

Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs Holds Hearing on the Fiscal Year 2025 USAID Budget Request

LIST OF PANEL MEMBERS

CHRISTOPHER COONS:

Of the State and Foreign Operations and Related Programs, subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee of the United States Senate to order. We meet today to review the Fiscal year 2025 budget request for the United States Agency for International Development. I am delighted to welcome back Administrator Samantha Power.

You are a few short weeks away from your third anniversary as USAID Administrator making you the longest-serving aid administrator since Russia in the past decade and I just upfront wanted to thank you and all the people of USAID around the world. You have been tireless, you have traveled the world, you have advocated for change, you have been someone who has applied your values, your capabilities, and your leadership to an exceptionally difficult time and I'm grateful for your service.

We look forward to hearing your perspectives on the challenges facing aid as well as the opportunities. I also solicited testimony from Inspector General Paul Martin given his critical role in each Senator has in front of them, his submission, which is part of the formal

record. This is this subcommittee's first FY 25 hearing for funding and we have a great deal to cover.

I first briefly want to reflect on FY 24. For our FY 24 bill for the state aid. MCC, DFC, and other related agencies was ultimately 58.3 billion, a 5.5 percent cut from the FY 23 appropriated level. In managing that cut, we made some hard decisions limiting the impact on the workforce, trying to make sure that the people who are at the very core of what you do were prioritized, meeting our treaty dues and multilateral commitments to demonstrate that we are a reliable global partner, and protecting funding for life-saving health programs and humanitarian assistance.

That meant that funding had to be cut from other critical efforts. Those cuts will have real impacts and we had to make hard choices. I've just returned from a call led by Chair Murray to Angola, Botswana, Cabo Verde Malawi, and Zambia. And we got to see firsthand the increasing needs due to food insecurity, the importance of investing in women and girls, the challenges and opportunities associated with strategic competition on the continent.

It's critical that while we pursue new opportunities to promote our national security, like investing in diversified and secure supply chains and competing for critical minerals that we also ensure that those efforts actually benefit local communities and our national partners. This is what makes our development model different from some of our principal competitors.

African countries also offer growing export markets for American companies. This is not principally about charity, but about helping our partner countries address the challenges they face in a way that also presents opportunities for Americans. That means we have to

maintain our investments in economic growth and development, not just emergency responses, and to strategically build resilient systems including in agriculture to address food security.

So while we can't do more with less, we have to continue refining our priorities and making the most of every appropriated dollar. That's why in the FY 24 bill, we increased investments in agricultural R&D. We required more Feed the Future funds to be focused on target countries and added a new director for leveraging Feed the Future to catalyze private sector investment.

Senator Graham and I are also working hard to authorize a new food security foundation to leverage public sector funding in a way that would complement ongoing US investments. This is also why we worked to enact the Economic Resilience Initiative that will provide 265 million in resources across the interagency to support economic growth and stability in partner countries including funding for strategic infrastructure projects through EXIM and DFC, enhancing critical supply chains and digital infrastructure, supporting the economic resilience programs of USAID, and supporting new grants and loans to international financial institutions that provide access to capital for countries that otherwise would have to rely on the PRC's coercive model of lending.

I'm proud those efforts have moved forward as we seek to better leverage the private sector and to use our limited dollars. It's important we pursue these efforts while not undercutting traditional development. I want to discuss reforms that we can and should make to development and we have to recognize the critical role that our development has played in our global leadership.

That brings us to this year, to FY 25. The request for staff and programs across state aid, MCC, DFC, and others is 62.4 billion. That is 7 percent above the 24 enacted but only a 1 percent increase if you refer back to the 23 level last year. We spoke in your hearing about the challenges aid faces. Historic levels of food insecurity, a record number of refugees and displaced people, democratic backsliding, Chinese economic Coercion, Russian aggression in Ukraine, these and many other challenges persist and in some places have worsened, but you will have less to work with than you did even last year.

Many of my colleagues and I are deeply concerned about the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza where many who are surviving the violence are facing family. And tonight as Eid AL-Fitr is celebrated and Muslim families begin that celebration, it is a particularly painful reality that they are on the verge of famine.

In Sudan, there is another devastating conflict which is inflicting an inconceivable toll on civilians, millions of dislocated civilians. In our own hemisphere, the people of Haiti are being terrorized by armed gangs and a lack of governance. All of this in combination and more is why the House needs to enact the supplemental that we passed in the Senate that includes \$9 billion for humanitarian assistance and additional funds for Taiwan, for Ukraine, and other partners.

Today is the start of a conversation about how we build a 25 appropriation bill that accounts for the reduced funding you received and the new challenges you face. I'm proud of the work we've done on this subcommittee on a bipartisan basis to help you grow and better equip your workforce, apply lessons learned from your predecessors, adapt to locally-led development and cooperation with the private sector.

But we have more work to do. I look forward to hearing from you about your proposals about how we can best leverage our development tools, how we define our interests, where USAID fits in, and what you're doing to tell the story globally and to the American people about your leadership. Thank you, Madam Administrator and I look forward to your testimony.

Senator Graham?

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I really enjoy working with you and my democratic-republican colleagues on the committee. I've never seen this many problems in the world at the same time. I wasn't around in World War II. I can imagine only. I can only imagine how I must have been then, but everywhere you look, Mr. Chairman is just people moving around, war, famine, uh, rumors of war.

So um, it seems to me that America needs to understand sort of not only the role we play in the world, but the role this committee in this budget plays in making us safe. Uh, I'm pretty hawkish guy, but you're not going to kill your way out of these problems, you're not going to fight your way out on all these problems.

Like food security, I'm working with you on conservation programs to you know, protect land and help communities. Um, you know, protect nature is good. Economic investment is actually good for the people uh that creates jobs on food security. Uh, the World Food Program is under siege. The number of people needing assistance on the food front is doubled in two years when no end in sight.

So starving people, people with no hope left unattended, or the terrorist uh recruiting opportunity and um pay now or pay later, so I

look at it. Um, we're having our budget cut at a time of the greatest need. I have seen so I voted against this budget deal. On the military side, everybody talks about we need a bigger navy.

Well, the budget we just agreed to is going to give us fewer ships in, in the next decade, not more as China is building through the roof in this account. You know the ability for uh, um, USAID under your leadership. Um, MrS Power is going to be more challenging. I do appreciate what you do into the people under you that work throughout the world.

You're in danger every day. I mean, you know we rightly praise our military and and other groups. But you know USAID workers, State Department folks out on the tip of the spear uh, they deserve our respect and support and admiration. So I don't know how this gets better until we come up with some kind of strategy with our partners to get ahead of it. Uh, I'll end where I began.

You either pay now or you will pay later.

CHRISTOPHER COONS:

Thank you, Senator Graham, and thank you and your staff for your great partnership. We have genuinely enjoyed working together on this subcommittee and it. It is an island of productivity and positivity and an otherwise challenging institution and that applies across the subcommittee. But you in particular have been a great partner.

Madam Administrator.

SAMANTHA POWER:

Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Graham, um, and thanks to the other distinguished members of the committee. Uh

grateful for your comments, but above all, grateful for your leadership. And you were right in crediting USAID'S teams, uh for the sacrifices uh and the work that they do all around the world.

I would also just thank your teams. Um, this budget process is not easy uh, because so many of us here believe in everything we do and recognize that everything is connected to everything else. It is very hard in an environment of cuts, uh, to find places to cut and the collaboration that we have in thinking these problems through together, uh has been absolutely pivotal.

So thanks really to the -- to the people uh to you here and to those who sit behind you. Um, I want to start just by reflecting um and really speaking to I think Senator Graham's comments, but reflecting on the lobby of the Republic of Korea's development agency, which is their equivalent of USAID. Uh, they actually display an old bag of flour from the 1940s, which is marked with the words from the American people, which of course is USAID's motto today.

But this is a reminder of how the United States showed up, supported them when they were one of the poorest countries on the planet to fight hunger and disease, and to kick start a journey of remarkable economic growth. Today, of course, South Korea is one of the world's richest countries and last year spent nearly \$4 billion, and this is the critical point, providing assistance to other countries.

And while uh a lot of countries are experiencing cuts at a time when we can least afford it, I will say this coming year, Korea plans to go up from 4 billion to \$5 billion in -- in assistance to other countries. The decades that the United States has invested in supporting countries chart their own paths of development has in fact notwithstanding

today's problems brought extraordinary results and not only for our partners but also for our own people.

We have helped stop the spread of diseases that threaten us all and develop more resilient and high-yield crops that can feed growing populations. We've helped uh people and nations rise up from poverty and in doing so, invested billions in American small businesses and opened up new markets for American products.

And this is a really important fact. Eight of our top ten trading partners today were once recipients of US assistance. It's a long game. I get. Under President Biden's leadership and in partnership with this committee, we are building on this legacy. In Ukraine, such a vivid example, USAID has helped Ukrainian farmers withstand Putin's attempts to destroy the agricultural sector.

We have done this, thanks to you all by getting them the seeds, the equipment, and initially the alternative export routes that they needed. This has remarkably helped Ukraine rebound their grain exports to very close to pre-war export levels. That is just extraordinary when you think of the systematic bombardment of the agricultural infrastructure by Putin's forces.

This in turn because everything is connected to everything else has helped bring global food prices down 26 percent from their 2022 peak. In Nigeria, we are providing community health workers with technologies to spot diseases like tuberculosis early, which helped increase TB diagnoses by a third in a single year.

This allows patients to get treatment so that outbreaks don't spread across the planet. Across Africa, we are working to connect African and American companies and reduce barriers to trade through the Prosper Africa initiative. Efforts that since 2019 have generated some

\$86 billion in trade and investment that builds prosperity again both for our African partners and for businesses here at home.

Bipartisan support for these efforts make Americans safer and more prosperous and provides a critical foundation for US leadership and influence in a world where other global powers are working aggressively to erode US alliances undermine, democracy, and diminish basic rights and freedoms. For example, the PRC's global lending spree has made it the world's largest debt collector.

For every dollar of aid that the PRC provides to low-income and middle-income countries, China has provided \$9 of debt. So \$1 of -- \$1 of aid, \$9 of debt. The opposite of true is true here in the United States. For every dollar of debt we provide, we provide at least \$9 of aid. The PRC's assistance tends to be negotiated behind closed doors, fueling corruption, and can demonstrate a flagrant disregard for human rights.

One chilling example, of course, is the PRC's Safe Cities Initiative, which provides surveillance and facial recognition technology that can monitor critics, journalists, and activists. And that technology has been given to 80 countries so far at least. We need US leadership to advance models of development and governance that honor freedom, transparency, human dignity, and opportunity for all which in turn will be more stabilizing.

The Biden-Harris administration's FY 2025 request of \$28.3 billion for USAID's fully and partially managed accounts would give us the resources to continue that leadership. With these funds, we will help nations around the world, strengthen food security, improve health, and drive economic growth. We will respond to what have already been described as historic levels of humanitarian need.

USAID teams have been working day and night to address the catastrophic humanitarian crisis in Gaza, where nearly the entire population is living under the threat of famine. Add to that, ongoing crisis in Ukraine, Sudan, and beyond and the continued battering from a growing number of natural disasters, and the number of people requiring humanitarian assistance has increased by nearly a third from 274 million in 2022 to 363 million at the end of 2023. I mean, if you think about that time margin and the number of people with new needs, it's -- it's breathtaking to meet these needs.

And this is really something that I think we all must stress. We will need both the \$10 billion in humanitarian assistance in this budget request as well as the \$10 billion in emergency humanitarian assistance in the pending National Security supplemental requests. Otherwise, we will be forced to make draconian cuts to rations and support all around the world.

I want to be clear that the FY 2025 request recognizes the need for trade-offs. Crucially, this budget gives us specific resources to help us deliver even better value for money. We have inaugurated as many of you know, a new office of the Chief Economist just last July, and the team is already expanding our use of rigorous analysis across the agency to identify best buys, the programs with the highest impact per dollar invested so that they can be scaled.

They identified for example a poverty reduction program in our Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance which is being piloted in Uganda, which is offering a sequence set of supports like trainings and financial services that help refugees move from requiring humanitarian assistance to earning livelihoods for themselves.

For every dollar we invest there, households are seeing over four times the return in economic benefits and we are now taking that program on the road to other nations. I'm going to wrap up here just in a minute beyond maximizing our own resources through efforts like that of the Chief Economist, we are drawing in new partners through tools like the New Edge Fund.

And here I really just want to thank you for supporting that fund. It is an innovation, it meets this moment, and we need to scale it. This is an incentive fund designed to apply the private sector's unique comparative advantages to some of the largest global development challenges. We're working with companies like Citibank, Walmart, and Johnson and Johnson to boost our impact.

And I want to be clear that from FY 2021 to FY 2023 alone, private sector partner contributions to USAID activities jumped by over 60 percent. And this is something we need to make more broadly known so people understand how we are trying to leverage taxpayer dollars so that they go further. We also recognize that the future of development in so many countries is going to be driven by the private sector.

If we make these investments, we really can catalyze change and I have no doubt that we can continue America's extraordinary legacy of leadership in building a more secure, prosperous, and stable world for us all. Thank you.

CHRISTOPHER COONS:

Thank you, Madam Administrator. To my colleagues, we're going to do seven-minute rounds. I'm expecting that there's a lot to dig into here. Anyone who uses less than their seven minutes gets a prize. Um, let me start by just asking about what you were just describing the

importance of leveraging private sector partnerships and making our dollars go further.

In last year's budget hearing, we talked about the need to increase locally-led uh development efforts and engaging with the private sector. Senator Ernst and I just introduced the locally-led Development and Humanitarian Response Act which aims to advance those same goals. Um, Senator Graham and I are making progress advancing bills to create public-private foundations focused not on supplanting USAID work, but on complementing it leveraging philanthropic and private sector dollars.

With the limited time we have even with seven minutes, what have you found to be the biggest challenge in increasing locally-led development? How were you addressing it and how are you best working to leverage funds from the private sector? Where are you seeing your biggest success?

SAMANTHA POWER:

Uh, thank you so much in brief. I would say um, doing smaller grants, contracts requires more people. Fundamentally, it can be the same amount of work to do a \$100 million contract as to do you know a small grant to an organization combating sexual trafficking or doing job training um, that will -- that local organization will have a better chance probably of seeing those gains sustained over time because fundamentally they are of the community, they will remain in the community even when the grant dries up. So we have tried to expand the number of contracting officers at USAID. We're appreciative of you trying to protect our operational expenses uh, in this recent process, uh, to give some sense of how much we are spending and

how our program budget has gone up because of the messiness of the world that you both described.

Um, we basically have programmatic dollars that have gone up 68 percent over recent years and operational expenses that have gone up 27 percent. So even with you protecting our operational expenses, we're still seeing a 3 percent cut in the FY 24 uh, which is better compared to the other cuts that we will be seeing.

But that's a big issue as we seek, again, to invest the staff time uh in working with local organizations and smaller organizations. Uh, we again seek to address the -- the issue of growing our contracting officer workforce, including by empowering our local staff who can do a lot of work in that domain.

It's also just famously hard to work with USAID. We have a lot of compliance requirements, many of which are imposed by folks up here, but -- but many of which we would embrace ourselves in order to be sure that we're faithful stewards of the resources invested in the agency. And so we've tried to simplify the application process, so it doesn't crowd out by definition those who don't have the lawyers, the accountants, you know the armies of people to be able to comply.

CHRISTOPHER COONS:

I'm deeply concerned about the crisis in Gaza as well as many other places, but that's one that's seized a lot of our attention. The prohibition on funding UNRWA is going to make this harder and worse and I think too little has been done to address the impediments to delivering aid to aid distribution. Um, it's also consumed a fair amount of media attention.

I'd be interested in both, what USAID is doing to get other donors to increase their contributions because many of our partner countries have not stepped up to this challenge, um and what are you doing to address the challenges of distribution of aid in difficult and contested spaces? Gaza is probably at the forefront of news coverage, but frankly, Sudan is also incredibly difficult and dangerous.

So is Haiti, so Somalia, so is Afghanistan.

