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Trump actions could change the presidency

Story by Scott Pelley • 1d • 6 min read



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President Trump, back in the White House for less than a month, has closed agencies, frozen spending that Congress mandated by law, and challenged the breadth of [rights guaranteed](#) by the Constitution.

Lower courts are blocking, at least temporarily, many of the president's priorities but nothing has yet risen to the Supreme Court, where these [battles over presidential power](#) could be historic.

Presidents often push limits, and voters in this last election wanted change. but the scope and speed of Mr. Trump's reach for power



Feedback

change, but the scope and speed of Mr. Trump's reach for power may be unprecedented.

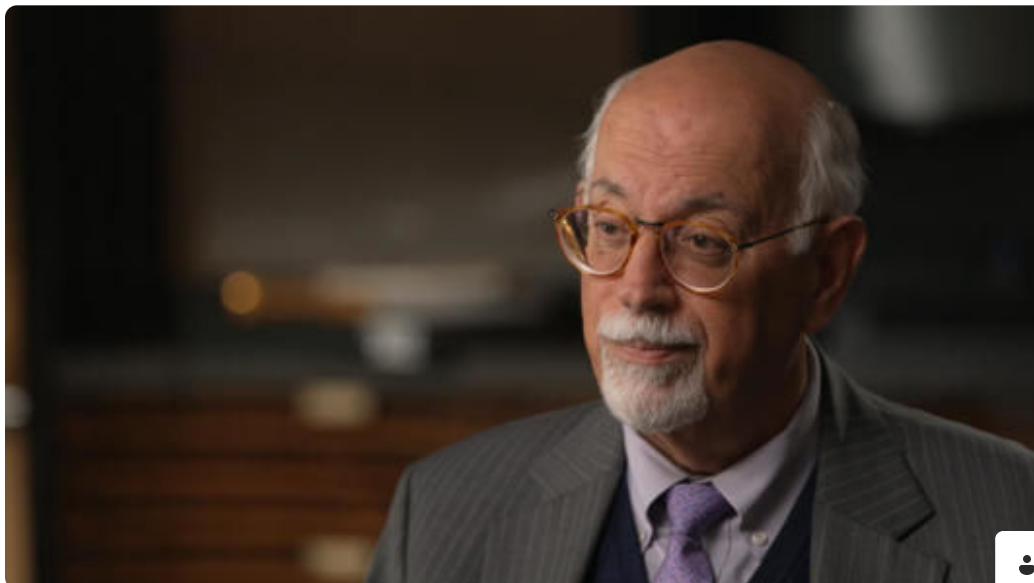
It's raising concerns on both sides of the political aisle, including with conservative Republican Andrew Natsios, former head of the U.S. Agency for International Development. [USAID is one of the agencies](#) being targeted by the Trump administration, working alongside Elon Musk's DOGE, or Department of Government Efficiency. Natsios has concerns about DOGE.

"I think we're creating a system that violates the separation of powers and the checks and balances that are intended in the Constitution," he said.


Trump and USAID

USAID [was dismantled](#) on Mr. Trump's order, even though it was mandated by Congress and its funding was required by law. Trump said he has the authority to shut down an independent agency like USAID. Natsios, who was USAID administrator in the George W. Bush White House, said the president is wrong.

"He cannot rescind federal law by executive order. And A.I.D. is a statutory agency," Natsios said. "The Foreign Assistance Act, I believe, is three- or four-hundred-pages long. You can't rescind that without an act of the Congress. And the Congress has not acted."



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 Andrew Natsios / Credit: 60 Minutes

More than 8,000 employees from the 63-year-old agency were sent home by the Trump administration. Kristina Drye was fired during the chaotic shutdown of the agency.

"People are really scared," Drye said. "I think that, you know, 12 days ago, people knew where their next paycheck was coming from. They knew how they were gonna pay for their kids' daycare, their medical bills. And then, all gone overnight."

Among those told to leave were employees who had decades of public service across presidential administrations, Drye said. To the best of her knowledge, employees received an email about what was happening. Some were escorted out.

Mr. Trump, a long time critic of foreign aid, has said USAID is a "radical" partisan agency where "billions of dollars have been stolen." He's made allegations of fraud against USAID.

"It's utter nonsense. The most accountable aid agency in the world is USAID. I've written widely on this subject," Natsios said. "Forty percent of the staff are accountants and lawyers and people trying to make sure no money is stolen. We've created systems to monitor that. What they did was, they went back 20 years to try to find things, if you have to go back 20 years to find abuse, that means there isn't that much abuse."

USAID spent about \$38 billion on foreign assistance in 2023, less than 1% of the federal budget. Natsios told 60 Minutes there is waste and occasional fraud, like in any big agency, but he said the money is watched by the Office of Management and Budget, the State Department Office of Foreign Assistance and congressional oversight committees.

"No one caught all these horrible abuses? That's just not believable," he said.

Where DOGE and Elon Musk come in

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WHERE DOGE AND ELON MUSK COME IN

Instead of asking Congress to evaluate USAID and other agencies, Mr. Trump handed the budget ax [to billionaire Elon Musk](#), who is racing through the government cutting jobs and budgets with his own, newly-created agency DOGE.

DOGE was authorized by the president and, beginning in January, DOGE engineers rapidly gained wide access to the computer networks of USAID and [the U.S. Treasury](#). Long-time officials at both agencies who pushed back were put on leave. Now, DOGE has accessed at least 18 other agencies.



