

Anti-USAID Video Shared by Musk Marks Russian Propaganda Triumph

Published Feb 07, 2025 at 12:59 PM EST

By **Jordan King**
US News Reporter

Newsweek Is A Trust Project Member

FOLLOW

News Article |



An anti-United States Agency for International Development (USAID) video shared by [Elon Musk](#) and [Donald Trump](#) Jr. is a triumph for the Kremlin's pro-Russian disinformation network Matryoshka.

The Bot Blocker project, an X account that "exposes troll farms," is one of several sources reporting that there are several anti-USAID videos being shared on social media that were created by Matryoshka bots.

Newsweek has contacted X, formerly [Twitter](#), which is owned by Musk, as well as representatives for Trump Jr. and the Russian Foreign Ministry via email for comment.

Why It Matters

President Donald Trump's administration announced on Tuesday that nearly all USAID workers would be [withdrawn from the field](#).

The U.S. pays more in foreign aid than any other country, and dismantling USAID emerged as a priority for the president in the early days of his second term.

Critics view USAID as a misuse of taxpayer dollars, arguing that the funds should be spent at home to tackle priorities such as border security, but disinformation about what USAID actually spends taxpayer dollars on is rife.

What To Know


One of the videos reportedly made by Matryoshka said that USAID had paid for American celebrities' trips to Ukraine to boost Ukrainian President [Volodymyr Zelensky](#)'s popularity among Americans.

Musk and Trump Jr. shared the video reposted by the account I Meme Therefore I Am (@ImMeme0), with Trump Jr. captioning it: "USA ID may be the biggest scam ever perpetrated on the American people under the guise of doing good."

Musk reposted it without a caption to his 216.4 million followers, but now appears to have deleted it, according to multiple screengrabs, including one shared by AFP Fact Check.

Ben Stiller, one of the actors named in the video, denied that his trip to Ukraine was funded by USAID, [writing](#) on X: "These are lies coming from Russian media. I completely self-funded my humanitarian trip to Ukraine. There was no funding from USAID and certainly no payment of any kind. 100 percent false."

there was no funding from USAID and certainly no payment of any kind. 100 percent false.

 These are lies coming from Russian media. I completely self-funded my humanitarian trip to Ukraine. There was no funding from USAID and certainly no payment of any kind.

100 percent false. <https://t.co/EFBPmrFQJ6>


— Ben Stiller (@BenStiller) February 5, 2025

The 26-second clip, which alleges that other celebrities, including Angelina Jolie, were sent by USAID to Ukraine, is designed to look like a report from E! News, with a version of the outlet's logo in the bottom right-hand corner.

But the video "is not authentic and did not originate from E! News," a spokesperson told AFP.

Ukraine has also denied the reports, with Andriy Yermak, head of the office of the president of Ukraine, calling it "complete nonsense."

Bot Blocker reported that Matryoshka is behind the video and the [BBC](#) reported that the video has "several hallmarks of a Russian disinformation campaign" which BBC Verify has previously investigated.

 **2/** The fake video RTed by Elon and Trump Jr is straightfwd:

USAID allegedly paid for celebrity visits to Ukraine aimed to facilitate its fundraising from the West:

\$20M to Angelina Jolie

\$5M to Sean Penn

\$1.5M to Jean-Claude Van Damm

\$8M to Orlando Bloom

\$4M to Ben Stiller pic.twitter.com/ZdVSultpTi

— bot blocker | блокировщик ботов (@antibot4navalny) February 6, 2025

The campaign reportedly has a history of posting videos that appear to be from well-known media outlets, such as E! News.

Darren Linvill, co-director of Clemson University's Media Forensics Hub, posted that the video has "every indication of being a Russian fabricated video planted and spread using familiar methods."

