



**Testimony Before the U.S. House Subcommittee on Military and Foreign Affairs
of the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform**

Hearing: “Emerging Global Threats: Putting America’s National Security First”

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Chairman Timmons, Ranking Member Subramanyam, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the future of U.S. foreign aid and the indispensable role of soft power in securing American interests. I come before you as a firm believer in the doctrine of peace through strength—a doctrine that recognizes that America’s security and leadership in the world require both the capacity to deter—and when necessary, defeat—our adversaries, as well as the strategic application of our values and influence abroad.

The world is rapidly changing, and the United States finds itself in a global competition against near-peer adversaries, chief among them, China and Russia. These authoritarian regimes are waging a relentless campaign to expand their influence, undermine Western institutions, and reshape the global order to suit their authoritarian models. They understand that power is not only measured in tanks, ships, and missiles but also in influence and perception.

If we are to prevail in this competition, the United States must effectively deploy both hard power and soft power. Hard power—our military capabilities—requires political will and material strength to deter aggression and defend our interests.

But soft power—the power of our ideals, our culture, and our global partnerships—requires equal political will and a disciplined, strategic approach to the exportation of American values.

Yet, the American people have lost faith in soft power, or foreign aid by another name. And who can blame them?

For decades, they were told their hard-earned tax dollars were being used to advance U.S. interests, build alliances, and project American leadership abroad.

Instead, the last few weeks have demonstrated that millions vanished into a bloated bureaucracy, enriching contractors and NGOs with deep pockets and deeper ties to Washington, while the world grew more dangerous and more hostile to the values we claim to champion.¹

They saw clear evidence that many initiatives under USAID were simply progressive social engineering projects, detached from the realities on the ground and the strategic interests of the United States.² They saw evidence that programs which promised prosperity delivered corruption instead.³

All too often in the past when Americans asked about the nature of foreign aid, they were met with obfuscation and condescension, told they simply didn't understand the complexities of development work.

The American people understand a fundamental truth: when their generosity is exploited, their security is put at risk, and their trust is betrayed, they do not forget.

Today, we are facing the consequences of that betrayal. Not just in public opinion, but on the global stage.⁴ Our adversaries are exploiting the vacuum we created, and have now left behind. They are buying influence, spreading lies, and reshaping the

¹ Chairman Brian Mast. "Chairman Mast Exposes Outrageous USAID and State Department Grants." *House Foreign Affairs Committee*, February 4, 2025. <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/press-release/chairman-mast-exposes-outrageous-usaid-and-state-department-grants/>

² USAID. "LGBTI Programs." Archived Page - June 2012 - September 2017. <https://2012-2017.usaid.gov/what-we-do/democracy-human-rights-and-governance/protecting-human-rights/lgbti-programs>.

³ Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction. "U.S. Funds Benefitting the Taliban-Controlled Government: Implementing Partners Paid at Least \$10.9 Million and Were Pressured to Divert Assistance." *SIGAR*, May 2024. <https://www.sigar.mil/Portals/147/Files/Reports/Audits-and-Inspections/Performance-Audits/SIGAR-24-22-AR.pdf>.

⁴ Natasha Turak. "U.S. and UK embassies in the UAE face backlash after flying rainbow pride flag in historic regional first." *CNBC*, June 30, 2021. <https://www.cnn.com/2021/06/30/us-and-uk-embassies-in-uae-see-backlash-for-flying-gay-pride-flag.html>.

international order in their image.⁵ And while our military remains the most capable fighting force on earth, it is being asked to operate in a world increasingly aligned against us.

This is what the managed decline of American soft power looks like.

The Grift That Broke the System

Let's be clear: USAID became a racket.⁶

Over time, it was captured by a class of well-connected development firms and NGOs that figured out the real money was not in results, but in relationships. The bigger your lobbying shop in Washington, the bigger your contracts overseas. Accountability was an afterthought.⁷ Success was measured by dollars obligated, not outcomes achieved.