Elon Musk listens as U.S. President Donald Trump speaks in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington, DC, on Feb. 11, 2025. / Credit: JIM WATSON/AFP via Getty Images

Democratic Sen. Chris Coons, a member of the Senate committees on Appropriations and Foreign Relations, says the dismantling of USAID was a "dress rehearsal."

"Next up is the [Department of Education](#). They're going to take it down next," he said. "They're already talking about getting into and going after the Department of Labor, the Veterans Administration, the Department of Defense, the Social Security Administration. Why?"

Coons said he doesn't have a sense of what DOGE is doing

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Coons said he doesn't have a sense of what DOGE is doing.

"I think DOGE is an unelected, unofficial, small group of young tech bros who are charging into different federal agencies, getting into their core computer systems, doing things with them that, at least I don't know the full details of, copying and downloading reams of data," Coons said.

Coons is alarmed that DOGE has access to government information.

"Our Social Security information, our Medicare, Medicaid, Veterans Benefit payments, things that matter to us. Obviously, our tax filings," he said. "And if they have access to it and control it, they can change it."

60 Minutes learned that DOGE demanded and received access to USAID's unclassified systems, including all financial and personnel data.

One USAID employee told 60 Minutes that a DOGE engineer gave himself access to classified spaces in the building. That USAID employee said they didn't know if the DOGE engineer entered those spaces, but the employee said, "that's the problem with all of this. We don't know what has been compromised."

Neither [Musk](#) nor DOGE responded to requests for an interview. Musk has called USAID a "criminal organization" and its employees "worms." In a post, he said he'd been feeding the agency to "the woodchipper." But the world's richest man has, so far, stopped U.S. aid to the world's poorest families. Musk spent nearly \$250 million to help get Mr. Trump and other Republicans elected. He collects billions in taxpayer dollars for his SpaceX rockets.

Will the traditions of Washington be upheld?

Natsios, a conservative Republican, said he's speaking out, in part, because he is not hearing public appeals to reason from fellow Republicans in Washington

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Republicans in Washington.

"The reason they're not saying anything, I think they're afraid," Natsios said. "Musk has said that he would spend \$100 million in primaries on anybody who opposed the president on anything. So, I think there's a lot of fear in the city right now."

In the [Oval Office with Musk, Mr. Trump](#) said, "I always abide by the courts and then I'll have to appeal it."

But he also said this: "We want to weed out the corruption, and it seems hard to believe that a judge could say we don't want you to do that. So, maybe we have to look at the judges because that's a very serious — I think it's a very serious violation."

Stephen Vladeck, a professor of constitutional law at the Georgetown University Law Center, said Mr. Trump's allegations of fraud do not negate statutes enacted by Congress. Vladeck says claims of fraud at USAID may be a cover up for a consolidation of power.



 Stephen Vladeck / Credit: 60 Minutes

"Fraud provides a plausible sounding reason for running over what had been historical constraints, whether they were statutes or norms, limiting the president's ability to centralize power," Vladeck said. "The end game here seems to be controlling every single apparatus of the federal government directly out of the White House. And that's just never been how we've understood executive power."

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Vladeck says a system of checks and balances is what the Founding Fathers of the United States intended.

"The idea is that we want a zealous executive. We want a zealous Congress. We want a zealous court, because if they push at each other, that's how we'll find the limits. That's how we'll find healthy checks and balances," he said. "But I think we can no longer dispute that Congress, which is supposed to be providing rigorous oversight of the executive branch, which is supposed to be reigning in abuses by the executive branch, by the courts too, has largely stopped doing any of that."

Both Vladeck and Natsios say a constitutional crisis may result if the Trump administration defies a ruling by the Supreme Court.

"If it gets to the Supreme Court and the Supreme Court rules against the administration on something and they refuse to enforce it, then we will have a constitutional crisis," Natsios said.

A president defying the Supreme Court would be an unprecedented move. What happens after that, Natsios says, "No one knows."

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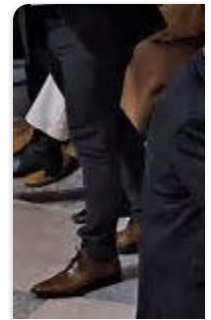


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How Trump could trigger the third constitutional presidency

Opinion by Allen Sumrall • 10h • 5 min read

Less than a month into [the second Trump presidency](#), we may already be witnessing a fundamental remaking of the constitutional presidency. President Donald Trump's primary agenda in his first few weeks has been to use executive orders and memos to [dismantle the executive branch](#) he was elected to control. He has frozen congressionally allocated funds [in violation of federal law](#) and fired thousands of federal employees who perform important work, to name just a few actions. As these demonstrate, Trump brings with him a style of leadership that risks transforming the entire constitutional structure, and the president's role in it.

Feedback

The presidency has gone through several less extent developments

The presidency has gone through several important developments throughout its history, and now we may be witnessing the next. This development could push our constitutional order increasingly far from a collaborative, interbranch democracy and toward a structure that expects a strong and slapdash presidency. Meaning, the next constitutional presidency may be antithetical to the Constitution itself.

In 1987, political scientist Jeffrey Tulis published "[The Rhetorical Presidency](#)," uncovering in his research a fundamental transformation in the constitutional presidency in the early 20th century. Where 19th-century presidents were typically more muted officeholders who understood their role as a policymaker to be a complement to Congress, early 20th-century presidents like Teddy Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Delano Roosevelt began to engage more with the public. Tulis refers to this development — the birth of the rhetorical presidency — as the second constitutional presidency. The new character of presidential leadership has changed the office

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