SAMANTHA POWER:

Thank you, um. So just a quick word on UNRWA, which as you know is funded by the State Department and not by USAID, but is the humanitarian backbone for the work that all of our partners are doing on the ground in Gaza. The allegations against UNRWA's staff are outrageous, horrific, and we, like everyone, are awaiting the results of the investigation, including the independent investigation about reviewing procedures and processes so that something like that could never happen again where staff uh potentially involved in, in horrors like October 7th would be able to work for humanitarian agencies.

So uh, at the same time that goes forward, UNRWA hasn't stopped doing the work. Um, and as you know, uh, many, many UNRWA staff member um, who had been uh before October 7th, involved in providing education or health care or food distribution to people living in Gaza uh now have just turned to doing humanitarian delivery full-time.

And there's a tremendous risk as the killing of more than 228 workers um uh in IDF military operations attests. Uh, so you have seen countries after initial pauses as they waited to make sure that credible investigations were going to be underway uh unpause their funding. We are not one of them, uh, obviously.

Um, but we do believe that this is another reason, uh, to press for the passage of the National Security supplemental uh, because just -- and this gets to your second question too about all the other places that are broken and in need of humanitarian assistance. Um, you know we're looking at a situation now if all we have to rely on which is our current situation is the FY 24 base humanitarian assistance that you provided to us. And again, you made a special effort to protect as much of that as you could despite the cuts overall.

But you're looking at an increase of about close to 40 percent in humanitarian needs from last year to this year and a drop in resources of about 40 percent, between 35 and 40 percent. So that delta is um staggering and will be staggering in its effects and horrifying and its effects on the ground. I mentioned that in the context of Gaza because access is key, access has improved in the last few days in -- in fairly substantial ways.

It needs to improve much more uh, but we also need to have the resources to fund those other organizations even as other countries step up to continue to support the backbone.

CHRISTOPHER COONS:

I have more questions, but I will stop early and defer to my colleagues.

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

Thank you. Let's just continue to talk about Gaza and sort of the future. Let's assume for a moment we can find some conclusion to this war and somebody will take over the Palestinian file, maybe um, the Saudi Arabia, the UAE, I don't know, but somebody needs to come in and you know try to clean things up a bit.

Uh, is there a plan to replace UNRWA uh in the West Bank and Gaza?

SAMANTHA POWER:

Um, not to my knowledge, OK.

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

Um, so I think Israel's going to be pretty hard over on, you know, trusting this organization after all the abuses that we discovered. So I would encourage you and I know you get a lot to do to sort of thinking about could, how could we do this? Um, so when it comes to providing assistance, uh to folks in Gaza harder, how do the Gulf Arab states, are they contributing anything?

SAMANTHA POWER:

Um, yes, and absolutely, I think you've seen particularly Emirati uh leadership uh, they have been uh critical in um, leading also for alternative routes into Gaza uh, helping spearhead the -- the effort to do maritime deliveries. Indeed, partnering with the World Central Kitchen um uh, which uh suffered the horrific attack uh last week.

Um, so I think the Emiratis uh have have definitely stepped up uh, I think they and other Arab nations. And you know this far better than I so uh, I won't -- I won't speak to it for too long, but you know our very adamant about linking their longer-term investments to a viable path to --

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

Let's assume for a moment that Hamas will be destroyed, which I hope and pray it does. Who's going to take over Gaza? Do we have any idea?

SAMANTHA POWER:

As USAID's administrator, my focus is, is on the humanitarian--

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

The only reason I mention is--

SAMANTHA POWER:

-- meeting people.

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

Before we invest a lot of money, we need know a lot of things like who's going to be on the ground when Hamas is gone, you know, can we trust them, what kind of partners we'll have? So that's important to me. I'd like to be an investor, but I want to know what I'm investing in. Uh, how would you describe the situation um, in Gaza?

IS it you say near famine? How would you describe that?

SAMANTHA POWER:

Well, I think the -- as you know well, the -- the IPC report uh indicates that famine conditions are already present in northern Gaza and looming trucks for much of the South.

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

Do you know how many trucks are allowed in to Gaza in terms of food delivery?

SAMANTHA POWER:

Well, we've had sort of our best 48 hours uh since the beginning of the war uh. So I think more than 400 trucks today, more than 300 yesterday. That's after uh a very --

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

Around 200, I think, right? Pardon me before this, it was around 200.

SAMANTHA POWER:

Yeah, I mean, in some days under 100. Uh and to be clear, when we -- we talk about trucks, uh, sometimes we blur a lot of things together. I mean, uh, you know, before the war, as you well know, there were 500 trucks getting in. When we talk about trucks, that's not all food. In fact, a very small percentage of what goes in uh, relatively speaking, is food.

And if you think about all of the destruction of uh, farmland and granaries and marketplaces and people's own stockpiles in their homes, we need to go way beyond even, you know the 500 trucks that I hope we can approach here in the coming days.

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

Based on what you hear and what your people see, do you think Israel has been using um food as a weapon of war?

SAMANTHA POWER:

I think that Israel has not done enough to facilitate um the kind of humanitarian access we need to avert --

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

Yeah.

SAMANTHA POWER:

The kind of food conditions that we're seeing to avert famine.

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

I guess it could always do more, I get what you're saying, but do you think it's been the policy of the Israeli government to use starvation as a tool of war?

SAMANTHA POWER:

Again, what we see is that there has been a series of restrictions over many, many months where we as trusted partners, have tried to describe what the effects of those restrictions are. And um, again, fortunately, uh in -- in over the course of the last several days really to a week, we are seeing a sea change which we hope is sustained and expanded upon in the.

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

Provision of that day, they did not find any evidence of genocide --

SAMANTHA POWER:

Pardon me.

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

Did not find any evidence of genocide on the behalf of the Israeli government toward the Palestinian people, were you familiar with that?

SAMANTHA POWER:

Did you mention, do you say the ICA?

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

The State Department.

SAMANTHA POWER:

Or the State Department, I -- I'm -- I'm not tracking uh determinations of that nature.

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

All right, so you're like the head of the um, the aid program we have. I just want to make sure that I understand exactly what you're saying here. Are you uncertain as to what the Israeli policy is toward allowing food in?

SAMANTHA POWER:

Well, what I can describe is um engagements with different parts of the Israeli government that you'll have over these months yielded different answers and different results. And what's very important in the last week, uh is that uh, now it appears, again, we're not uh in -- in the cabinet, but -- but it appears that there's a consolidation of decision-making authority.

Uh, but to be again, we have famine-like conditions in Gaza and supermarkets filled with food, you know, within a few kilometers away. So it's incredibly important that the food that is available get to the people who uh, especially in the case of very young children are -- were getting a growing number of reports of death by malnutrition or diseases induced by malnutrition,

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

So uh death by malnutrition, let us know what you find. I want to -- I'm very curious about that. How many deaths you attribute to malnutrition? Can you report to us your findings?

SAMANTHA POWER:

Well, what I can report you back to is the IPC report, which is the -- the -- the gold standard, but um what, what is very, very challenging in addition which has in it again the -- the measurement of the circumference of the children in order to show severe acute malnutrition and then we have the reports from our partners uh and I don't have the statistics.

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

OK.

SAMANTHA POWER:

As of today.

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

I'll check that out. So I got--

SAMANTHA POWER:

--Can I just make one tiny point which is just that even your question about can we have better data or real data depends on access. And so this is where again it's you know, allowing our partners to move around to be -- to be not at risk of being targeted so that they can answer questions of the nature you're describing.

LINDSEY GRAHAM:

I would imagine that's pretty difficult thing to accommodate for Israel where you're fighting this war, but we'll try to get them to do better. Sudan real quickly. What's the top line on Sudan? What should this committee know about what's going on in the Sudan?

SAMANTHA POWER:

Well, I'm pleased that we have the US has appointed an envoy that is engaging with the stakeholders in African and and the Arab world to try to create a meaningful peace process. But basically, you have two factions that are much more interested in power for themselves than in ensuring that their people have access to food.

Blockage of convoys that we are funding that could be feeding people who themselves too uh are facing near-famine conditions, particularly in the Darfur area. So it's a horrific situation and a place where we do not have the resources, uh, we don't have the access as I've described, but even in the places where we have access because of the drop in our humanitarian budget, we're going to be funding the needs there far less this year than we did last.

CHRISTOPHER COONS:

Thank you, Senator Graham. Thank you, Administrator. I'm going to turn to Senator Murphy.

CHRIS MURPHY:

Thank you very much. Mr. Chairman. Let me just um make one addendum to this discussion about what's happening in Gaza today. Last week I visited a Connecticut-based emergency relief

organization, AmeriCares. They deliver mainly uh, emergency medicines into conflict areas. They are amongst a number of organizations that have suspended operations in Gaza.

They're suspending those operations not because of a lack of access, not because of overly bureaucratic process at the ports. They are suspending their programming there because they don't think they can keep their people safe because of our inability to do deconfliction in a meaningful way uh. And so they are not likely to resume operations until there is a cessation of hostilities.

And so we just have to be pretty clear-eyed about the fact that until the bombs stop dropping, until the shooting stops, it's going to be very, very hard to be able to do what we need to do inside Gaza and save the kind of lives we want to save. Um, uh, Administrator Power, I wanted to turn your attention to Haiti for a moment.

Um, we have been the biggest humanitarian contributor to a country that continues to spiral out of control as gangs now control the majority of the capital \$171 million since October 2022. I think we should be -- we should be proud of that fact, um, but I think we all worry that Haiti is lurching into what may be a permanent state of emergency.

Uh, that is going to be a significant drain on what we have heard today are dwindling resources with lots of suitors and competitors. This is a really critical moment. Um and I know there is a deep skepticism about the role that the United States has played and should play when it comes to restoring security in Haiti.

I convened a meeting of Haitian American leaders in my state and they had a variety of opinions as to what role the United States should play. Um. So I want to ask you a question not about whether we should

be a humanitarian partner in saving lives in Haiti, but but you know what is the proper role for the United States to play right now in restoring security in Haiti?

Because this seems to be a moment to double down on our work in that endeavor rather than just to sit back and let others lead while we continue to provide the bulk of humanitarian assistance as well.

SAMANTHA POWER:

Just to embrace the premise of your question that you can't -- there's no humanitarian fix to a complete breakdown in insecurity as is happening in so many neighborhoods in uh in the capital. Look, I think the US role has been on display in um over the course actually of several years going around the world and trying to find uh, a willing partner who was willing to, to put security forces in this case, police forces on the ground in Haiti, securing the commitment, and huge thanks to the Kenyans and to President Ruto for being willing to step forward.

And uh, that was of course in an environment that was already unstable already, very, very difficult um, and now all the more so. So these conversations are ongoing, but you know, mobilizing the resources that we have in order to provide to be in a position to support the payment of salaries because this is of course not a traditional UN peacekeeping mission.

It's blessed by the UN but not funded by the UN. I think that's an important role for the United States, but so is the diplomacy we've done to get other countries, uh like the Canadians, um and many of the Europeans as well to step up and fund and equip that force. Uh, but the diplomacy around this, the three legs of the stool, right, security, uh, humanitarian welfare, and then -- and then governance.

And the fact that there hasn't been a legitimately elected government in Haiti uh is something that has surely contributed to the breakdown in security as well as as gangs and others use that at least as a -- as a pretext for their vigilantism. So the efforts to -- to pull together a transition, USAID stands ready with a lot of election support when we are in a position to, to provide it and when there is a roadmap to elections, but you won't get security without governance.

And of course, you can't get that roadmap to elections until we get a baseline of security.

CHRIS MURPHY:

Yeah, I think we've got a really short window in which to figure out the path forward and find those international partners. Let me pull back and ask you one additional question about China's competition. Um, you know, really excited about the work that you're doing to better evaluate the impact of programs on the ground.

Um, you know, but there is an asymmetry between how we view our aid and how China views its aid, right? We are looking at the impact of our aid largely through a policy lens trying to impact the largest number of people possible. China is really looking at their aid more so through a political lens. You know, an example is, you know often there are pet projects that dictators or quasi dictators have around the world that we don't see as a, you know, have as a real ROI for the citizens of that country.

We aren't willing to put our dollars behind it, but China will um. And so you know, do you see it as an exposure to the United States that you know our aid is more focused on how many people we can help and China's aid is focused more on how many officials they can influence? How do we -- how do we balance that asymmetry?

SAMANTHA POWER:

Well, you know, needless to say, I think our budget request is and particularly the investments as well in, in uh, the global infrastructure efforts are a reflection of our desire uh to be more competitive in terms of the kinds of resources that we are investing. So that's quantity. Uh, we should be showing up there.

They're actually receding um, uh from, you know, having become the world's largest debt collector, their investments are way down. In fact, over the last 2 or 3 years, having become overextended, not getting maybe the return on investment that they had sought, being in that position of being debt collector, they're rethinking what they are doing.

There's an opening -- there's a real opening. Um, but I do think our comparative advantage is quality fundamentally and that involves not only quality of infrastructure, transparent procurement, you know not having the investments we make benefit the few rather than the many, but it's also the quality of what for example, an agency like USAID can come in with to align with infrastructure that is being built?

So you've heard a lot about the libido corridor as the flagship uh, initial major investment associated with the PGI. You know, we are looking at mobile money, you know, so the small-scale farmers can you know better, better uh access resources in order to take that loan out in order to be able to get the access to capital they need to, to grow their business for when that rail exists.

And there'll be -- we'll actually support them in getting their goods to market. But getting them digitized is a prerequisite for the kind of growth that they envisage for themselves. USAID is funding a public-

private partnership with the Department of Transportation in Angola, uh to help them do other concessions for their infrastructure.

But again, in a manner that is transparent, that changes the enabling environment, uh, hopefully over time sees civil society also empowered to scrutinize what is being done in governmental circles. It's an entirely different model, um, but it reflects that my response at least tries to reflect the toolkit that we need to bring to bear, which is both about the hard infrastructure, which people are craving uh, but also aligning development, human development uh, along with those investments.

You know, we can build a railroad uh, but if we aren't actually investing in nutrition and education, uh and you know, uh small, medium-sized enterprises in route at the same time, uh, the return on that investment is going to be much more limited. The last thing I'd say just is the polling is very striking about public reactions in the countries that have taken that alternate development approach and a real souring uh on, you know, seeing those big infrastructure projects that either you know aren't uh actually of the quality that that citizens need in terms of their infrastructure.

Some of them are, but -- but many of them are not that are saddling publics with debt in the -- in the longer term, but also that are bringing in workers from outside the country rather than actually using infrastructure as a source of employment uh in the countries themselves. And so I think the polls are actually the best diagnostic about whether we need to change or whether we just need to scale what we are trying to do.

CHRIS MURPHY:

Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

JEFF MERKLEY:

Ah, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and welcome administrator power. In response to Lindsey Graham's question, you noted that there was a series of restrictions by Israel on aid entering into Gaza. The -- as you're, I know, very aware of Foreign Assistance Act provisions 620I, it says no assistance shall be furnished under that Act, that if a country restricts directly or indirectly the transporter delivery of US humanitarian assistance.

Did the administration start considering back in December and January, uh implementing 620I as a way to persuade Israel to let more aid in?

SAMANTHA POWER:

Um, thank you, Senator. I -- My understanding this is of course being administered um and adjudicated at the State Department, but is that 620I has been incorporated in the Security Memorandum 20 Um. And as the assurances have come in from the seven countries, including Israel, uh, uh on the provisions of NSM 20 encompassing 620I um uh that the State Department is in the process of reviewing the credibility of those -- of those assurances.

JEFF MERKLEY:

But just directly to my question, did you advocate back in January or others at 620I be used by the president?

SAMANTHA POWER:

That -- I'm not going to speak about internal advocacy, but I know that there's a report that will be forthcoming in -- in early May I think that

assesses the credibility of the assurance, but I certainly believe we should use our leverage.

JEFF MERKLEY:

Yeah, well, what we saw this last week was the president for the first time said to Bibi Netanyahu that there will be consequences for our relationship and for the delivery of assistance uh, if we don't get more humanitarian access and many folks have asked, why did the president and presidential team not use that same strategy that same power months ago?

SAMANTHA POWER:

Well, I think um, first of all, it's very important uh, President Biden's message and -- and uh, you know so much of the content of what we are asking for uh is, you know the this a lot. A lot of those things are the things that we have been asking for as you note for, for many, many months, um, very specific and measurable steps.

Uh, and again, we are hopeful that finally those steps will be taken. I think the president's uh view over this period of time has been that the combination of sustained private diplomacy, uh and public diplomacy, you know, has been the best way to move Israel. I mean, if you think again about where they were at the beginning where Kerem Shalom wasn't even open, Rafah wasn't even open.

It has been a too gradual a process of seeing the access.

JEFF MERKLEY:

Let me progress to some other questions here. Uh Lindsey asked about children starving who said that 28 children have now died of complications related to malnutrition and that is the way people die

from malnutrition. They don't die from the lack of food. They die from infections, they die from many medical complications.

So that's the beginning of this -- this -- this -- this wave, but we also know that a tremendous number of people have died because of lack of medical aid. We're down to ten hospitals out of -- out of 34. One of the things that many of us advocated for was for the US to directly provide assistance to these hospitals through airdrops, which Jordan has done, the US has not.

Why not?

SAMANTHA POWER:

Well, um, I, on that specific question, I don't -- I don't know the answer. USA does fund the International Medical Corps, which treats 600 patients a day. I think it's treated more than 40,000 since the conflict began. They've done an incredible job um in, but that's in the southern part of Gaza. Uh, I think the military has been providing food, of course, MREs through its airdrops.

Um, but perhaps it's a feasibility a, you know, a belief that uh, it would not be a practical way to deliver the kind of medical assistance that is needed, but I can look into it.

JEFF MERKLEY:

Well, I'll tell you that um, the fact that Jordan can do it means it can be done. Uh, the fact that you're down to ten hospitals that do not have antibiotics, often don't have insulin, don't have many of the other basic supplies. These are not the kind of the heavier things that are more difficult to deliver uh, by our -- let me turn to the lens through pregnant women and what we have heard reports from Gaza is that

there's been a significant increase in miscarriages and in stillbirths and that many women when they deliver uh, because there's not communications or power or a safe passage, can't get to a hospital to deliver, that many women are malnourished and therefore cannot breastfeed after a child is born and that there is not access often to clean water and formula as an alternative.

Are you familiar with those general descriptions?

SAMANTHA POWER:

They're very consistent with what we hear from our partners, yes.

JEFF MERKLEY:

It really emphasized through that one lens, the level of -- of catastrophe, the cascading humanitarian catastrophe. Uh, when Chris Van Hollen and I went to Rafah and talked to the hardened, experienced, hardened aid workers who said they had served in the most difficult places in the world. Places like Somalia and Sudan and Yemen and the front lines of Ukraine.

They said the combination of factors and by that, they were referring to lack of power, lack of communications, lack of housing, continued military hostilities, lack of food, lack of clean water in combination. They said this is the worst humanitarian catastrophe they have seen in their careers. Does that generally fit your understanding of the situation in Gaza?

SAMANTHA POWER:

I would just add, it's also the -- the um deconfliction system that doesn't provide any assurance that even if you can get access to these supplies, that you can deliver them in safety or reliably. And yes, I was

-- I traveled uh as well to, to uh Israel in the -- in the West Bank, uh last month and met with aid workers that I've worked with um all over the world in past lives of theirs and mine.

And um, that is very consistent with their description. Unprecedented was a word that was used, yes.

JEFF MERKLEY:

Thank you. After the death of the seven World Central kitchen workers, the president, our president, President Biden did um convey the challenge of US continuing to provide its normal relationship unless Israel acted and within hours Israel was talking about opening Erez crossing, the use of the Ashdod port, more trucks getting in. Why did it take seven World Century -- World Central kitchen workers to make that happen?

228 workers had died, 489 healthcare workers had died. Why did it take those seven from World Central Kitchen for President Biden to make the pivot?

SAMANTHA POWER:

Well, again, you know, I would distinguish what President Biden has been pushing privately from the beginning. He's been the lead humanitarian voice engaging every time he talks to Bibi. This is to Prime Minister Netanyahu. This is uh, basically the -- the -- the number one topic, number 1,2,3,4,5 topic.

Uh, I think what is different is, is the -- the -- the public nature of this. Um and um, and again, the -- the system that gave rise to the killing of these innocent aid workers is the same system uh that has made it so

hard to bring about the kind of civilian protection that is needed as well for Palestinians.

And it has to be said that um, that you know these deaths horrific and tragic as they are come on the heels of more than 200 deaths of Palestinian aid workers and then of course more than 30,000 Palestinian civilians. So, so the -- the -- the system for so-called deconfliction where civilian sites and civilian gatherings, um, uh and the welfare of civilians and including aid workers, uh, you know that, that those are prioritized uh, that system is -- is really in need of this improvement.

JEFF MERKLEY:

Thank you.

CHRISTOPHER COONS:

Thank you. Senator Merkley. Senator Durbin.

RICHARD DURBIN:

Thank you, Administrator. It's good to see you again. So if people in Illinois ask me whether USAID is providing any help in Gaza today, what would be your shorthand answer?

SAMANTHA POWER:

Absolutely, I mean, the World Food Program uh is uh doing the bulk of the -- the food assistance that is funded by US taxpayer, Illinois taxpayers, um. And if we can get more access, we will get more food and we will um prevent the worst effects of this uh acute food crisis.

RICHARD DURBIN:

The Inspector General's report were given for this hearing suggested a concern that uh, we may after the October 7th attack, the OIG issued an alert identifying Gaza as a high risk for potential diversion and misuse of US-funded assistance. What has been our experience?

SAMANTHA POWER:

Um, first of all, I think an alert like that is, is important. This is an incredibly complex uh operating environment, and we are grateful for the OIG's work and they're -- I think they're probably uh, surging staff and uh inquiries. Our partners uh know that they have to report uh diversion as soon as it happens.

Um, you know, we will suspend or terminate our work with partners. Um, uh, if we find again that uh, the food is not getting to its desired uh beneficiaries' targets. In this case, it's even that need is even greater because the food needs are so great. Um, we have not received reports of Hamas uh systematically diverting food.

Um, we have seen, as you know, so-called self-distribution uh, where communities gather around trucks and the kind of organized distributions that we are accustomed to doing, uh give way to desperate families, you know lunging and trying to get access to, to boxes. With food so scarce, also prices went up and that increased the influence and the role of gangs and other uh, more criminal elements.

Uh, so you know, we really look forward to flooding the zone with resources to be in a position to do what we're able. We -- our partners have been able to do in other really complex operating environments, which is organized distributions in a manner that can be safe and dignified uh for -- for civilians.

Um, but again, uh, we think the systems that we have in place, the trusted partners that we're working with World Food Program, UNICEF, International Medical Corps, these are partners we work with all around the world, uh, and we expect them to report again anything that they're finding on the ground that's interfering with their ability to pursue their mandates.

RICHARD DURBIN:

So I'm trying to compare your answer, which basically says nothing extraordinary has been noted in terms of diversion and misuse of US-funded goods with the stated policy of the Israelis uh that they're slowing the flow of goods to a trickle to verify whether or not they're being diverted to Hamas or any other purposes.

SAMANTHA POWER:

I mean, just to step back, I think that um, what happened on October 7th, uh caused the Israeli public and the whole world uh to -- to um, look and say, OK, well, how did that happen? How did it happen? And that led um uh to certainly a level of restrictive-ness. In the early days with really no checkpoints open to be able to get food in and uh a gradual uh building of an infrastructure.

Some of the infrastructure had been destroyed also in the attack itself, um, but it was -- it was also policy, you know, real concern that anything went in would go to Hamas. I mean for a long time, we couldn't get fuel in to power the trucks in order to be able to get the food to people who needed it because of the concern again that Hamas would get the fuel.

So I think that you know, understanding the -- the -- the history and how it was that Hamas acquired the capabilities that they exhibited on

October 7th, that is part of uh, again something that we hear a lot about from our government of Israel interlocutors understandably in light of what happened on October 7th, but we still have to get food in to feed a population that has no means of feeding itself uh, in light of the conflict and the light of all that's been destroyed.

So I'm not sure if I'm responding exactly to your question.

RICHARD DURBIN:

For that, I'm not an expert on this, but I can recall a time when I was introduced to something called Plumpy'Nut, yes, which is a food supplement--

SAMANTHA POWER:

--Extraordinary--

RICHARD DURBIN:

--For starving children. There may be some new product that has evolved over time. But is that part of what we're doing in Gaza?

SAMANTHA POWER:

Right now, the -- the access limits uh, the -- the inability to get to the north in a sustained way has limited our ability to provide um ready-to-use therapeutic food. But that is absolutely part of what we are trying to flow into Gaza to address severe acute malnutrition that is being diagnosed. But -- but just I want to be clear about again in a -- if we can -- if we can have a humanitarian system whereby goods are flowing in regularly in convoys, humanitarian aid workers are in a position to know that they can move out without fear, um, for their

lives as well as fear, you know, for the people to whom they're trying to get assistance.

Um, you know, this is and where we can get to the North, which has been largely uh off limits with only a very limited supply. Um, we're going to want to see uh Plumpy'Nut or ready-to-use therapeutic food uh in those pipelines. But I -- I could not advertise now that we are reliably getting those resources to, to the very vulnerable kids who need it.

RICHARD DURBIN:

I think that is a stunning statement. We know children are starving to death in the numbers and the most fundamental life-saving substance that we can sell that we can transmit or transport to this country, we can't get to the most serious areas is what I understand you're saying.

SAMANTHA POWER:

Well, we hope that is changing uh again with -- with today 433 trucks or yesterday 433 trucks finally getting in um, I will get back to you precisely about the contents of those --

RICHARD DURBIN:

--Whose ground is supposed to receive those and for example, if that that?

SAMANTHA POWER:

UNICEF is our -- is has is traditionally our partner as we move ready, if that's what you're talking about, the ready-to-use therapeutic food. We work with UNICEF and then UNICEF would in turn be relying on

the UNRWA humanitarian infrastructure uh that you know provides the trucks and and assembles the convoys.

We also work with WFP as well in providing those food, but I get back to you as to which partner specifically we're looking to, to -- to provide those resources to -- bear in mind also though the point that was made earlier about hospitals and clinics. Um, you know, again, this is a -- this is an operating environment where uh, you know, many of the most severely malnutrition children aren't in a proper facility uh, you know where in one stop you can go and again provide a flow of these resources.

So it's extremely dangerous and I can't even imagine being a parent in that circumstance.

RICHARD DURBIN:

Nor can I. Thank you.

CHRISTOPHER COONS:

Thank you, Senator. Chair Murray.

PATTY MURRAY:

Well, thank you very much, Chair Coons. Thank you, Administrator Power. Good to see you. Thank you for being with us today as we kick off our first subcommittee hearing for the fiscal year 2025. Uh, and I hope my colleagues will indulge me for just a moment to go over some of my thinking about this as we start this process.

First of all, I do want to acknowledge to everyone the success we had as a committee in passing all 12 of our annual funding bills for FY 24, was not easy by any stretch, but we accomplished what many believed

we could not do in this Congress. We worked together in an open bipartisan process and passed all of our funding bills and it was the approach that we took here in the Senate listening to each other, finding common ground, setting aside extreme partisan proposals that finally allowed us to complete full-year bipartisan bills with the House after so many months wasted by republicans.

But while we have now passed all of our annual funding bills, we are not close to being done yet with 24 and we won't be until we pass the National Security Supplemental and provide desperately needed aid for Ukraine. The Senate passed that National Security Supplemental in an overwhelming 70 to 29 vote nearly two months ago.

There is no reason for further drama, delay, or partizanship. It's time the speaker put this up for a vote. We cannot afford to give up on Ukraine and throw in the towel to dictators like Putin, not when we know that our assistance is so consequential and has overwhelming bipartisan support. I will not stop stop pushing until we finish this job and get that bill to the president's desk.

I'm also going to continue talking with my colleagues to make sure we address other needs including working to ensure we reopen the Port of Baltimore and rebuild the Francis Scott Key Bridge. And at the same time, we are getting moving right away on FY 25 and it's no secret we have our work cut out for us. FY 24 was hard, 25 will be harder.

Spending caps from the FRA increased by just 1 percent for both defense and non-defense funding. That is an increase that is not nearly enough to tackle the challenges we face here at home and abroad. And we head into FY 25 without many of the non-defense

resources that were so important to passing workable bipartisan bills just a few weeks ago.

So this committee will again need to come together on a bipartisan basis to provide adequate resources for both defense and non-defense programs and to make sure there's no confusion about where I stand here. I will insist that any agreement take care of both non-defense and defense. And I look forward to talking with all of our committee members in the coming weeks about how we're going to do that.

Now turning to the issue of today, our investments in USAID. Chair Coons, several colleagues, and I just returned from a codal that I led to southern Africa where we met with officials and leaders in a handful of countries and saw firsthand how US investments are strengthening our political, economic, and security partnerships.

Now turning to the issue of today, our investments in USAID. Chair Coons, several colleagues, and I just returned from a CODEL and that I led to southern Africa where we met with officials and leaders in a handful of countries and saw firsthand how US investments are strengthening. Our political, economic and security partnerships.

And I'm very eager to talk about how we build on that progress, especially when it comes to economic and development assistance at this critical moment with a severe humanitarian crisis in Gaza, civilians in Ukraine suffering from Putin's brutal invasion, and so many other challenges like the truly dire crisis in Sudan where a staggering 8 million people have been displaced.

It is clear that we cannot abandon our role as a global leader in delivering humanitarian aid. Across all of these programs, we need to continue to do better incorporating women and girls who are often the

most at risk in times of conflict and into emergency response, development, programing, and peace-building work.

And we need to keep building on our global health infrastructure. Let's be clear, helping our partners around the world overcome hardships, increase their security and stability, and improve their economies and the lives of their people is not just the right thing to do, it is the smart thing to do. These are investments that pay off for our country.

We are helping our partners address threats across the world like conflict chaos and contagion, contagion before they fester and jeopardize folks here at home. So with that in mind, I will turn to my questions and you've been asked several times about Gaza, so I won't reiterate that. But just to say, I share the concerns of my colleagues that you heard about how we are not doing enough to get more aid into Gaza.

Airdrops and sea routes are not going to solve this, so we've got to see consistent access across the Gaza Strip, including the North at a scale necessary to address the serious threat of famine. So I appreciate your responses to my colleagues and it's something a concern will all consider continue to push on. Now on my recent trip to Southern Africa, I was very glad to see the progress we have made improving the lives of women and girls.

But we've got to do a lot more to be responsive to their needs in every aspect of foreign assistance. As you well know, women and girls often eat last and eat the least while sacrificing for their families. The majority of community health workers are actually women who are frequently underpaid or unpaid.

We're still seeing a lot of barriers that prevent girls from staying in school and getting a quality education like early and forced marriage. Building on our efforts in this space is essential because we know women's empowerment and inclusion is critical for resilient democracies and strong economies. So Administrator Power, how can we continue to make sure the needs of women and girls are accounted for in humanitarian responses and development program?

SAMANTHA POWER:

Uh, thank you so much well, I think uh for start to sustain the resources, invested in programs that are uh dedicated to girls, education, support for female SMEs, and so forth. All of these, again, we have sprinkled throughout the world, including to the countries you visited. And thank you to your teams, we are so grateful that you all took the time to not only to visit those countries, but to actually see the programs up close.

I, uh one example where I think which I think needs to be a growth area is as even in the budget constraint environment is on global health workers um, as the vast majority of global health workers are women. As you know, they are underpaid. In some cases they are unpaid and so um, even though this recent budget cycle as you mentioned was -- is -- is -- is going -- is going to be very difficult for us the FY 24 budget.

We were grateful to you for finding \$10 million for the Global Health Worker Initiative, um, and we would like to grow that over time. We think this is an example of the kind of foundational investment uh that is needed for primary health systems, not just for the disease-based programming that you saw on HIV or TB or malaria, but really getting

at foundational health while also uh advancing the rights and the welfare of women.

But in addition to these, these dedicated programs, you know really I think um, women's and girls' empowerment needs to be a design feature or kind of filter through which we look at all of our programming, agriculture, economic growth, global health as I mentioned, education. And I think the teams have made a ton of progress in the last three years in doing that.

