

Statement Before the Subcommittee on Delivering Government Efficiency

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I am pleased to provide this written testimony for the Subcommittee. I served as Administrator of USAID in the Clinton Administration and was elected in 2010 by the member states to serve as chair of the OECD Development Assistance Committee. In this forum donors nations share information and best practices in development cooperation.

I have had the privilege of working with outstanding development professionals in the US Government and with those in international organizations and other bilateral donors. 99 of my USAID colleagues have lost their lives in service to their country. They are as much American heroes as are our brave military personnel.

The American foreign aid program has received bipartisan support from Congress and multiple Administrations since its inception as the Point Four program launched by President Truman and the creation of USAID by President Kennedy of in 1961.

Thus, I would suggest that the title of this hearing which suggests that our foreign aid program has undermined US interests is not only counter-factual, it also demeans the motives of Presidents and Congresses past. I welcome the opportunity to present evidence to the contrary.

It is very much in the interests of the American people that we retain our institutional capacity to help the world's poorest countries help themselves. America has been a leader in this field for over 70 years. If we abandon this vital mission, we will be allowing the effects of poverty—immigration, disease, environmental destruction, violent conflict and terrorism—to overwhelm us.

With less than one percent of our national budget USAID promotes American democratic values in the face of efforts by autocratic governments to undermine those values. We are today in a competition between the authoritarian worldviews of the Chinas and the Russias.

Our “soft power” has always been an appealing and influential attribute as we pursue our national interests. And USAID is the principle way we exercise that power in the developing world where 80 percent of the world's population lives. I repeat that for emphasis: **80 percent of the world's population lives in the developing world.**

The United States is faced today with several transnational threats that impact our citizens. One of those is the threat of infectious disease. We are currently dealing with bird flu. USAID had been monitoring that disease and others at 49 sites around the world. Those sites have now been shut down. That makes no sense.

USAID has been instrumental in keeping diseases like Ebola and the Marburg virus from reaching our shores. The Agency has been implementing President Bush's malaria initiative that has serviced some 600,000 people, many of them children, with protective nets and prophylactics. That program has been closed down. Many children and other vulnerable people will die as a result

The Bush Administration's PEPFAR program that provides lifesaving antiretrovirals to HIV patients has also been virtually shut down--despite having been granted a waiver--because there are no USAID staff to run it. That program has saved over 26 million lives. Lives will be lost to AIDS if people no longer have access to those antiretrovirals.

The American people understand well that viruses do not respect borders; that they must be treated and mitigated at the source. We lost 1.6 million people to the COVID-19 virus that came to us from a remote location.

The American people voted in part because of concerns over illegal immigration. USAID is one of the most important tools we have to create opportunity for potential migrants where they live.

Most people do not want to risk life and limb to travel long distances to live a better life. If they are not persecuted by tyrannical governments or gangs, and they can provide for their family, they will stay home.

When people fall into extreme poverty they become desperate. Then they are either radicalized or become migrants.

Foreign aid has been highly successful in helping many countries to eliminate extreme poverty and to create a middle class. USAID offers technical assistance in creating the micro-economic systems—tax, banking, customs, import-export, and rule of law—that are essential in attracting foreign investment.

In 1950, 59% of the world's population lived in extreme poverty. Today that number is just over 8%.

The US, with less than 1% of its national budget, has led the donor community in leveraging some \$230 billion in Official Development Assistance annually. That burden sharing has in turn has produced \$1.3 trillion in Foreign Direct Investment (source: OECD/DAC statistics).

US leadership in the foreign aid field has contributed to exponential global growth. But with the world growing at 70 million people a year, we cannot afford to get off this tread mill of success. Peace, prosperity and our national security are at stake.

Another serious consequence of the dismantling of our foreign aid programs is the termination of democracy programs. These programs respond to the human need for freedom, a need for democratic institutions that give the people a voice and make governments accountable.

There are many forms of democracy, but they all are characterized by the rule of law, an independent judiciary, active political parties and representative government legitimized by free and fair elections. As was envisioned by President Ronald Reagan in his famous Westminster speech, democracies have an obligation to support other democracies, especially those that are emerging from authoritarianism or civil war.

The programs supported by USAID and the National Endowment for Democracy convey American values and offer support to courageous small “d” democrats around the world. The termination of these programs leaves these people exposed to the authoritarian forces that want to shut them down and thwart their aspirations.

Giving up this American expression of our international obligations is conceding the field to our adversaries. China in particular has to be celebrating as we leave the playing field. Their Belt and Road initiative is designed to pull poor nations into their orbit. They levy no democratic or human rights requirements. They provide loans that tie developing countries into financial obligations to mother China.

The other responsibility of USAID is to respond to international disasters, natural and manmade. Last year alone USAID provided relief services in 77 different disasters. With climate change impacting the globe’s weather we can expect even more traumatic events. The US has been a leader in this field as well and, once again, our absence will cost lives.

Finally, this committee will no doubt hear a lot of stories about strange sounding foreign aid programs. Be wary of these stories. Most are simply not true. The Russian and Chinese governments have been spreading lies about USAID’s work for many years. Their objective is to create dissent because they want USAID off the playing field.

You may even hear that USAID has been used as cover for operations of our intelligence agencies to achieve a particular political goal, like regime change. I can personally attest that such conspiracy theories are false.

As Administrator of USAID I signed an agreement with the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency that USAID and its employees would never be used for cover in

an intelligence operation. It was my understanding that that type of agreement was a traditional requirement.

Other stories are about projects that were not USAID's. They may have been initiated by the State Department to address a particular human rights issue.

Some of these stories may be accurate up to a point, but in the telling they are being described out of context and mimicked to sound silly.

Every Administration has the right – even the responsibility—to assure that the programs of USAID reflect the general philosophy of the elected President. Projects can be reformulated, certain descriptive language can be changed and new programs can be introduced. But these changes take place within an overall framework of legislation approved by Congress.

No Administration has the legal right to eliminate programs earmarked by Congress, or to eliminate an agency of government created by Congress.

Democratic and Republican Administrations and bipartisan coalitions in this Congress have supported our foreign aid programs for over 60 years. Congressional committees have conducted oversight of USAID and your General Accountability Office has reviewed and audited its programs. Inspectors General have occasionally exposed waste and fraud, and remedial action has been taken. Reforms have been made and endorsed by OMB and Congress.

Further reforms may well be required. My experience with reform is that it is best undertaken with the professionals that understand the mission. What is happening now is not reform; it is destructive and counterproductive.

If USAID “undermined US interests” as is alleged by the title of this hearing, it seems to me that Presidents, Congresses, and both political parties, have been hoodwinked for decades. Yet, the record contradicts that emphatically. Bipartisan majorities have supported USAID and its budgets since the Agency was created in 1961.

There is very good reason for that support. USAID has been the premier development agency in the world. It has served the American people well by reflecting their generosity and investing in the prevention of threats to their interests. It is the vital third leg of American national security. We would eliminate it at our own peril.