

## **Is USAID being dismantled?** Special Edition of The USGLC Global Gab, 6 Feb 2025

The new Administration promised to shake things up in Washington -- and shake things up they have. You may love it or hate it. I have heard both from members of our coalition. But when it comes to America's commitments to international development, I am not only deeply troubled but frankly bewildered by the intensity and velocity of the dismantling of some of our most potent economic and national security programs.

As I listened to Secretary Rubio at his confirmation hearings, I thought he was spot on when he said **our global investments should make America "safer, stronger, and more prosperous,"** and I welcomed his call for a review of our foreign assistance programs.

No one should argue against a smart and strategic review to ensure alignment with America's national interests. But what's baffling is that *before* any review had even been conducted or any meaningful consultation with Congress, the State Department put a freeze on all future and current foreign assistance programs – and are now putting nearly every USAID employee on administrative leave, or terminating them entirely, including recalling thousands of our public servants from around the globe.

I can understand surgical adjustments while the review is taking place, but why would we unilaterally take nearly our entire development and humanitarian team off the global playing field? Our rivals – China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea – are playing to win, which is why we need an offense and defense strategy. In fact, top military leaders like former CENTCOM Commander and Marine Corps General Anthony Zinni worry that pulling back "diminishes U.S. strength around the world."

USGLC has been clear: **we should all support reform—but not retreat.**

The weeks and months ahead will be critical as this debate and discussion continues. To get more information about how you can add your voice, reach

out to me or my colleague Alex Grant ([agrant@usglc.org](mailto:agrant@usglc.org)).

Over the past week, many have shared stories with us of the national and economic security impact of the freeze and closure. I've shared just a sampling of the thousands I have heard below in this **special edition of The Global Gab**.

I hope you'll continue to share your stories with me.

Best,

Liz

Liz Schroyer, USGLC

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## **THE GLOBAL GAB – Special Edition Update on U.S. Foreign Assistance**

*February 6th, 2025*

**FOREIGN ASSISTANCE REVIEW.** In the big stack of day-one executive orders by the new Administration, including withdrawing from the Paris Climate Agreement and the World Health Organization, came one on **“Reevaluating and Realigning U.S. Foreign Aid”** to launch a 90-day review of U.S. foreign assistance programs and directing agencies to assess aid effectiveness, strategic alignment, and impact on national interests.

**STOP-WORK ORDER.** Before the review had even begun, a freeze on all future programs and a stop-work order on active foreign assistance was announced days later. The sweeping directive did include limited waivers for foreign military financing for Israel and Egypt, emergency food assistance, administrative expenses, legitimate prior expenses, and other exceptions as approved by the Director of Foreign Assistance.

**WAIVER ISSUES.** Following bipartisan concern and countless stories of direct harm being done to America's interests due to the freeze, additional waivers began to trickle out including for lifesaving humanitarian assistance, but with

enormous confusion as implementing partners are still not receiving payments or clear guidance on specific programs.

**USAID DISMANTLING.** Without any formal Administration Executive Order, USAID was restructured under the State Department earlier this week, with Secretary Rubio becoming the Acting USAID Administrator, and empowering **Peter Marocco** as **USAID’s Acting Deputy Administrator**. On Tuesday, the entire USAID workforce received the dramatic announcement that at 11:59pm Friday evening “all USAID direct hire personnel will be placed on administrative leave globally” impacting thousands of staff in Washington and recalling personnel and their families stationed overseas within the month. Reports now indicate that the Administration could plan to keep less than 300 staff out of more than 10,000 world-wide.

**BIPARTISAN LEADERS SPEAK OUT.** While Democrats were quick to jump into the fray, plenty of Republican leaders have been pushing back behind closed doors and even in public – warning about the dangers to our national interests and undercutting Congressionally mandated and appropriated strategic development and diplomacy tools:

- Senator **Roger Wicker (R-MS)** made [clear](#) that USAID is essential to America’s global **competition with China**, calling it “our way of combating the Belt and Road initiative.”
- Senator **John Cornyn (R-TX)** [underscored](#) the importance of programs like **PEPFAR**—which began under the Bush Administration and has saved millions of lives across Africa—as did Senator **Bill Cassidy (R-LA)** who [called](#) it “the epitome of soft power.”
- Senator **Lisa Murkowski (R-AK)** [highlighted](#) the critical role USAID plays in global stability, saying it “does a lot of good around the world, particularly for women and girls” and stressing that humanitarian relief must be “distributed fairly, equitably.”
- Senator **Susan Collins (R-ME)**, Chair of the Appropriations Committee, raised [concerns](#) that the Administration “did not follow the law in

notifying Congress” and cited enormous confusion surrounding the “so-called pause.”

- Senator **Jerry Moran** (R-KS) is [urging](#) action to distribute \$340 million in American-grown **food aid** currently stalled at U.S. ports before it perishes—stressing that “time is running out” for those in need.
- Senator **Chris Coons** (D-DE) [wrote](#) in the Washington Post that “U.S. foreign assistance makes up 1% of our federal budget, and this money isn’t charity. It bolsters our security and advances our values... wins us friends, establishes our leadership, and neutralizes distant threats.”