PATTY MURRAY:

Yeah, we were able to visit health care facilities and a school that touched my heart um with uh, you know, a couple of girls that were able to go to school and we just have to really expand that. So, um, I want you to know I'm going to stay focused on that. And Mr. Chairman, if you wouldn't mind, I just want to ask one more question.

Um, we were in Zambia and Malawi and the governments each made disaster declarations because of the recent droughts. Not only are they seeing clearly the challenges of climate change, they're seeing it in their lost crops and famine, disease outbreaks, um, and it is really worsening with water insecurity.

That can cause a lot of tensions in those communities and across the borders. Water is necessary for survival, not just for human consumption and cooking and all of that, but for the farmers and ranchers and the food production. And I want to ask you how is USAID investing in water rights and sustainable resource managed to reduce the threat and risk of conflict?

SAMANTHA POWER:

Well, let me embrace the -- present the premise uh and the connection you're making between water and drought and scarcity on the one hand and conflict on the other. I don't think it's a coincidence, uh, by any stretch that we have more conflict happening in the world today than at any time uh since World War II. Uh, we also have more drought and more extreme weather events generally than at any time uh in -- in our lifetimes.

I'm grateful actually also to -- to Senator Durbin and others who've led on on uh water and water rights. We are shifting our focus a little bit to uh focusing on governance and working with water ministries, municipalities, national utilities. That's on top of the work that we have been doing, uh, building taps and toilets.

Maybe you saw some of those um, uh and that those are really important legacy investments that we have made uh, but in order for water to be dealt with systemically, that is fundamentally going to require working with state institutions again, whether subnational or national. Uh, so uh, I think we -- um by 2027, we are aiming to strengthen a thousand water security and sanitation institutions in some fashion um. And last year, we supported 500 uh that sounds like, a thousand sounds like a big number.

It's not that big a number when you think about again how great the needs are. Um, but this underscores given our resource challenges, the importance as well. Uh, before you got here, I talked a lot about leveraging taxpayer money to get more private-sector investment. And I'm struck uh in the water domain that USAID's investments in water over the last five years have mobilized an additional \$1.4 billion in private sector resources.

So that's more than 60 cents for every taxpayer dollar and we just are going to have to do more of that across the board.

PATTY MURRAY:

OK, thank you. Thank you very much and thank you Mr. Chairman.

CHRISTOPHER COONS:

Senator Van Hollen?

CHRIS VAN HOLLEN:

I thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me start by thanking Chair Murray for navigating us through the last fiscal, long fiscal year um and uh for your commitment to moving forward in a constructive way, including mentioning replacing the -- the Key Bridge in Baltimore. Thank you and to Chairman Coons. Um, thank you for your leadership on this subcommittee and your commitment to humanitarian aid and to both of you for mentioning the need to pass the supplemental uh, which includes many elements including uh, humanitarian assistance.

Um, Madam Administrator, it's great to see you, and thank you and your team at aid for what you do worldwide every day. Uh, many of us have had the opportunity to witness your good work on behalf of our country and its ongoing and also responding to emergencies, including in Sudan. Uh Haiti has been mentioned, other places have been mentioned.

And I'm grateful for all the work you're doing there. Um, I do want to turn to Gaza because it's a humanitarian disaster, a manmade humanitarian disaster, a crisis that the UN as well as multiple international NGOs have called the worst humanitarian disaster they've seen in 50 years given all the factors that are at play there.

Uh, on Sunday, we marked the six-month anniversary of the horrific Hamas attacks on Israel. Uh about 1200 people murdered, uh over 250 hostages taken. And we have all said as the president has said that Israel not only has the right to defend itself, but I would argue the duty to defend itself against Hamas.

But as you know, you've been our ambassador to the UN, you've written uh about international law. The right to self-defense does not include the right to arbitrarily restrict desperately needed humanitarian assistance from getting to innocent people, including now over 2 million Palestinians in Gaza who have nothing to do with Hamas.

And it should not have taken the death of foreign aid workers to get the world to really say enough is enough here in the galvanized action. As you said, over 200 Palestinian aid workers have been killed already since the beginning of this war. And I'm glad to see the Netanyahu government say it's going to open the Erez crossing.

This is something those of us on this committee who are here right now, have been calling for for months as has the president. I'm glad to see over 400 trucks cross into Gaza yesterday. To my mind, that just shows what's been possible all along. And every day, we should have at least 400 trucks crossing.

But as you know, in addition to getting trucks into Gaza, we have to be able to safely distribute assistance within Gaza. And that of course, is why we've been calling for deconfliction and why the -- the killing of the aid workers with World Central Kitchen was unfortunately just another example of a failed deconfliction process.

So getting aid distributed in Gaza since the beginning of this war has required, as you indicated, the major UN agency responsible for

distributing aid, which is UNRWA, and at least the last I heard, the Netanyahu government was still not allowing UNRWA to distribute aid in northern Gaza. I'm hoping today maybe you'll tell me that's changed.

Is there any update on that?

SAMANTHA POWER:

Um, my understanding is that uh, there has been progress. Um, whether it is sufficient, I think we're waiting to see and uh, but certainly that has been in recent, you know, I think it's been about a month in which that policy was in place and it dramatically limited, what could be done given that the transportation infrastructure is, by and large, UNRWA and uh so, so that, that policy carried with it the consequence of being able to, to move even less to the north.

Uh, but -- but my -- my understanding from today is that, that position is changing.

CHRIS VAN HOLLEN:

Well, I'm glad to hear that because that policy, in my view resulted in, you know, more people uh suffering dramatically. And we've seen over 20 people not just on the verge of starvation, but die of starvation. So it's essential that, that that policy that was imposed by the Netanyahu government change in order to make sure that we can get food to people in northern Gaza.

Um, I was pleased to see the readout from the president's most recent phone call uh, with Prime Minister Netanyahu uh, where he indicated that uh, US policy uh on a forward going basis would be determined, I think determined was his word, uh, by whether or not we see results,

um, in terms of um preventing and stopping this humanitarian catastrophe.

And I saw Secretary Blinken underscore the fact that we need to see results. I just want to make sure I understand what we mean by results because from my perspective, results means that we stop what many say is an imminent famine, results means that um, we don't have any more people dying of starvation.

Results means we don't have hundreds of thousands of people on the verge of starvation. Results, means that um kids who are getting amputations because of wounds they suffered, um can at least have anesthesia. Is that how you would define results?

SAMANTHA POWER:

I would uh, I would add also uh that um civilian protection uh be a priority, um and something recognizing again the uh despicable tactics of Hamas uh, insinuating itself in civilian populations that doesn't lessen uh the responsibility uh to um uh look out for civilians. Uh. In -- in, in ones targeted targeting and be um, extremely mindful of the risks uh in -- in, in a manner that, that, yes, this creation of a new structure, uh whereby humanitarians and uh officers operating in Gaza are more closely latched up, something again that we have been appealing for some time.

Um, but you know fundamentally as well, uh a view on the part of those choosing targets um, that um, you know, civilian harm uh is something to be uh to -- to, to seek to avoid in every possible circumstance. Um and you know, military necessity alone, uh, you know, cannot dictate uh the targeting. You know, fundamentally, uh, the, the military uh necessity, uh, the proportionality analysis around military necessity is very, very important.

So, so um, again, we have laid out a series of steps that, yes, include the Erez crossing and the port and a new and much more beefed up corridor from Jordan. I mean, I think on the -- on the -- the trucks, we can see a path uh to um, you know, addressing the food crisis or at least to flooding the zone with food.

But you know, getting food into Gaza is the first step. That food then has to get to people where they are um and this underscores as well the importance of maintaining the humanitarian hub such as it is uh in Rafah um uh, which is something as well the president, not just in the last couple of weeks but for months has been alert to the risk of jeopardizing you know what humanitarian infrastructure does exist.

And so uh, again, our view is that the kind of ground operation that, that Israel that the IDF has undertaken in canyons and Gaza City uh, that it would be a mistake to carry something like that out, given that the provisions for the welfare of the civilians and the humanitarians who work there, uh, have not evidently been made.

CHRIS VAN HOLLEN:

Well, thank you. And you -- you anticipated my other questions. As is often the case, and I agree that that results has to include uh, reducing civilian harm. Uh results has to include a recognition of President of the United States' position uh that an invasion of Rafah would be a red line. In my view, all of this has to be part of results.

