



Daily Current Affairs



To The Point

by Dhananjay Gautam

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1 The Future of USAID: Global Implications and Potential Shutdown

Context: The **United States Agency for International Development (USAID)** faces an uncertain future as the **Trump administration** considers merging it with the **U.S. Department of State**. This move would involve **major funding cuts** and a possible **downsizing of USAID's workforce**, raising concerns about the future of **U.S. humanitarian aid** and its global impact.



What is USAID? Understanding Its Role and Importance

Origins and Mission:

Established in the **1960s** under the **Foreign Assistance Act of 1961**, USAID is legally mandated by **Congress** to oversee and administer **U.S. international aid programs**.

Key Areas of Focus:

Operating in **over 60 countries** with a workforce of nearly **10,000 personnel**, USAID plays a vital role in:

- **Food Security** – Provides famine relief and operates an advanced **food shortage prediction system**.
- **Healthcare** – Funds **vaccination programs**, **pandemic prevention**, and **global disease control efforts**.
- **Infrastructure & Development** – Supports **clean water initiatives**, **disaster relief**, and **economic growth programs**.
- **Humanitarian Assistance** – Aids war-affected regions such as **Ukraine** and **sub-Saharan Africa**.

USAID's Budget and Global Spending:

The **U.S. remains the world's largest donor**, allocating **\$68 billion** to international aid in 2023. USAID received the **largest share—\$40 billion**—most of which was directed toward **Asia, Africa, and Europe**, particularly **Ukraine**.

In comparison, **the U.K. and other global powers** spend significantly less on international aid, highlighting the **U.S.'s dominant role in global humanitarian efforts**.

Why is the Trump Administration Targeting USAID?

Criticism of Foreign Aid Spending:

- **Donald Trump** has long criticized **foreign aid**, claiming it **wastes U.S. taxpayer money**. He issued an **executive order pausing international spending** for 90 days, causing **multiple aid programs to be suspended**.
- **Public Opinion** – Polls show that many **American voters favor reducing foreign aid**, aligning with Trump's stance.
- **Elon Musk's Influence** – A key **Trump advisor**, Musk has **pushed for drastic spending cuts**, leading to tensions between USAID and the administration.

Consequences of the Spending Freeze:

- **Critical programs**, such as **medical aid and clean water initiatives**, faced immediate disruptions.
- **Security concerns** arose when reports suggested that **prison guards in Syria**, responsible for detaining **Islamic State militants**, nearly **abandoned their posts** due to funding shortages.



- **International humanitarian organizations** described the spending freeze as a **severe disruption** to global aid efforts.

Can the U.S. President Unilaterally Shut Down USAID?

Although the Trump administration is considering **dismantling USAID**, completely shutting it down would require congressional approval.

A **possible alternative** would be to **merge USAID with the State Department**, similar to how the **U.K. integrated its international aid department with the Foreign Office in 2020**. This restructuring would **limit USAID's independence** while keeping some aid functions intact.

What Would Be the Global Impact of USAID's Closure?

Humanitarian Consequences:

- **Critical aid programs**, such as **mine clearance**, **pandemic response**, and **prosthetic aid for war victims**, would be at risk.
- Millions of vulnerable populations **rely on USAID funding** for **healthcare**, **food security**, and **disaster relief**.

Foreign Policy Implications:

- Critics argue that **reducing U.S. foreign aid** would **weaken American global influence** and **harm diplomatic relationships**.
- Countries that depend on **U.S. assistance** could **turn to other global powers** for aid, altering global alliances.

Security Risks:

- USAID funding plays a role in **stabilizing conflict zones**—its removal could lead to **greater instability and security threats**.
- **Counterterrorism efforts** may be undermined, especially in **regions where USAID supports governance and development programs**.

Geopolitical Shifts:

- A weakened **U.S. aid presence** could create an **opportunity for China** to expand its **global influence** by offering alternative **development projects and investments**.

Conclusion:

The **proposed restructuring or closure of USAID** marks a **major shift in U.S. foreign policy**, aligning with **Trump's "America First" strategy**. While **supporters argue that reducing foreign aid saves taxpayer money**, critics warn that such a move **could have severe humanitarian, diplomatic, and security consequences**.

2 Beggar-Thy-Neighbour Policies: A Growing Threat to Global Trade

Context: The term "Beggar-Thy-Neighbour" has resurfaced as a major concern amid **rising trade tensions** and **currency devaluations**, particularly between economic giants like the **United States and China**. These policies, aimed at boosting **domestic economies**, often come at the expense of other nations, triggering **trade wars** and economic instability.



What Are Beggar-Thy-Neighbour Policies?

Beggar-thy-neighbour policies refer to **protectionist economic strategies** that benefit one nation while harming others. These policies typically include:

- **High Tariffs** – Imposing taxes on imported goods to protect domestic industries.
- **Strict Import Quotas** – Limiting the number of foreign products allowed in the market.
- **Currency Devaluation** – Weakening the domestic currency to make exports cheaper and imports more expensive.

While these measures may provide short-term benefits to **domestic industries**, critics warn that they can **cripple international trade**, leading to **economic slowdowns**, as seen during **the Great Depression**.

How Do These Policies Work?

Governments adopt beggar-thy-neighbour policies to **shield local industries from foreign competition**. However, these actions often provoke **economic retaliation** from other countries, creating a **dangerous cycle of protectionism**.

Key Examples:

1. **Trade Barriers** – Nations impose **high tariffs** and **import restrictions**, making foreign goods **more expensive**.
2. **Currency Manipulation** – Countries **deliberately weaken** their currency to **boost exports** and discourage imports, causing trade imbalances.

Historical Origins:

The term was first introduced by **Scottish economist Adam Smith** in his 1776 book, "**The Wealth of Nations**."

Smith **criticized mercantilist policies**, arguing that **free trade benefits all nations**, while **protectionism leads to long-term economic decline**.

Arguments in Favor of These Policies:

Protecting Domestic Industries & Jobs:

- Governments often **shield key industries** to **preserve jobs** and **ensure national security**.
- **New industries** may require **temporary protection** to become competitive in the global market.

Boosting Exports Through Currency Devaluation:

- A weaker domestic currency makes **exports cheaper** and **more competitive**, leading to a **trade surplus**.
- **Higher exports** and **lower imports** can **strengthen the national economy**.

Criticism & Global Consequences:

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**Trade Wars & Economic Retaliation:**

- **Tit-for-tat tariffs** often escalate into full-blown **trade wars**, reducing global trade and economic growth.
- The **interwar period (1918-1939)** saw widespread protectionist policies, **worsening the Great Depression**.

Recent Examples of Protectionism:

- **China & Japan** have been accused of **currency devaluation** to maintain their **trade surpluses**.
- The **U.S.-China Trade War (2018-2020)** involved **heavy tariffs**, disrupting global markets.

Impact on Consumers**Higher Prices for Goods:**

- **Tariffs on imports** raise the cost of **foreign goods**, increasing **consumer expenses**.
- Example: **U.S. tariffs on Chinese products** helped **American manufacturers** but **raised prices** for **American consumers**.

Reduced Purchasing Power:

- **Currency devaluations** may boost **exports**, but they also **weaken purchasing power**, making **domestic goods** more expensive.

An Alternative Approach: Unilateral Free Trade**Avoiding Retaliatory Tariffs:**

Some economists argue that **imposing tariffs harms domestic consumers** more than it helps.

- Example: If the **U.S. imposes tariffs on Chinese goods**, China retaliating with **its own tariffs** will **further harm its own consumers**.

The Free Trade Advantage:

- Free trade advocates believe that **one country can benefit** by avoiding **retaliatory tariffs**, allowing it to **profit from another nation's protectionist mistakes**.

Conclusion:

Beggar-thy-neighbour policies may **seem beneficial** for a country in the short run, but they **threaten global economic stability** in the long term. **Trade wars, rising prices, and reduced global cooperation** are just some of the negative consequences.

3

Home Ministry's Directive: Preventing the Misuse of the State Emblem of India

Context: The Union Home Ministry has directed State Governments to take strict measures to prevent the misuse and improper depiction of the State Emblem of India. The Ministry emphasized that the Lion Capital emblem is incomplete without the national motto, "Satyameva Jayate" written in Devanagari script.



Concerns Raised by the Government:

Incorrect Use of the Emblem:

- Many government agencies display the State Emblem on official documents, seals, vehicles, buildings, and websites without including the motto "Satyameva Jayate."
- Such an incomplete representation does not conform to Appendix I & II of the Schedule under the State Emblem of India (Prohibition of Improper Use) Act, 2005.
- Violating these guidelines amounts to a legal offense.

What is the State Emblem of India?

The State Emblem of India is the official seal of the Government of India, adapted from the Sarnath Lion Capital of Emperor Ashoka.

Key Features of the Emblem:

- Three lions standing on an abacus (the fourth lion is hidden from view).
- A Dharma Chakra (Wheel of Law) at the center of the abacus.
- A bull on the right and a galloping horse on the left of the Dharma Chakra.
- Smaller Dharma Chakras on the extreme right and left.
- The national motto "Satyameva Jayate" written in Devanagari script below the emblem.

Misuse by Unauthorized Individuals and Organizations:

- Many unauthorized individuals and authorities illegally use the State Emblem on their stationery, vehicles, and websites.
- The State Emblem of India is reserved only for specific government authorities as per:
 - The State Emblem of India (Prohibition of Improper Use) Act, 2005.
 - The State Emblem of India (Regulation of Use) Rules, 2007.

Strict Action Against Misuse:

Legal Consequences for Violators:

- Officials responsible for the incomplete display of the emblem will face action.
- Unauthorized individuals and organizations using the emblem illegally will be penalized.
- Punishment includes:
 - Imprisonment of up to 2 years.
 - A fine of up to 5,000.
 - Or both.



- **Falsely claiming** the right to use the emblem is also a **punishable offense**.

Government's Authority to Enforce the Law:

- The **Central Government** holds the authority to **frame rules, regulate use, and impose restrictions** on the **State Emblem of India**.
- The government can **seize or confiscate** any **unauthorized usage** of the emblem.

Conclusion:

The **State Emblem of India** is a **symbol of national dignity and sovereignty**. The **Home Ministry's directive** ensures that it is **used responsibly and displayed correctly**. By enforcing **strict laws and punishments for misuse**, the government aims to **protect the integrity** of this **national symbol** and uphold **legal compliance**.



4 Supreme Court to Assam: Deport Foreigners, Don't Detain Them Indefinitely

Context: On February 4, 2025, the Supreme Court of India strongly criticized the Assam government for keeping foreigners in detention camps indefinitely instead of deporting them. The court emphasized that individuals declared as foreigners should not be detained for eternity and urged authorities to resolve nationality verification and deportation issues effectively.

**Nationality Verification Crisis:**

- The Assam government revealed that nationality verification forms had not been sent to the Ministry of External Affairs due to a lack of proper addresses of the detainees in their native country.
- This has resulted in foreigners being stuck in detention centers for over a decade, making them effectively stateless individuals.

Supreme Court's Directives to the Centre and State:

- The Union Government was ordered to clarify how cases involving individuals with unknown nationality are being handled.
- The Centre must submit a detailed report listing:
 - The number of declared foreigners.
 - The total number of deportations so far.
- The Assam government was asked to file a proper affidavit detailing the steps taken for compliance with the court's directives.

Challenges in the Deportation Process:

- India and Bangladesh have been unable to resolve the issue of repatriation.
- India claims these individuals are not Indian citizens, while Bangladesh refuses to accept them, leaving them stateless.
- As a result, some foreigners have remained in detention for over 10 years with no resolution in sight.

