

The U.S. Foreign Aid Complex: Missionaries of Nihilism

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

Instead of recruiting from radicalized elite institutions, we must draw aid talent from experienced volunteers working overseas on behalf of scores of churches.

We must also recruit from the pool of graduates from traditional institutions of higher learning that believe in the American project.

By cutting out woke and expensive middlemen and recruiting from Middle America, we can restore foreign aid as an effective tool of national security.

One would expect a national uproar to greet the sudden dismantling of a \$40 billion federal agency. That didn't happen. Instead, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the U.S. government's conduit to send billions of dollars in foreign aid, would spark a national outcry for its waste, fraud, and radical progressive overreach.

On his first day in office, President Donald Trump issued an executive order freezing all foreign aid spending until the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) could conduct a full review of these programs.¹ The discovery of what USAID had been funding the previous four years caused the President to blast the agency as “run by radical lunatics.”² Secretary of State Marco Rubio accused it of “rank insubordination.”³ Thousands of employees at USAID and the U.S. Department of State were then let go.

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During a February hearing entitled *The USAID Betrayal*,⁴ Congress exposed the ideological rot underpinning our foreign aid programs, from funding transgenderism in Muslim Bangladesh, atheism in Hindu Nepal, illegal abortions in traditional Mozambique, and the distribution of condoms in Taliban-run Afghanistan to global civil society initiatives inspired by the social movement theories of an Italian Marxist.

We also learned about the billions of dollars in profits made by the aid industry and their outrageous overhead charges that can exceed 50 percent of an award.⁵ We learned about the systematic political and religious discrimination that would exclude conservatives while powerful foreign aid lobbies blamed global poverty on “white supremacy.”⁶ We learned about the large-scale theft of billions of dollars of humanitarian aid diverted by international organizations to terrorists in Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria, and Gaza.⁷ And we learned about systematic state theft of U.S. food and medicines in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Zambia.⁸

The American people predictably soured on continuing to disburse tens of billions of dollars annually on foreign aid initiatives they believed were promoting American interests and expressing American generosity but were, in fact, doing the opposite.

Eight months after the President’s aid freeze, foreign aid continues to be a high-profile issue, taking center stage in the current historic fight between our executive and legislative branches over the constitutionality of rescissions—whether the President of the United States has the unilateral authority not to spend funds previously approved by Congress.

So how did a once marginal federal agency gain such notoriety? How did what had started as an effective counter-Communism tool turn into a financial bonanza for global radicals?

Background

USAID was created in 1961 to counter Soviet Union support for Marxist–Leninist insurgencies out to seize power in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. U.S. government-led humanitarian responses to natural disasters, epidemics, famines, and grueling poverty were America’s way of combatting Communism’s appeal. Later, foreign aid would cement the building blocks of democratic capitalism in former Soviet vassal states in Eastern Europe and successfully integrate them into NATO as trusted allies.

The cost of foreign aid has always been justified for national security reasons, but how we defined our national interests was deeply rooted in a Judeo–Christian ethic of “Love thy neighbor.” It saw saving lives, alleviating

poverty, and promoting freedom as inextricably linked to our core interests as a free and prosperous nation. Much of what the U.S. government was doing seamlessly reflected what was being done for decades by our community of churches, missionaries, religious orders, and lay volunteers in charitable endeavors all over the world.

The Turning Point

The multiculturalism that emerged during the 1990s infected our universities, media, culture, and corporations and sought to denigrate the Judeo-Christian foundation of the American project. It poisoned our government bureaucracies. Marxists had lost a ready host with the collapse of the Soviet Empire only to find fertile refuge in elite institutions in the United States.

At home, Americans would vigorously fight back against this assault on our national values, as did Hillsdale College, The Heritage Foundation, and hundreds of other conservative organizations. The ideological contamination of foreign aid, however, went mostly unnoticed as the entire foreign aid apparatus, including major faith-based charities that should have raised the red flag, fell under progressive control.⁹ They too would genuflect before the new gods.

The corruption of foreign aid as a global platform began during the Clinton Administration. First Lady Hillary Clinton declared that “women’s rights are human rights” at the 1995 United Nations Conference on Women held in Beijing.¹⁰ Advancing sexual and reproductive so-called rights—abortion that is—was to become an “international human right.” Promoted by the United States, the world’s only superpower, it represented an unprecedented and bold salvo against what had been up to that time a consensus among non-Communist states that natural law defined the international liberal order and our role in it.

Meanwhile, under the rubric of strengthening civil society in post-Communist states, our embassies began financing former Communist regime elements whose past privileges allowed them to learn English, travel abroad, be educated in the West, and become comfortable in how to deal with us.¹¹ Genuine anti-Communist dissidents who had been denied such privileges were often ignored. Many of these compromised individuals would win coveted positions as senior staff inside our embassies. They secured additional support from the panoply of leftwing foundations, the Soros Foundation most notably.¹² They would come to dominate their civil society sector, the NGOs.¹³

From this Marxist morass would emerge a ubiquitous global network of anti-life, anti-family, anti-capitalist, anti-NATO, anti-Christian, and anti-American NGOs enjoying out-of-proportion political influence, all paid for by the U.S. taxpayer. Many of these same individuals would graduate from civil society jobs to political and government leadership roles in their own countries and appoint their candidates to multilateral organizations from the European Union to the United Nations. Afterwards, they would lead university centers and think tanks, ensuring ever greater influence by and financial flows to their ideological kin.

They and their progressive American benefactors effectively colonized the developing world and empowered new generations of radicals that today form the core of international hostility to conservatives, especially to conservative administrations in the United States. Ensnared in these international institutions, they now control global agendas on life, family, religion, politics, economics, education, and culture. They are the global authors of what does and does not constitute rights. They are recreating the world in their corrupt image.

Counter-Christian Evangelization

Eight years of the Obama Administration would see the progressive agenda sharply ramp up with climate, DEI,¹⁴ and transgender ideologies that infected every aspect of foreign aid, opening massive government financial spigots to the global Left. President Joe Biden accelerated the radicalization of aid through a series of executive orders mandating that all U.S. aid partners and recipients adopt and promote progressive extremism.¹⁵

For example, CARE International would declare that “gender is non-binary” and with \$50 million in U.S. government funding open a regional center in Costa Rica to advance “gender equity.”¹⁶ It was part of Vice-President Kamala Harris’s “root causes” strategy to stem illegal immigration into the United States.¹⁷ It had little to do with stemming migration and everything to do with global indoctrination. It was part of a larger political enterprise to misuse foreign aid as a global platform upon which to convert millions of people to the progressive cause.

Another example: The United Nations Children’s Fund, UNICEF, would seem to be a straightforward and innocuous organization helping children. Alas, it too got swallowed up in the progressive juggernaut. It launched a permanent commitment to intersectionality to “support LGBTQ children” with special attention to “queer youth.”¹⁸ UNICEF is illustrative of what ought to be noncontroversial global organizations that have been captured by the Left to evangelize progressive ideologies throughout developing countries.

Nowhere has this ideological and anti-Christian warfare—and it is warfare—been as aggressive as in our multibillion-dollar global health programs.¹⁹ U.S.-funded sexual education programs are teaching African fourth graders about “being born in the wrong body.” They describe gender as “socially constructed.” Sex manuals instruct children as young as 10 on watching pornography and—described in detail—performing various sexual acts.²⁰

Africans objected. An Archbishop in Tanzania accused the West of “sending us missionaries of evil.”²¹ The governments of Uganda and Ghana enacted legislation outlawing aggressive LGBTQ agendas imposed on them by western governments.²²

In 2023, 131 African lawmakers, religious leaders, and leading doctors and lawyers from 15 African countries publicly called on the U.S. Congress not to “violate our core beliefs concerning life, family, and religion.”²³ A Nigerian governor told USAID Administrator Samantha Power when she pressed him on LGBTQ issues, “we would rather starve than violate our Christian faith.” But that is the point: not only to violate their core beliefs, but to replace them by tying lifesaving aid to the acceptance of a new, counter-Christian belief system.

