

Mythologies About Musk

By Victor Davis Hanson

Here are some of the untruths told about Elon Musk and DOGE.

“Musk has no right to cut USAID.”

Elon Musk and his team are *not* cutting any federal programs.



They are auditors. They were given legal authority under a presidential executive order creating the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE).

Its mandate is to identify waste, abuse, fraud, and irrelevance in the federal budget at a time when the U.S. is \$37 trillion in debt.

The agency will expire on July 4, 2026.

Ultimately, Trump can propose program cuts, but Congress holds the authority to approve or reject them. He may or may not act on all, some, or none of the DOGE recommendations.

“No one elected Musk.”

Like hundreds of government officials, Musk was appointed by an elected president to run an agency that does not require Senate confirmation.

Musk is as legally legitimate as the national security advisor and his National Security Council, none of whom require Senate confirmation.

Does the left believe former national security advisor Jake Sullivan, who made decisions far more pivotal than Musk, had no authority to do so because he too was neither elected nor confirmed by the Senate?

“It is a dangerous precedent to give a private citizen billionaire like Musk so much power.”

In fact, Musk has far more legal authority than did FDR’s best friend Harry Hopkins. He moved into the White House and de facto set U.S. foreign assistance policies toward Stalin’s Russia.

Musk’s position is more akin to past captains of industry like Henry Ford, Henry Kaiser, and William Knudson appointed by FDR to run the wartime economy.

None of them were either elected or confirmed by the Senate. All of them helped to save a poorly armed US after the debacle of Pearl Harbor.

“Foreign aid is ending.”

Hardly.

Foreign aid, which in all its manifestations in various cabinets and agencies is reaching nearly \$80 billion per year, is *not* ending.

One of its distribution centers, USAID, may be vastly curtailed or bundled into the State Department. But the important bulk grants to allies like Israel or friends like Egypt or aid in times of famine relief and natural disasters to the needy abroad will remain. And these programs will be strengthened and saved precisely because they will be trimmed of skimmers and scammers.

“It is illegal to end USAID.”

USAID was created by an executive order in 1961 by then President John F. Kennedy in response to congressional legislation codifying foreign aid and allowing the president to execute the statute at his discretion.

Nearly four decades later, in 1998, Congress passed another law reifying Kennedy’s USAID as a formal agency but still within the executive branch.

But neither law mandates that Trump bundle all or even most foreign aid in USAID. He can disperse money as he sees fit throughout the cabinets. And he can keep whatever funds or programs he chooses under the aegis of USAID should he wish.

“Trump cannot impound any USAID money legislated by Congress.”

That legal question apparently depends on whose ox is gored.

Neither Congress nor the courts have ever, in blanket fashion, either approved and sustained a line-item presidential veto or outright banned any form of presidential impoundment.

But recently Joe Biden, as both vice president in 2016 and president in 2021, set a precedent that an administration most certainly can impound or delay congressionally passed funding as it pleases.

Infamously, Biden publicly bragged that on a trip to Ukraine, he had threatened that government by withholding \$1 billion in approved US foreign aid unless it immediately fired Biden enemy prosecutor Viktor Shokin.

That condition was never discussed in any congressional aid authorization (and was the sort of act the left would impeach Trump for in 2020).

More flagrantly in 2021, Biden abruptly and permanently stopped all construction on the border wall. And he impounded

those congressionally approved construction funds through a variety of gimmicks.

Biden, remember, without Congressional approval, gratuitously canceled student loan obligations, issued blanket loan amnesties, and promised to ignore or work around court prohibitions of his illegal acts.

“China will be delighted by USAID cuts.”

False. China will be likely upset by the Trump cuts.

Beijing finds its own concrete development projects far more effective than USAID imposing American cultural agendas abroad. Beijing likes self-destructive American aid like LGBTQ activism, transgender chauvinism, and anti-conservative American media.

Does anyone believe China was angry that the USAID created a vast gender studies program at the University of Kabul or had the U.S. embassy there advertise its pride activism, or itself snagged \$40 million to engineer deadly viruses?

So, China will be quite unhappy that organs like the New York Times and the BBC are having their USAID subsidies ended. After all, they, along with China, so often vilified their shared existential nemesis—Donald J. Trump.

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