Monitoring of Detention Camps:

- The Supreme Court instructed the Assam State Legal Services Authority to conduct surprise inspections at the Matia transit camp for foreigners.
- The purpose of these visits is to:
 - Ensure proper hygiene.
 - Check food quality provided to detainees.
- The court reiterated that Article 21 of the Indian Constitution guarantees the right to life and personal liberty to all individuals, including foreigners.

Understanding Foreigners Tribunals (FTs):

Foreigners Tribunals (FTs) are quasi-judicial bodies set up under the Foreigners (Tribunals) Order, 1964, framed under Section 3 of the Foreigners Act, 1946.

Functions of FTs::

- They determine the **citizenship status** of individuals **suspected to be foreigners**.
- They handle cases **referred by local authorities**.

Foreigners (Tribunals) Order, 2019 – Key Amendments:

- **Outlines the procedure** for appeals against **National Register of Citizens (NRC)** decisions.
- **Empowers District Magistrates across India** to establish **Foreigners Tribunals**.
- **Although the law applies nationwide**, FTs currently operate only in Assam.

Structure of a Foreigners Tribunal:

- Each FT is led by a **judge, advocate, or civil servant** with **judicial experience**.
- Appointments are made based on **government guidelines** under the **Foreigners Tribunal Act, 1941** and the **Foreigners Tribunal Order, 1964**.

Powers and Responsibilities of FTs:

- FTs function with **civil court powers**, including:
 - **Issuing summons**.
 - **Examining documents**.
- **Notices must be served within 10 days** of receiving a reference.
- **Cases must be decided within 60 days**.
- Under **Section 9 of the Foreigners Act, 1946**, the **burden of proof** lies on the individual to establish their **Indian citizenship**.
- If **unable to prove their nationality**, individuals may be sent to detention centers for **deportation**.

Appeal and Review Process:

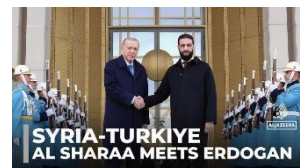
- A **review application** can be filed within **30 days** of the FT's order.
- **Adverse decisions** can be **challenged in the High Court**, and if necessary, further appealed in the **Supreme Court**.

Conclusion:

The **Supreme Court's directive** serves as a **strong reminder** that **foreigners must be deported, not detained indefinitely**. The **failure to verify nationality** has left **many individuals stateless**, creating a **humanitarian and legal crisis**. The court's intervention aims to **push the government** towards finding a **just and efficient solution** while **ensuring that fundamental rights are upheld**.

5 Turkey-Syria Talks: Kurdish Fighters and Defense Agreements Take Center Stage

Context: In a major diplomatic development, **Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan** met with **Syria's interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa** in Ankara. This meeting marks a **significant shift in Turkey-Syria relations**, focusing on **security concerns and potential defense agreements**.



This was **al-Sharaa's second international visit** since taking office, following discussions with **Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman**.

Key Points from the Meeting:

- The two leaders discussed **strengthening security cooperation**, particularly against **Kurdish fighters in northeastern Syria** and the **Islamic State (ISIS/ISIL)**.
- Erdogan **reaffirmed Turkey's support for Syria's anti-terror efforts**, specifically against groups like **ISIS and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)**, which Turkey classifies as a **terrorist organization**.
- **Turkey is considering establishing additional military bases in Syria** as part of a **new defense agreement** between the two nations.
- Al-Sharaa **opposed Kurdish self-rule** and demanded the **disarmament of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)**, signaling Syria's commitment to maintaining **territorial integrity**.

Ongoing Turkey-Syria Tensions:

- The **Turkey-Syria border stretches 909 kilometers**, from the **Mediterranean Sea in the west to Iraq in the east**.
- A key source of friction is the **presence of Kurdish militant groups** in northern Syria.
- The **Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)** has been engaged in an insurgency against Turkey since the **1980s** and is **designated as a terrorist group by Turkey**.
- The **Kurds**, a major ethnic group in the Middle East, are spread across **Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Armenia** and have long sought an independent state, **Kurdistan**.
- The **Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)**, a **Kurdish-led militia**, was a **key U.S. ally against ISIS**, but **Turkey views the group as an extension of the PKK**, raising concerns over its growing influence near Turkey's borders.