 Earlier today both [@elonmusk](#) and [@DonaldJTrumpJr](#)

E shared a post and video claiming USAID sponsored expensive celebrity visits to Ukraine. This has every indication of being a Russian fabricated video planted and spread using familiar methods. 1/5 pic.twitter.com/ZH0osHu9rl

— Darren Linvill (@DarrenLinvill) February 6, 2025

What People Are Saying

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt told reporters: "I don't know about you. But as an American taxpayer, I don't want my dollars going toward this crap. And I know the American people don't either. And that's exactly what Elon Musk has been tasked by President Trump to do. To get the fraud, waste and abuse out of the federal government."

Andriy Yermak, head of the office of the president of Ukraine, posted on X: "Of course, the widespread fake claiming that Angelina Jolie, Sean Penn, Jean-Claude Van Damme, Orlando Bloom, and Ben Stiller allegedly received payments from USAID ranging from \$4 to \$20 million for their trips to Ukraine is complete nonsense."

Of course, the widespread fake claiming that Angelina Jolie, Sean Penn, Jean-Claude Van Damme, Orlando Bloom, and Ben Stiller allegedly received payments from USAID ranging from \$4 to \$20 million for their trips to Ukraine is complete nonsense. pic.twitter.com/QP3BVdCMUX

— Andriy Yermak (@AndriyYermak) February 6, 2025

What Happens Next

Decisions about which USAID programs are being cut are expected to be made within 90 days of January 20. Reimbursement for approved programs will resume at the end of the review period, but many programs are expected to be halted.





Elon Musk speaks at an inauguration event for President Donald Trump in Washington on January 20, 2025. **AP**



Fairness Meter

Newsweek Is Committed To Journalism That's Factual And Fair.
Hold Us Accountable And Submit Your Rating Of This Article On The Meter.

[Request Reprint & Licensing](#) [Submit Correction](#)

[View Editorial & AI Guidelines](#)

ADVERTISEMENT

Top Stories

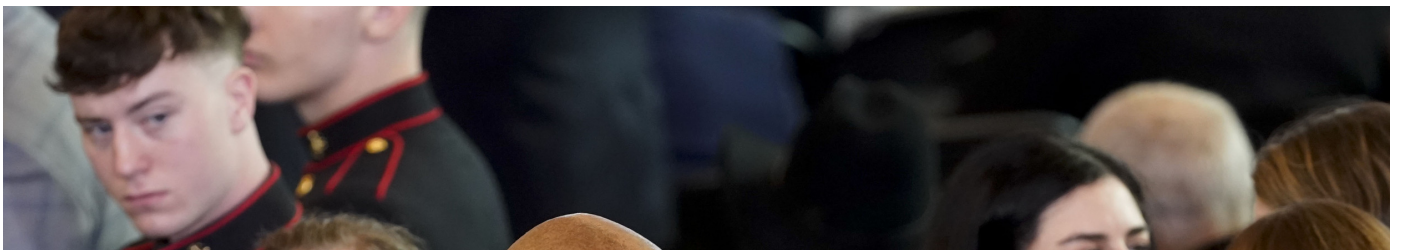




Donald Trump Declines to Endorse JD Vance as 2028 Republican 'Successor'



