in containing outbreaks and could compromise the safety of the American people. U.S. foreign aid has served American interests in countless other ways

including by generating good will, strengthening bilateral ties, improving economic conditions, providing disaster relief, and addressing humanitarian needs in areas of conflict.

With this dramatic reduction in U.S. global leadership in mind, I request that the Comptroller General evaluate the following issues:

*Effects on U.S. Diplomatic Efforts and Global Influence*

1. Evaluate how the elimination of USAID and the majority of foreign aid as well as planned programming and staffing cuts at the State Department has impacted the U.S. government's ability to engage with foreign governments and maintain leadership in multilateral institutions.
2. Assess whether these disruptions have eroded U.S. credibility with allies and partners, especially in regions where American aid and diplomatic presence are crucial.
3. Assess whether the State Department has established a process or guidance for addressing competing diplomatic and foreign assistance priorities, should they arise.
4. Assess inefficiencies and errors linked to the foreign aid freezes, including incorrect transfers, payment delays, contract terminations, and reinstatements.

*Economic and Humanitarian Impacts*

1. Assess how the foreign aid and staffing cuts have disrupted economic development programs, humanitarian aid, and public health initiatives, particularly in fragile or conflict-prone regions.
2. Examine whether these reductions have hindered U.S. efforts to combat global challenges such as food insecurity, pandemic response, and climate change adaptation.
3. Analyze the long-term institutional damage caused by cuts to USAID personnel, including the loss of expertise in critical fields such as disaster relief, governance, and economic development.

*Effects of USAID and State Department Workforce Reductions*

1. Assess how staffing cuts at USAID and the State Department have affected the planning, oversight, and execution of foreign assistance programs.
2. Evaluate whether hiring freezes and staff reductions have led to the loss of experienced personnel, weakening U.S. capacity to respond to global crises.
3. Examine the impact of unfilled diplomatic and development positions on U.S. influence abroad, particularly in regions where foreign assistance is a key pillar of U.S. engagement.
4. Assess whether the USAID reorganization plan implemented during the Trump administration has complied with U.S. law and congressional guidance.
5. Evaluate the impact of consolidating USAID functions under the State Department, particularly whether State has the technical expertise, personnel, payment systems, and relationships with implementers necessary to manage large-scale development programs.

*Geostrategic Implications: Openings for China and Russia*

1. Evaluate whether the combination of foreign assistance cuts and staffing reductions has created opportunities for China, Russia, or other strategic competitors to expand their influence.

2. Identify specific countries or sectors where China's Belt and Road Initiative or other foreign assistance efforts gained traction as a result of U.S. disengagement.
3. Assess whether reductions in USAID and State Department personnel weakened the U.S. government's ability to counter China's economic and diplomatic advances.

Given the vital role that diplomacy and foreign assistance play in advancing U.S. national security interests, it is imperative that we fully understand the consequences of these policy decisions. A comprehensive GAO review will provide valuable insight into how such actions have affected U.S. global leadership, economic and humanitarian initiatives, and strategic competition with adversaries.

I appreciate your attention to this request and look forward to working with GAO as it conducts this important oversight. Please provide an update on the status of this audit at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator