

## DEVEX - Conversation with Samantha Power

NOTE - THIS IS A SUMMARY OF [A LONGER ARTICLE](#) AND THE 45 MINUTE INTERVIEW

### Powerful reflections

A balancing act — that’s what Samantha Power has performed for the past three and a half years as head of [USAID](#), which receives criticism for everything from not taking enough risk to not using taxpayer funds wisely enough.

In one of her last interviews before leaving office, [Power spoke with Devex](#) for a special edition of the This Week in Global Development podcast about **navigating the push-pull of her job**, whether it’s trying to frame the narrative around USAID’s foreign policy objectives, or trying to institute reforms with limited resources.

“You have to have the balance in life between the patience to know that systems change ... but the impatience to never be like, ‘Oh but it takes time,’” she said. “I try to strike that balance.”

Power took the reins of America’s preeminent aid agency somewhat on the impatient side, promptly laying out an ambitious plan for reform that included [increasing USAID’s workforce](#), stripping bureaucratic red tape, and [bringing more local partners into the fold](#), my colleague Elissa Miolene writes.

She also spoke about balancing the desire to take risks with the desire to be “faithful stewards of taxpayer money.”

But some Republican lawmakers don’t think USAID has been a very good steward. They claim money is flowing to progressive causes such as LGBTQ+ rights. Power pushed back.

“There might be individual members of Congress who pluck out a single program and try to reduce all that USAID is doing in the world to some particular beneficiary or constituency in a manner that makes it look — as they put it to me — ideological. They’re not going to find a lot of that at USAID,” she said.

Nevertheless, the agency is likely to be **put under the microscope in a Republican-controlled government** led by a president notoriously skeptical of foreign aid. There is some hope, however, that Donald Trump may find

geostrategic value in offering the world an alternative to China's aid model.

While Power says U.S. soft power can advance national interests, whether it's preventing wars or gaining new economic partners, she **warned about boiling assistance down to a self-serving transaction.**

“Development and humanitarian work that gets entirely instrumentalized really does risk becoming so transactional and just bounded, in a way, by shorter-term considerations,” she said. “And if you think about the kind of lasting impacts that USAID and development generally have achieved, it's always a long game.”

**Read:** [How Samantha Power performed a delicate balancing act as USAID chief](#)