**NATIONAL SECURITY IMPACT OF FREEZE.** At a moment when America needs to demonstrate strength on the global stage, our development and diplomacy programs are precisely how this Administration can outcompete China, avoid costly wars, and strengthen our economy here at home. Dismantling this fraction in the overall federal budget risks undermining our own interests and ceding ground to America’s rivals:

- **Unwinding support to strategic partners from Jordan to Taiwan.**
  - Foreign Military Financing (FMF) to strategic allies and partners, including Jordan and Taiwan, has been suspended, risking greater regional instability in the Indo-Pacific and Middle East with direct impacts on U.S. national security.
  - China’s saber-rattling around Taiwan continues to threaten our partner with a record number of incursions by China’s air force in 2024 as Chinese President Xi Jinping promised once again to bring Taiwan under CCP control as recently as his 2025 New Year’s address. With fragile ceasefires in the Middle East, Jordan’s proximity to instability in Syria as well as Western Iraq threatens a key ally and security partner in the region.
  - While Israel and Egypt received exemptions for FMF, the suspension of long-standing security assistance for U.S. allies and partners weakens U.S. national security interests in two critical arenas.

- **Abandoning Anti-ISIS and Counterterrorism Programs.**

- Just as Syria's new government takes shape, critical civilian stabilization programs – that work alongside the U.S. military – to hold back an ISIS resurgence were suspended in the region. At the Al Hol and Al Roj camps, where close to 10,000 ISIS fighters and 40,000 women and children remain detained and displaced, security guards walked off the job at the camps following the initial freeze. Reports suggest a two-week waiver was granted for this program, but little clarity or assurances remain for ongoing civilian stabilization programs in the fight against ISIS in Syria that puts our strongest ally in the region, Israel, at risk from the north.
- In critical countries around the world, USAID's Development Assistance for Countering Terrorism (DACT) program is currently frozen globally including in the countries of Indonesia, Iraq, Libya, Malaysia, Somalia, Yemen, and in the Sahel region of Africa. This freeze has suspended essential U.S. national security activities that train local security personnel and law enforcement, combat the smuggling of weapons, and work with local institutions to detect terrorism financing.

- **Pausing Lifesaving Food and Medical Aid.**

- Shipments with lifesaving food and medical aid are stuck in ports around the world as organizations struggle to determine if programs are exempt from the foreign assistance freeze or not. One recent report from Senator Jerry Moran (R-KS) cites \$340 million worth of American-grown food being stuck in U.S. ports.
- In the Democratic Republic of Congo, nearly 4.5 million children under the age of 5 years are facing acute malnutrition. Services are being stopped at 73 sites testing and treating tens of thousands of malnourished children, and 92 health facilities are being shuttered that support over 200,000 individuals in Eastern DRC during this current mpox outbreak.

- In the midst of the ongoing conflict in Sudan, which has strategic geo-political interests for the United States, 48 health facilities serving over 300,000 people are closed. Nutrition services are being cut off to over 250,000 people, including in the Zamzam IDP camp where famine has been declared.
- **Ending Counternarcotics and Migration Mitigation Efforts at Our Southern Border.**
  - Civilian programs in Central and South America that combat transnational criminal organizations and drug trafficking have been halted, which risks opening the door for more illegal narcotics, including fentanyl and other synthetic opioids that are killing thousands of Americans.
  - As one example, funding for narcotics interdiction in Colombia was paused, which totals \$380 million annually. This suspension is relieving pressure on cocaine-funded transnational criminal organizations and gangs, and risks driving increased chaos and mass migration to the U.S. southern border.
  - In Central America, tough diplomacy with partner countries has been essential, but the pause on economic development, food security, and counter gang activity will only exacerbate current conditions that are driving migrants north to the U.S. Southern Border.
- **Ceding Ground to China in the Indo-Pacific.**
  - In the Pacific Islands, just months after USAID strategically launched a new nine-country mission to combat China's expanding influence, the drawdown of USAID personnel and the foreign assistance freeze is immediately giving Beijing a freer hand in this strategically important region.
  - As one example, over 40 Chinese state-owned enterprises operate in the country of Papua New Guinea with more than 1,800 foreign companies controlled by Chinese nationals or entities as the U.S. draws down its presence in the region.

- **Stopping Weapons Disposal and Demining Unexploded Ordinances.**
  - U.S. efforts to properly dispose of weapons in conflict zones are currently frozen, jeopardizing fragile ceasefires and peace agreements in places like Lebanon, which is critical to protecting Israel.
  - Current demining programs have also stopped globally, putting thousands of people at risk including U.S. military personnel. Program halts include Cambodia, Laos, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Vietnam – all in a region where the U.S. is vying for influence and partnership as we compete with the CCP.
- **Weakening our Biosecurity and Outbreak Threat Monitoring.**
  - Outbreaks of Ebola, Avian (Bird) Flu, M-Pox, and Marburg are happening in Africa and other parts of the world. The suspension of global health programs that monitor Bird Flu in 47 countries will only cause further setbacks to U.S. farmers as Bird Flu continues to wreak havoc within the United States with more than 13 million hens lost or slaughtered since December.
  - In Uganda, where the country is now fighting a new Ebola outbreak, health programs are under significant duress with supply chains halted due to the aid suspension. Without active U.S. programs to prevent, detect, and respond to biothreats when and where they occur, new disease threats remain an average of just 36 hours away from U.S. shores.

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