



GOATS AND SODA

Why does Musk want USAID 'to die'? And why did its website disappear?

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By
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A USAID officer watches as a U.S. military cargo plane taxis to a stop at Kathmandu's international airport in the wake of the 2015 earthquake. The agency funds projects that aim to alleviate poverty and disease and meet humanitarian needs around the world.

Roberto Schmidt/AFP via Getty Images/AFP

It's been a tumultuous weekend for USAID — the U.S. Agency for International Development. On Saturday sometime after 3 a.m., its website went down, [according](#) to the Internet Archive, a nonprofit group that tracks web pages.

Some browsers display the error message: "This site can't be reached. Check if there is a typo in www.usaid.gov."

The agency's [account](#) on X (formerly Twitter) has also been deleted.

Early Monday morning, Elon Musk, speaking during a live "Space" conversation on X, said his Department of Government Efficiency is in the process of "shutting down USAID."

On Sunday, [Musk wrote on X](#) that USAID is a "criminal organization."

"It needs to die," he wrote. AP reported that workers at the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) were denied access to confidential documents at USAID on Saturday and that the Trump Administration subsequently put on leave the two USAID security officials who refused to grant access.

The website vanishes

Musk made his early Monday comments during a panel discussion he shared with Sen. Joni Ernst, R-Iowa, who has long tried to push for more oversight of USAID; Vivek Ramaswamy; and Sen. Mike Lee, R-Utah. Musk said he had the support of President Trump.

"None of this could be done without the full support of the president, you know. And with regard to the USAID stuff, I went, went over it with him, you know, in detail, and he agreed with that we should, we should shut it down," he said.

Online information about USAID, which is responsible for funding aid projects around the world and managed more than \$40 billion in federal spending in 2023, is available at a new page that is part of the State Department's website. That page was captured for the first time on Jan. 27, [according](#) to the Internet Archive.

There are seven items in this USAID section — a drastic reduction of the reports and information on the original USAID.gov website, which covered the wide range of the agency's portfolio, from humanitarian assistance and global health to education and conflict prevention.

The first item that appears on the State web page is a press release: "Implementing the President's Executive Order on Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid."

President Trump temporarily halted foreign assistance in that order on the first day of his presidency, writing that foreign aid serves to "destabilize world peace."

The State Department and USAID did not respond to NPR's media inquiries about the website termination and the future of the agency.

What's the fate of USAID?

The move appears amid questions about the fate of the aid agency, with concerns in the aid community that USAID may be folded into the State Department or eliminated altogether.

The deletion of the website and social media accounts alongside significant layoffs and the near-total suspension of work is an effort to dismantle USAID entirely, Jeremy Konyndyk told NPR. Konyndyk led disaster relief under Obama and the COVID and mpox responses under Biden at USAID. He's currently president of the aid group Refugees International.

"They're trying to eliminate the agency," Konyndyk said.

"They have announced no plan and given no rationale — they're just taking everything down," Konyndyk said. "They're trying to do it behind the scenes rather than openly," he said, so they don't have to "defend what they're doing" in announcements to the public.

The consequences of a diminished or erased USAID would be dire, Konyndyk said, noting that one key component of its programs is keeping outbreaks and epidemics from reaching U.S. shores.

USAID is "enduring an unlawful shutdown, purge, and dismantling," wrote Dr. Atul Gawande, former assistant administrator for global health at USAID, in a [post](#) on Bluesky on Sunday.

The dissolution would extend beyond "the unlawful destruction of USAID's life-saving work," Gawande told NPR. "USAID has become the place where the administration is demonstrating and developing its playbook for eviscerating other targeted agencies."

The web shutdown comes in the wake of both the stop work order and the furloughing or laying off of hundreds of USAID employees. In his first two weeks in office, the Trump administration placed senior leadership at USAID on leave and laid off or furloughed more than 400 contractors in the agency's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance and also laid off hundreds more in its Global Health Bureau.

Democratic lawmakers in Congress are decrying these actions. The dissolution of USAID would be "illegal and against our national interests," Sen. Chuck Schumer posted on [Bluesky](#) Friday evening.

Sen. Chris Murphy said in a [post](#) on X on Saturday that the "total destruction" of USAID was "happening as we speak" and would be "cataclysmic."

A question of legality

The question of the legality of any attempt to change the status of USAID is connected to its origins. The agency was created in 1961 when President John F. Kennedy signed an executive order after Congress passed the Foreign Assistance Act, which mandated the creation of an independent agency to focus on development separate from politics and the military. The agency was formally established by Congress as an independent agency in 1998.

That means "it cannot just be undone, at this point, by an executive order," Konyndyk said. "To actually disestablish the agency and dissolve it into the State Department will take an act of Congress."

In the past, USAID has enjoyed bipartisan support, including from lawmakers like Sen. Lindsey Graham and Sen. Mitch McConnell, he noted.

[Melody Schreiber](#) is a journalist and editor of What We Didn't Expect: Personal Stories About Premature Birth.

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