'Big Brains' Behind 'Big Balls': Legal Firebrands Powering Musk's DOGE





Eric Adams Gets Lifeline from Donald Trump's DOJ



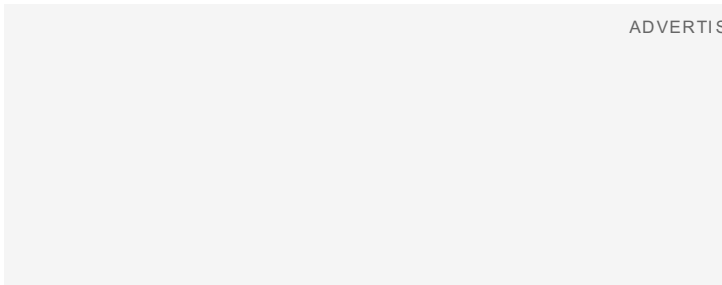
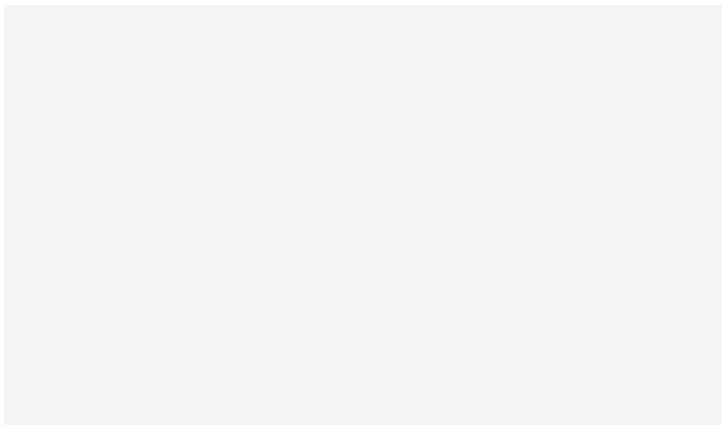
Trump: Palestinians Won't Have Right to Gaza Return Under 'Ownership' Plan

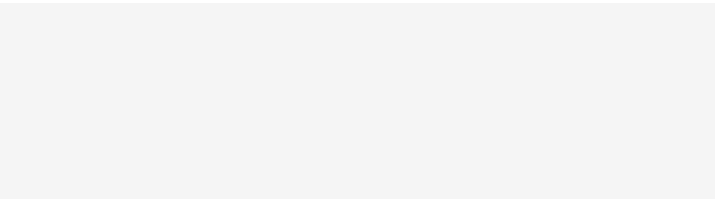
About the writer

Jordan King

FOLLOW

Jordan King is a Newsweek reporter based in London, U.K. Her focus is on human interest-stories in Africa and the ... [read more](#)





THE DEBATE

Trump's Orders on Gender Put Science Back in the Driver's Seat | Opinion

By J. Michael Bailey

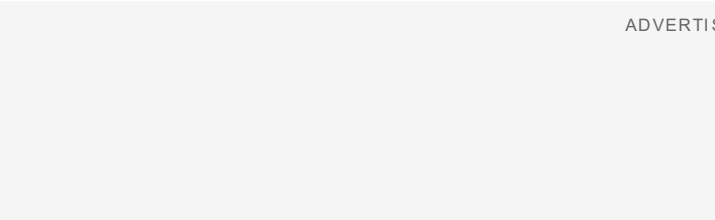


VS



As Promised, Trump's Persecution of LGBTQ+ People Is Underway | Opinion

By Kevin Bolling



ADVERTISEMENT

U.S. World Science Health Rankings Opinion Entertainment Fact Check My Turn Education Events Sports Podcasts Better Planet Better Workplaces Vault Mightier Autos Newsletters Unconventional Vantage Experts Voices

- ☐ Trending
- Israel at War Vladimir Putin Russia-Ukraine War Donald Trump
- ☐ Subscriptions

Digital+ Monthly (Ad Free Trial) \$1.00 Digital+ Yearly \$49.00 Premium Monthly \$9.99 Premium Yearly \$99

- Newsletters in your inbox See all
- ☐ The Bulletin (Daily) See Sample
- ☐ The Gist of It (Daily)
- ☐ Geoscape (Twice a Week)
- ☐ The 1600 (Daily)
- ☐ Inside Trump Policy (Weekly)
- ☐ Sports Daily (Daily)
- ☐ The Josh Hammer Report (Weekly) See Sample
- ☐ For The Culture (Three Times a Week) See Sample
- ☐ Discoveries (3 Times a Week)
- ☐ Like & Subscribe (Daily)
- ☐ Breaking News (As it Breaks)
- ☐ The Debate (Twice a Week)
- ☐ Pawsitively (Daily)
- ☐ Better Planet (Weekly)
- ☐ Newsweek Pulse (2x3 Times a Month)

Email address

Sign up now

You can unsubscribe at any time. By signing up you are agreeing to our Terms of Service and Privacy Policy



- ☐ In The Magazine
- February 14 2025 Issue