And um, if I may, Mr. Chairman, I just want to say to the Administrator, I want to thank her um. I know that aid has played a role with respect to the interpretation and provided input on NSM 20. And I think it's essential that those who are responsible in the Department for the delivery of humanitarian aid have a strong voice within that process since one of the key factors of NSM 20 as you

know is whether a recipient of US military assistance is facilitating and not arbitrarily restricting the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

So I hope aid will have a strong voice at the table. I don't know if you have any comment on that.

SAMANTHA POWER:

I'm always for USAID having a strong voice.

CHRIS VAN HOLLEN:

All right, well, please keep us posted. Thank you.

CHRISTOPHER COONS:

Thank you. Senator Van Hollen, we are in the middle of a vote. I have three more brief questions if I might, but you're welcome to speak to briefly or at length. As you wish, um almost every Senator raised the urgency of the supplemental, Chair Murray in particular. It is the unfinished business of FY 24. What are the consequences if the \$9 billion in humanitarian aid that was passed by the Senate on a big bipartisan margin and the funding for Ukraine and the other funding, but what are the consequences both for the humanitarian circumstances of the world and for your 25 budget, which is the topic of this hearing?

What happens if the House simply doesn't pass the supplemental?

SAMANTHA POWER:

The House has to pass the supplemental. There's so much riding on it. Um, uh, for starters, uh, you know, we've been talking about the importance of access and uh, the importance of all players doing everything they can to facilitate resources flowing into Gaza. Well,

imagine the United States not being in a position to even fund uh food or you know, ready-to-use therapeutic food for -- for infants or for kids under five who have severe acute malnutrition.

I mean, you know, maybe maybe we'd be able to do something small again growing out of the FY 24 budget. But for -- with new wars in Sudan and Gaza that have come onto the books in 20, between April of 2023 and now um and for us to cut our -- or have 40 percent less humanitarian funding to work with, it will again mean cutting people off rations who are in desperate need of it and not being able to -- to meet the needs that have arisen over the course of the last year uh, except for a short period of time.

I mean, it's -- it's very, very bleak.

CHRISTOPHER COONS:

Because I think, you know, I was in Dadaab in August. I think we spoke about this and got to hear from a whole series of parents about what it meant for them and their children, that the World Food Program had cut their rations again. Senator Booker spoke today at our caucus lunch about his visit to Chad and with refugees coming from Sudan and the impact of the cuts that have already been imposed before that possible.

So if I hear you right, it would take a tragic situation and make it catastrophic.

SAMANTHA POWER:

I mean, life and death, uh, millions of lives depend on the passage of the supplemental, tens of millions. I just -- I can't go this whole hearing without talking about Ukraine. Um, and you know the fact

that there are uh men and women in the trenches trying to defend their communities from a Russian onslaught uh and that the thing that could be holding them back is not their uh courage, not their ingenuity, but simply the question of whether the United States of America is standing with them in providing military support.

I mean, that is something we will -- we will -- we will not wish to live with ourselves years from now as we look back on this moment. But in addition, the part that uh USAID is responsible for is to bear in mind that Putin is trying to do two things, conquer Ukraine militarily and having failed that, destroy its economy.

The resources that Congress has given USAID to work in partnership with those same courageous and ingenious Ukrainians this time in the economic sector, the agricultural sector, the energy sector. I can't think of a better return on an investment, not only because the economy has not collapsed and indeed will grow by 5 percent this year, not only because Ukraine is now back to feeding the world despite Putin's attempts to destroy Black Sea port, exports, and agricultural land and agricultural equipment and that that has brought down global food prices including food prices here in the United States surely, um, you know not only for all of those reasons but because this country is so much further along economically now in terms of its integration with Europe.

Its ability, once this war is over, to wean itself quickly, you know from international assistance once it has of course had the -- the initial recovery from the war, its tech sector grew by 5 percent in the first year after Putin invaded Ukraine. Its young people determined again to invent and and USAID facilitating those partnerships, trade fairs, job fairs, making those export linkages.

That is what the supplemental also funds. Yes, it's humanitarian assistance. Yes, it's ammunition for Ukraine, but it is development, it is economic development that is going to put Ukraine in an incredibly strong position to be the -- a member of Europe and a member of democratic civilization that contributes and gives back.

And maybe I'll just use this occasion to close where I started because I gave the -- the Republic of Korea example --

CHRIS VAN HOLLEN:

I was going to take you.

SAMANTHA POWER:

Right, you know, the Republic of Korea goes from, you know, taking flower and assistance uh, you know, from the United States and other democracies to now being an absolutely pivotal development partner and humanitarian partner to the United States. The Republic of Korea, while we were under you know significant budget pressure increasing its own development and humanitarian assistance by nearly 30 percent next year.

Um, I -- that's a path Ukraine, uh is on honestly, but if we pull the plug on the resources needed to help thwart Putin's ambitions to destroy the economy, uh we -- it is something that we will uh live to regret. And it is something that will be a great gift to Putin and it is something that will impede the kind of contribution that Ukrainians are so desperate to make.

CHRISTOPHER COONS:

As a friend of ours often says, from your lips to God's ears, uh, I think it is urgent that Speaker Johnson have the courage to put this on the

floor in the House and that we avoid what will be there. I've almost never seen in my brief 14 years here such a clear difference in outcome. Um allowing Russia to roll over Ukraine, threaten the rest of NATO, destabilize all of Europe, the wave of refugees that would come from that, the significant loss in American standing in the world, or staying in the fight, sustaining them dramatically growing their economy, rewarding their innovation, their patience, their determination, their patriotism, and their sacrifice.

And showing that a former Soviet satellite really can choose whether to be free or subjugated and if they are willing to fight can fight for freedom successfully. You've done amazing work in dealing with the attacks on the power infrastructure, on restarting the agricultural sector, uh on economic growth.

Secretary Pritzker met with a whole group of us in Munich about the impact just in Odessa and in the agriculture sector and it was genuinely inspiring. Um, I'll submit some questions for the record about economic growth. You're doing great work there. Um, we -- when we were in Zambia had long conversations with President Hichilima about debt burden and the difference between predatory lending and the possibility of the DFC being a real tool and other initiatives by different agencies to be a tool.

I'd love to hear your thoughts on the interagency and what tools we need to sharpen. And then global health um, look, I've been a strong supporter of PEPFAR. Uh, it was striking that the life expectancy of the average Zambian has increased by 50 percent simply because of our investment there. Botswana really has achieved pandemic control.

Um, there really is transition to country ownership and a number of key southern African countries. I'd be interested in hearing from you where we go next, what's the trajectory forward? We were only able to get a one-year extension, um, something, Senator Graham and I both worked hard on um trying to figure out sort of where are we going in global public health Um. But let me also run to the floor to cast a vote, um and reflect on what you said in the outset about the arc of South Korea.

Ukraine will someday if we are wise, if we do what we must join that list of our top trading partners of those who give back to the rest of the world of those who are a model of development. South Korea for critics of development is the single strongest case of a country that was a basket case and is today a basket of opportunity and growth for the rest of the world.

Our investment, our partnership, and your leadership at aid can help make that possible. Um, so thank you for your testimony and your leadership. Um and the hearing record will remain open for written questions until 5 PM on Tuesday, April 16th. And with that, this hearing is adjourned.

List of Panel Members

PANEL MEMBERS:

SEN. CHRISTOPHER COONS (D-DEL.), CHAIRMAN

SEN. RICHARD DURBIN (D-ILL.)

SEN. JEANNE SHAHEEN (D-N.H.)

SEN. JEFF MERKLEY (D-ORE.)

SEN. CHRIS MURPHY (D-CONN.)

SEN. CHRIS VAN HOLLEN (D-MD.)

SEN. BRIAN SCHATZ (D-HAWAII)

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SEN. MITCH MCCONNELL (R-KY.)

SEN. JOHN BOOZMAN (R-ARK.)

SEN. JERRY MORAN (R-KAN.)

SEN. MARCO RUBIO (R-FLA.)

SEN. WILLIAM HAGERTY (R-TENN.)

SEN. SUSAN COLLINS (R-MAINE), EX-OFFICIO

UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATOR SAMANTHA POWER

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