What's Next?

The **Turkey-Syria security discussions** could reshape **regional power dynamics**, with potential **military agreements and anti-terror measures** affecting not just these two countries, but also the **broader Middle East conflict**. The **fate of the SDF and Kurdish groups** remains uncertain as **Turkey and Syria push for stronger territorial control**.

6 Harnessing Bacteria to Combat Plastic Waste: Potential and Challenges

Context: The **global plastic waste crisis** has prompted scientists to explore **innovative biological solutions** using **bacteria and enzymes** to break down plastics.

Numerous **research institutions and companies** are actively working to develop and commercialize these technologies. However, **scalability, efficiency, and industry acceptance** remain significant hurdles.



Why is Plastic Waste a Problem?

- **Plastics take centuries to degrade**, causing long-term environmental damage.
- In the **last 65 years**, an estimated **8.3 billion tonnes** of plastic have been produced.
- **Less than 10%** has been recycled, while approximately **4.9 billion tonnes** continue to pollute the environment.

Biological Approaches to Plastic Degradation:

1. Enzyme-Based Degradation:

- Scientists have developed **engineered enzymes** to break down **PET (Polyethylene Terephthalate)**, a common plastic used in bottles and packaging.
- In **2016**, **Kōhei Oda's team** discovered **IsPETase**, an enzyme capable of degrading PET, though at a slow rate.
- Recent advancements have led to engineered enzymes that can **degrade 90% of PET in just 17 hours**, breaking it down into reusable components like **terephthalic acid and ethylene glycol**.

Challenges:

- Enhancing the **speed and efficiency** of enzymatic degradation.
- Reducing **costs for large-scale industrial applications**.

2. Microbial Degradation: Bacteria That Eat Plastic:

- Scientists are exploring **bacteria that consume plastics** as an energy source.
- **Example:** A bacterium known as **X-32** can break down plastics into **carbon dioxide (CO₂)**, **water**, and **biomass**—but takes around **22 months** to do so.

Key Process:

1. **Bacteria attach** to the plastic surface.
2. They use the **plastic as a carbon source** for energy.
3. They release **enzymes** that break down the polymer structure.

Challenges:

- **Slow degradation rates** compared to enzymatic solutions.
- Requires further **optimization for industrial use**.

3. Spore-Based Biodegradable Plastic: A Revolutionary Approach:

- Scientists at **Harvard University** and the **Wyss Institute** have developed a **bacteria-infused thermoplastic** that degrades naturally.



- The technology uses **heat-resistant bacterial spores** (*Bacillus subtilis*) embedded in plastic.
- These spores **remain inactive** during use but **activate in composting conditions**, accelerating plastic breakdown.

Advantages:

- ✓ Increases **plastic durability** while in use.
- ✓ **Speeds up decomposition** in composting environments.
- ✓ Offers a **potentially industry-friendly alternative**.

Challenges:

- Requires **regulatory approval** for use in consumer products.
- Scaling up **spore purification** for mass production remains difficult.

Bringing These Solutions to the Industry:

- Companies and researchers are working to make **bacteria- and enzyme-based plastic degradation commercially viable**.
- **Notable examples include:**
 - **Carbios (France):** Developed a **PET-digesting enzyme** that breaks down plastic in just **10 hours**.
 - **North Carolina-based biomaterial firms:** Experimenting with **spore-infused thermoplastics** to enhance biodegradability.

Major Hurdles for Industrial Adoption:

- **Improving degradation efficiency** to match industry demands.
- **Lowering the cost** of enzyme production and bacterial processing.
- Encouraging **manufacturers to integrate these solutions** into existing production models.

Conclusion: The Future of Bacteria in Plastic Waste Management

While **bacteria and enzymes** present a **game-changing opportunity** to tackle plastic pollution, their success depends on **overcoming challenges in scalability, efficiency, and industry adoption**. Future research should focus on **optimizing enzymatic reactions, advancing microbial degradation techniques, and ensuring cost-effective commercial application**.