I saw this myself firsthand as Vice-President Mike Pence’s envoy to Iraq for counter-genocide programs. I was dispatched there to assist Christians and Yezidis who had faced ISIS brutality and were on the verge of being wiped out. One senior State Department official explained to me that it was against U.S. law and the Constitution to provide direct aid to Christian Churches. I asked him, “even if they are victims of genocide, targeted because they are Christians?” He answered “Yes.” That was of course hogwash, and so we proceeded to assist them as we did Yezidis, Muslims, and others persecuted for their religious faith. It is an issue that is personal to President Trump.

This incident demonstrates the raw anti-Christian bias that is deeply engrained within our bureaucracy as is the hostility toward promoting international religious freedom. Upon entering office, Secretary of State Antony Blinken publicly repudiated his predecessor’s emphasis on religious freedom, declaring that “there is no hierarchy that makes some rights more important than others.”²⁴ This was a deliberate shot against Christian conceptions of religious freedom. It set into motion a concerted Administration effort to set a new regulatory foundation against religious objections to this radical foreign aid agenda.

Upon taking office, the Biden Administration cancelled programs to support the return of Iraqi Christians to their homeland following ISIS’s

genocide campaign. A planned grant to Nigerian Christians to teach them international standards on documenting atrocities committed against them by Islamic jihadists was also canceled the afternoon of Biden's inauguration. The slaughter they dismissed as a consequence of "climate change."²⁵ In Kenya, a prominent pastor told me that soon after the 2020 election, a U.S. embassy official called him to inquire "what is all this Jesus stuff on your website?" He would never again be invited to U.S. embassy events. Given Christianity's opposition to the Left's anti-life and anti-family agenda, especially in Africa, Christianity is deemed the enemy of progress.

The Biden Administration's religious-like fervor in climate change politics became a debilitating driver of global poverty. It increased world hunger. The green agenda laser focused on freezing current and blocking future investment in the production of fossil fuels whose revenues could finance critical social services. It spiked global energy prices, hitting the poorest the hardest. For many African farmers, it made using natural gas-based fertilizers unaffordable. Crop yields tanked. Food shortages ensued. Food prices soared.

Fueling Radicalism at Home

For years, the U.S. foreign aid industry has charged high overhead rates. A U.S. government audit found that USAID could not account for overheard charges on \$142 billion in previous awards. The agency did not have a system in place to collect and analyze these charges.²⁶ The political significance of this money never leaving our shores has been substantial.

The political sociology of the foreign aid industry is staggeringly one-sided. Based on Federal Election Commission records, 98 percent of campaign contributions from this industry skew left. That included employees at the U.S. Department of State and USAID.²⁷ This political purging ought not be surprising given the pressures on those working in this field to conform to the progressive agenda with no room for disagreement, the discrimination in hiring and promotion, and the hostile work environment that people of faith have been forced to endure.

Career advancement was tied to the extent to which you could prove you were advancing DEI goals, especially if you were the wrong color or of the "wrong" sexual orientation. A former Chairman of the House of Representatives' Foreign Affairs Committee complained, "Now, foreign and civil service officers must pledge allegiance [to the DEI agenda] or else risk not being promoted."²⁸ You could not keep quiet: You had to publicly pray before the city gods!

This decades-long political cleansing provided the Left with thousands of highly educated, trained, and salaried foot soldiers, based mostly in Washington, DC, but also around the country at elite institutions. They dominate national political discourse on most foreign policy and foreign aid issues. They push the same woke ideas, amplified through and subsidized by taxpayer funding.