Worse, USAID drifted from its original mission. It became a platform for social experiments, driven by progressive ideology, disconnected from both U.S. strategic interests and the needs of the local populations it claimed to serve.

For example, in regions vulnerable to Russian disinformation campaigns, what was needed were initiatives to strengthen independent media, counter propaganda, and support civil society. Instead, USAID directed resources toward advancing controversial social agendas—such as LGBTQ programming—in societies where such efforts were culturally alienating and counterproductive. This not only undermined our credibility but provided adversaries like Russia with powerful propaganda tools to paint the United States as an imperial power seeking to impose foreign values.

⁵ U.S. Department of State. "Pillars of Russia's Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem." *GEC Special Report*, August 2020.

https://2017-2021.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Pillars-of-Russia's-Disinformation-and-Propaganda-Ecosystem_08-04-20.pdf.

⁶ Tanya Lukyanova. "How the U.S. Government Controls Ukrainian Media." *The Free Press*, February 18, 2025. <https://www.thefp.com/p/us-government-controls-ukrainian-media>.

⁷ Paul K. Martin. "Challenges to Accountability and Transparency Within USAID-Funded Programs." *Office of Inspector General, U.S. Agency for International Development*, January 23, 2025. <https://oig.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2025-01/USAID%20Inspector%20General%20Memorandum%20Challenges%20to%20Accountability%20and%20Transparency%20Within%20USAID-Funded%20Programs.pdf>.

In Africa and Latin America, as China locked down critical infrastructure projects, USAID was promoting the same LGBTQ initiatives—alienating the very partners we needed to counter Beijing’s influence.⁸

In the Middle East, as Iran extended its reach, USAID poured money into projects that have ties to terrorist groups and have espoused anti-Israel commentary.⁹

Human rights matter. Freedom of expression and freedom of religion matter. But the exportation of American ideals cannot come through ideological imperialism. It must come through partnership, respect, and the clear demonstration that our way of life leads to prosperity and security.

What we got instead was arrogance, waste, and failure.

And the American people saw it.

They saw their money squandered while their own communities crumbled. They saw aid funneled to corrupt foreign elites while their own leaders told them there wasn’t enough for their needs.

The UN is a Failed Institution

Similarly, the United Nations now stands exposed as a relic of a bygone era. Far from effective at multilateral cooperation, the UN has become a stage upon which authoritarian regimes flaunt their power and democratic nations flounder in procedural paralysis.¹⁰ The UN has failed, and we are footing a huge portion of the bill.¹¹

⁸ Kerry Picket. “Disinformation: Democrats refuse to believe USAID bankrolled transgender operas, woke activism.” *Washington Times*, February 12, 2025. <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2025/feb/12/disinformation-democrats-refuse-believe-usaid-bank/>.

⁹ Gabby Deutch and Lahav Harkov. “The good, the bad, and the ugly of USAID’s Middle East Funding.” *Jewish Insider*, February 11, 2025. <https://jewishinsider.com/2025/02/usaids-middle-east-funding-pro-hamas-organizations-grants-coexistence/>.

¹⁰ UN Security Council Working Methods. “The Veto.” *Security Council Report*, October 19, 2015. <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-security-council-working-methods/the-veto.php>.

¹¹ Brett D. Schaefer. “Biden Sets Record on U.S. Taxpayer Funding for an Unappreciative U.N.” *The Heritage Foundation*, November 28, 2023. <https://www.heritage.org/global-politics/commentary/biden-sets-record-us-taxpayer-funding-unappreciative-un>.

Once envisioned as the ultimate tool of soft power, designed to prevent global conflict through diplomacy, cooperation, and moral authority, the UN has instead devolved into a bloated, corrupt, and impotent institution. The time has come for the United States to fundamentally reassess its support and potentially defund the UN altogether.

When the United Nations was established in 1945, it was built on the ashes of a devastated world as a hopeful successor to the League of Nations, whose impotence had ushered in the deadliest conflict in human history. The UN was meant to be different. It was crafted to stand as a sentinel against aggression, genocide, and tyranny. Today, that vision lies in ruins.

