

The richest man on the planet attacks the poorest

by Bill Press

dy agrees with: There's a lot of wasteful spending, and too many programs that no longer serve any purpose kept needlessly alive. Pledging to "cut the fat" out of government spending is a good idea for any administration, and some have actually done so.

But that in no way justifies Elon Musk's shutting down the United States Agency for International Development — which President Trump said has his "100 percent support." It's one of the most short-sighted, most dangerous and most stupid decisions made by any modern president — and one Donald Trump will soon regret, especially as Russia and China step in with their own humanitarian programs.

USAID was created by President John F. Kennedy in 1961, in the middle of the Cold War, to provide a humane presence, not a military presence, for the United States throughout the world. Since then, under both Republican and Democratic presidents, it has saved millions of lives, providing food, health care, housing and security for the poorest people in the poorest countries on the planet.

Among other successes, USAID is credited with preventing a 2014 Ebola outbreak in Guinea. The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, George W. Bush's anti-HIV/AIDS program administered largely through USAID, is hailed for saving 26 million lives so far. Until last weekend, USAID was battling a new malaria outbreak in Uganda.

Remarkably, USAID provided that "smiling face" for America around the world, made so many friends for America, and saved so many lives at a cost of roughly \$40 billion a year, less than 1 percent of the federal budget. We taxpayers got more bang for our buck from USAID than any other government program. But now, suddenly, all of that good work and good will are gone.

Who did Donald Trump talk to before authorizing the dismantling of USAID? Not to his wife. In 2018, on her first solo international trip, then-first lady Melania Trump traveled to Africa to highlight what she deemed "successful" USAID projects. "We care, and we want to show the world that we care, and I've partnered and am working with USAID," she told ABC News. "When people have opportunities and societies are freer and more educated, we are stronger as the United States."

He obviously didn't talk to his daughter, either. In 2018, Ivanka Trump embarked on her own mission to Africa, where she met with women cocoa farmers who had just received a \$2 million grant from USAID. One year later, then-President Trump launched a new \$50 million "Women's Global Development and Prosperity," aimed at empowering women in the developing world — a project led by his daughter and senior advisor Ivanka. "There's a reason today, the president signed WGDP as a national security presidential memorandum," she told reporters, "It is in our domestic security interests to empower women."

Trump didn't talk to former Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), and other hawkish Republican senators who have been strong supporters of USAID and, as one agency official told Politico's Jonathan Martin, consistently asked them: "Why aren't you doing more? More, more, more, more."

And, clearly, Trump didn't talk to his new secretary of State. For more than a decade as senator, Marco Rubio was one of the chief advocates for foreign aid in general, and USAID in particular. "We don't have to give foreign aid," he said in February 2013. "We do so because it furthers our national interest. That's why we give foreign aid."

In targeting USAID, Trump talked only to his new best friend, the un-elected Government-Cut Czar Elon Musk, who called USAID a "criminal organization" and bragged about feeding it into the "wood chipper." How ironic that Trump would take such advice from a man who himself profits from federal government hand-outs.

According to USASpending.gov, SpaceX and its subsidiary Starlink, companies that Musk owns, have received a total of \$3.3 billion in federal grants in just the past 12 months. Tesla has received \$41.9 million in federal contracts since 2008. Both of Musk's companies were hatched with federal grants.

Of course, there are lots of places to look for wasteful government spending. Why not start with the Pentagon? Or congressional junkets? Or the \$13 million price tag for holding a prisoner at Guantanamo Bay? Instead, Musk and Trump decided to start out with one of the smallest government agencies, which does the most good around the world for the least amount of money. But that's what bullies do.

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