Take, for example, the National Endowment for Democracy, established during Ronald Reagan's presidency as a bipartisan nonprofit. NED has been the premier American organization tasked with promoting democracy overseas. It is funded entirely by the U.S. Congress. Lately, it has focused on combatting Russian and Chinese disinformation. However, it turned this mandate into a blatant partisan weapon to denounce opponents of progressive ideology.²⁹

Ahead of last year's national elections, NED's board members and affiliates publicly demonized President Donald Trump, equating him with Hitler, Stalin, and Mussolini.³⁰ Its network of paid experts published articles in major foreign policy magazines. They appeared frequently on television and on influential discussion panels to press forward the theme that President Trump and the Republican Party overall are fascists and autocrats "just like Russia's Vladimir Putin."³¹ This theme has been repeated thousands of times by the foreign aid complex. It is smear posing as intellectual discourse.

The global impact of this demonization campaign has harmed America's standing around the world. It has poisoned international media coverage of our national politics and negatively impacted the views of the rest of the world to the benefit of our adversaries.

Besides the undermining of America's global image, every conservative Administration must face organized political resistance that Secretary of State Marco Rubio rightly characterized as "rank insubordination."³² Through targeted leaks, political appointees during Trump 45 were often blindsided by media political hits, intimidating external efforts to seize work emails, and organized internal political campaigns demanding obedience to the progressive cause. For example, on the Monday after the George Floyd incident in late May 2020, 300 of 1,000 employees at USAID's \$8 billion Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance signed a letter demanding that the bureau publicly admit that America is based on "systemic racism."³³

Even President Biden proved too moderate for this radical fringe. Last year, 1,000 USAID employees sent the President a letter demanding that the U.S. government cease arming Israel over its war in Gaza against the terrorist Hamas regime.³⁴

Professor Mark Moyar of Hillsdale College has written a brilliant book on this deep-seated progressive resistance in his *Masters of Corruption* publication, which lays out in detail how federal bureaucrats sabotaged the Trump presidency.³⁵

The Future of Foreign Aid?

What, then, is the future of foreign aid? The Trump Administration has laid out two simple markers: foreign aid must align with our interests and values.

To do so requires a change in the industry's political sociology. No reforms of an institution can work if its personnel remain radicalized. The Trump Administration's dismantling of USAID, deep cuts to foreign aid spending and staff, and defunding U.N. agencies are a good start, but it is not enough as we will continue to spend billions more on future foreign aid. To change the sector's political sociology, we must circumvent the foreign aid blob of contractors, U.N. agencies, and international NGOs—the source of radical ideas, but also of expensive overhead rates.

We can work directly with local organizations overseas who already do most of the work as subcontractors to global elites, especially the churches that boast powerful networks of hospitals, schools, and other important social institutions. Locking in partnerships with this naturally conservative body will forge a bulwark against future attempts by the U.S. to impose radical social experiments on poor countries.

We must no longer recruit aid officials and diplomats from radicalized elite institutions but draw new talent from the experienced pool of volunteers working overseas on behalf of scores of churches. We must also draw from the pool of graduates from traditional institutions of higher learning, such as Hillsdale College, that believe in the American project. By cutting out woke and expensive middlemen and recruiting from Middle America, we can drain this radical swamp and restore foreign aid as an effective tool of national security.

To conclude, we all know that international welfare does not generate wealth, whether at home or abroad. Increased private investment and international trade do, just as they have done in many other countries, including our own.

To win the next global challenge posed by yet another Communist giant, we must transition away from traditional grant-based aid approaches that entrench poverty and enrich the Left. We must mobilize our massive private-sector capital markets to generate wealth in developing countries

as the most effective poverty reduction program. Empowering America's entrepreneurial class, who are willing to spend their own money to promote American interests abroad, is preferable to empowering bureaucrats who are happy to spend *our* money.

If we succeed, we will once again defeat Marxism not only abroad, but at home as well.

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