The Security Council, the core of the UN's peacekeeping apparatus, has been hijacked by Russia and China, two authoritarian powers wielding vetoes as weapons to shield themselves and their allies from accountability.¹² Russia, despite waging a brutal war of conquest in Ukraine, continues to occupy a permanent seat on the Security Council. The result is predictable: stalemate, inaction, and the normalization of aggression.

The parallels to the League of Nations are evident. Just as the League collapsed under the weight of fascist expansion in the 1930s, the UN is now crumbling in the face of modern-day imperialism. From Russia's bombardment of Ukrainian cities with Iranian drones to North Korea's growing military alliance with Moscow, the global order is unraveling and the UN is powerless to stop it.

The UN's failures extend far beyond the Security Council chamber. Peacekeeping missions intended to stabilize conflict zones have repeatedly spiraled into disgrace. In Rwanda, Bosnia, and Somalia, UN forces either stood idle or fled as massacres unfolded.¹³ Worse still, UN personnel have been implicated in scandals that mock the organization's core values. Peacekeepers in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo have been accused of sexual exploitation and abuse.¹⁴

¹² United Nations. "With Invasion of Ukraine, Security Council's 2022 Efforts to Maintain International Peace, Stability Mired by Widening Rifts between Veto-Wielding Members." January 12, 2023. <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15172.doc.htm>.

¹³ Chris McGreal. "What's the point of peacekeepers when they don't keep the peace?" *The Guardian*, September 17, 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/17/un-united-nations-peacekeepers-rwanda-bosnia>.

¹⁴ "8 UN peacekeepers detained in Congo over sexual abuse claims, sources say." Reuters, October 13, 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/un-suspends-some-peacekeepers-congo-denounces-sexual-abuse-2023-10-12/>.

More recently, reports surfaced that UN forces in Lebanon accepted bribes from Hezbollah, undermining their mission and endangering Israel.¹⁵

This is not mere incompetence, it is moral rot. How can an organization that claims to champion human rights appoint Saudi Arabia to chair the UN Commission on the Status of Women?¹⁶ How can an institution sworn to impartiality entertain diplomatic overtures from BRICS—an alliance led by China and Russia explicitly seeking to dismantle the Western-led global order?¹⁷

Defenders of the UN argue that its existence, however flawed, is better than nothing. This is a dangerous delusion. A system that legitimizes aggression and rewards hypocrisy breeds more conflict, not less. Diplomacy devoid of enforcement is an invitation to lawlessness. We see the consequences today: war in Europe,¹⁸ genocide threats in the Middle East,¹⁹ and an increasingly aggressive China in the Pacific.²⁰

The United States must lead in forging a new path. Clinging to a dysfunctional institution out of fear of the unknown is not leadership, it is surrender. Multilateralism is not inherently virtuous, especially when it shackles America to an institution that emboldens its enemies.

This is why the American people now view foreign aid as a dirty word. Not because they are isolationists. Not because they lack compassion. But because they know a scam when they see one.

The Danger of Abandoning Soft Power

¹⁵ David Israel. "Revealed: Hezbollah Bribed UNFIL Soldiers to Use their Positions." *Jewish Press*, October 21, 2024. <https://www.jewishpress.com/news/global/un/revealed-hezbollah-bribed-unifil-soldiers-to-use-their-positions/2024/10/21/>.

¹⁶ Jennifer Hauser. "Saudi Arabia to chair UN forum on women's rights and gender equality." *CNN*, March 28, 2024. <https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/28/middleeast/saudi-arabia-chair-un-gender-equality-forum-intl/index.html#:~:text=The%20UN's%20Commission%20on%20the,was%20elected%20as%20chair%20Wednesday.>

¹⁷ "Putin hosts growing BRICS alliance in Russia, touting it as an alternative to the West's "perverse methods." *CBS News*, October 24, 2024. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/russia-putin-brics-summit-china-ukraine-war-us-nato-sanctions-perverse-methods/>.

