

Trump's Dismantling of USAID is Anarchy Masquerading as Efficiency, by Hawaii's [Senator Brian Schatz](#), *Time Magazine*, 14 Feb 2025

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Nothing about Donald Trump's hasty and illegal [attempted](#) dismantling of the [United States Agency for International Development](#) (USAID)—and with it, the decapitation of American power—is remotely efficient. Just this week, USAID's now-former Inspector General [found](#) that there is currently half a billion dollars' worth of American-grown food stranded at ports and warehouses across the country, on the verge of spoiling. That's corn and rice and lentils and soybeans, grown in Iowa and Kansas and Texas and Oklahoma, that would have otherwise fed children in a school in Bangladesh or famished refugees at a camp in war-torn Sudan. (The Inspector General was subsequently [fired](#) for disclosing this information.)

Similarly, there's no efficiency being achieved by obstructing one of the most successful global health programs in history—the [President's Emergency Program for AIDS Relief](#)—which has saved 26 million lives over the past two decades. PEPFAR currently provides HIV treatment to over 20 million people around the world, meaning every day aid isn't flowing inches us closer to the very outbreaks we've worked so hard to prevent.

Whether it's delivering clean water to communities across Africa; or promoting economic development through education in Mali and small business support in El Salvador; or providing life-saving care in Thailand and Syria; or fighting human trafficking in Nepal and Liberia, thousands of USAID workers and contractors make miracles big and small happen every day.

But USAID succeeds as more than just a moral matter. Each year, it pours [billions of dollars](#) back into the U.S. economy, supporting farmers and businesses that provide food and other supplies. It also helps fight terrorist groups and drug cartels that endanger Americans, while deepening American values and interests in every corner of the globe. But perhaps the most underappreciated aspect of USAID's work is its singular ability to forge relationships with unlikely partners which help combat the harmful influence of adversaries like China and Russia.

It's no surprise, then, that Beijing and Moscow are now [cheering on](#) our sudden retreat. They're not wasting any time filling the void, either. Within days of USAID's closure, China [sent aid](#) and [dispatched workers](#) to take on projects we've abandoned in the Indo Pacific and Africa. Intended or not, that will be the enduring consequence of this episode of chaos: an emboldened China, all-too-eager to exploit American isolation to grow its own power and influence.

Like any organization, USAID is not perfect. There are inefficiencies and redundancies, and evolving challenges and emerging technologies present opportunities for improvement. It's also entirely legitimate to question whether U.S. funding is aligned with our current priorities and interests and seek to adjust it as needed within the four corners of the law. Doing that is one of Congress' most fundamental responsibilities—and something I was eager to work on when I became the lead Democrat on the Senate Appropriations subcommittee overseeing foreign aid last month.

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But the abrupt and total shutdown of USAID—in defiance of [multiple federal laws](#) through which it was codified and funded—reveals a simple truth: [The Department of Government Efficiency](#) is not actually about achieving efficiency. Rather, it’s about Trump trying to wish away whichever parts of the government he doesn’t like. Were a purge of this nature to happen in a country halfway around the world, we would rightly call it an authoritarian takeover. The fact that it’s happening at our own doorstep doesn’t change that.

Much of what DOGE claims to have newly unearthed are either outright lies or were already [publicly available](#) for all to see. Worse, there’s no telling what funding they deem unnecessary—except for vague, baseless descriptions like “woke” and “radical” and “criminal.”

The way to make reforms is through the lawmaking process—not the [lawbreaking](#) process. If you believe that a program needs to be narrowed in scope, reformed a great deal, or even eliminated altogether, the way to do that is by proposing a law—not by rampaging the federal government and stripping it for parts. Our government with three separate but co-equal branches exists precisely to prevent this kind of anarchy operating under a thin veneer of fiscal responsibility and shrewd cost-cutting.

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Moving fast and breaking things may be an acceptable way to conduct business at a tech company. But a break now, fix later strategy doesn’t work when you’re the leader of the free world. What’s on the line is not advertising revenue and the user experience, but lives and livelihoods. Hundreds of millions of them, in fact. People will die, [diseases will spread](#), and famine will grow. Trump is trying to hoodwink Americans into thinking the only way to achieve efficiency is by exacting maximum chaos and cruelty. It’s a false choice and we must reject it.