¹⁸ Caroline de Gruyter. "Putin's War is Europe's 9/11." *Foreign Policy*, February 28, 2022. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/02/28/putins-war-ukraine-europe-hard-power/>.

¹⁹ Matthew LEE and Aamer Madhani. "Biden calls Hamas attacks the deadliest day for Jews since the Holocaust as US death toll ticks up." *Associated Press*, October 11, 2023. <https://apnews.com/article/israel-hamas-us-biden-blinken-99eb4063edabc80fa1fa198fb0bb020e>.

²⁰ Isabel Reynolds. "US Commander Warns China Is Fast Becoming More Aggressive in Region." *Bloomberg*, April 23, 2024. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-04-23/us-commander-warns-china-is-fast-becoming-more-aggressive-in-region>.

But here is the danger: Their anger, though justified, is leading us toward retreat. And retreat is exactly what China and Russia want.

Soft power is not charity. It is a weapon—one that, when wielded correctly, can shape the battlefield before a single shot is fired.

Beijing understands this. That's why they're buying ports in Africa and offering surveillance systems to Latin American governments.

Moscow understands this. That's why they're flooding social media with disinformation to fracture NATO.

The question is: Do we understand it?

China's Belt and Road Initiative is not simply about building roads and ports—it is about entrenching influence, creating dependencies, and expanding Beijing's geopolitical reach. Russia's disinformation and destabilization campaigns are not just about spreading lies, they are about weakening Western alliances and exploiting societal fractures.

If we cede the soft power battlefield to these regimes, we risk seeing the free world slowly eroded not by force, but by influence. We will find ourselves surrounded by nations more beholden to Beijing and Moscow than to Washington. This leads to more conflict, not less.

Soft power, when properly executed, is a force multiplier. It creates allies before conflicts arise. It deters aggression by fostering resilience. It spreads our values not through coercion, but through aspiration.

When we build critical infrastructure in a developing country, we deny China the opportunity to use debt-trap diplomacy.

When we support independent media in Eastern Europe, we blunt Russia's disinformation campaigns.

These outcomes are not "nice-to-haves." They are core national security imperatives.

If we abandon the field, others will fill it. And they will shape the future in ways that endanger our security and our values.

Reclaiming Soft Power—The Right Way

The solution is not to abandon soft power, it is to reclaim it. We need a foreign aid apparatus that is lean, accountable, and unapologetically aligned with American interests.

1. End the Contractor Class: The development-industrial complex must be broken. No more million-dollar contracts to firms whose primary expertise is navigating Washington, not delivering results abroad.

2. Link Every Dollar to Strategy: Foreign aid is not a welfare program. It is a national security tool. Every program must advance U.S. interests—whether it's countering Chinese influence, disrupting Russian propaganda, or building resilience against Iranian extremism.

3. Demand Results or Cut Funding: If a program fails, it ends. If a contractor underdelivers, they're out. The American people deserve the same performance standards abroad that they expect at home.

4. Export Strength, Not Ideology: Our soft power must reflect the best of America—economic opportunity, personal liberty, and the rule of law. It must be adaptable to the cultural and political realities of each region. We win hearts and minds by helping people build better lives—not by lecturing them.

5. Rebuild Trust with the American People: We must tell the truth about what went wrong and show them we are serious about fixing it. Transparency is not a threat—it is a requirement.

Conclusion: Peace Through Strength

The world is watching. Our adversaries are advancing. And the American people are losing faith.

If we continue on this path, surrendering the battlefield of influence because we mismanaged it, we will pay a far higher price in blood and treasure down the road.

Peace through strength requires both hard power and soft power. Our military must remain unmatched, but our ideals, when projected wisely, are our greatest strength.

We must rebuild the credibility of American soft power, not as a vanity project for Washington elites, but as a weapon in defense of our nation and the free world.

But it must be reformed, refocused, and reinvigorated to meet the challenges of this new era.

Peace through strength requires both the resolve to defend freedom and the wisdom to inspire it.