



CONGRESSIONAL TESTIMONY

House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

Delivering on Government Efficiency Subcommittee

America Last: How Foreign Aid Undermined U.S. Interests Around the World

Testimony of Gregg Roman, Executive Director, Middle East Forum

February 26, 2025; 11 AM

Chairman, Ranking Member, and distinguished Members of this Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Gregg Roman, Director of the Middle East Forum, and I'm here because there's a fox loose in the henhouse of our foreign aid system—a system intended to uplift lives abroad that instead has funneled millions of taxpayer dollars to radical and terrorist-linked organizations. If we don't fix these fences now, we risk fueling violence against our allies, our troops, and potentially ourselves.

Let me be clear: This is a problem that began under the Obama administration and was exacerbated under the Biden administration. It's a problem that has been brewing across both of these administrations — by a bureaucracy so insulated it can't always tell teachers from terrorists. The result is moral confusion among grants officers who unwittingly, and in some cases may intentionally, bankroll extremist causes. At the Middle East Forum, we've uncovered evidence of \$164 million in approved grants, \$122 million of which ended up supporting radical or terror-tied organizations. That's not pocket change; that's a jackpot for the wrong crowd.

Specific Findings

- **World Vision:** Over the past two decades, this major evangelical NGO has received nearly \$2 billion from USAID. In 2014, World Vision facilitated a \$125,000 sub-grant to the Islamic Relief Agency—an entity linked to **Osama bin Laden's** precursor to Al-Qaeda. Even after a whistleblower raised red flags, USAID “rammed through” the funding, pressured by World Vision, Sudanese warlords, and even U.S. officials who lobbied to delist the terror group.
- **Helping Hand for Relief and Development:** In 2023, it received a \$78,000 grant from USAID despite openly working with the terrorist who orchestrated the 2008 Mumbai Massacre. Worse, this came *after* the USAID Inspector General had launched an investigation into a prior grant to the same group.

- **Jammal Trust Bank (Lebanon):** USAID dollars helped pad the pockets of this financial institution, later designated for financing Hezbollah. This was no mere oversight; it points to a broken system that handed cash to a future terror-financing entity.
- **Bayader and Unlimited Friends Association (UFA):** Members of the Gazan charity Bayader cozy up to senior Hamas figures like Abdul Salam Haniyeh, son of Ismail Haniyeh—credited as one of the planners of the October 7 attacks on Israel. Meanwhile, UFA officials have called for their lands to be “cleansed” from the “impurity of the Jews.”
- **Masking the Money Trail:** Billions of dollars in USAID grants are lumped under “miscellaneous foreign awardees,” making it almost impossible for Congress, the media, or the public to track who’s really getting the funds. A portion of this money has ended up in the hands of Al Qaeda affiliates in Syria.

How does this happen? The oversight is as weak as a house of cards in a windstorm—like handing out cash in a dark alley and hoping it doesn’t buy trouble. USAID’s vetting system is archaic, relying heavily on self-reported data with no real-time checks or teeth. Primary grantees are entrusted to vet their own subcontractors, even when those grantees themselves might sympathize with radical causes. In places like Gaza or Sudan, groups with blatant extremist affiliations slip through because the “gatekeepers” have no incentive—or even ideological desire—to shut them out. This isn’t a glitch; it’s a feature of a broken system.

Funding groups aligned with Hamas, Lashkar-e-Taiba, or bin Laden affiliates is not just a colossal waste of taxpayer money—it arms those who want to tear us down. We’re bankrolling bin Laden-linked operatives in Sudan while our troops fight their networks. We’re padding Hezbollah’s pockets in Lebanon. Every misdirected dollar destabilizes conflict zones and puts American lives at risk. This risk is real, not hypothetical—our reporting has detailed how Iranian proxy militias and other extremist factions exploit these funds to further violence.

Here’s the kicker: it’s a problem caused by bureaucrats, but its now threatening American interests at home and abroad—it’s a not just waste, fraud, and abuse, this is a national security problem. It goes beyond who’s in the Oval Office. It’s a bureaucracy that has lost its way, staffed by grant officers who too often can’t distinguish between a legitimate teacher and a terrorist recruiter. Meanwhile, powerful NGO lobbies funded by the State Department—like InterAction—push disinformation to protect the status quo and sabotage meaningful congressional oversight. We’re not talking about ending foreign aid; we’re talking about saving it from a fatal moral confusion.

That’s why I’m urging you to hit the pause button on the US’s foreign aid budget. Give the Trump administration the space to audit this chaos, root out the rot, and build a fence that keeps the fox out. Humanitarian assistance can still flow through existing waivers for conflict zones, ensuring true emergencies are addressed. But we can’t keep turning on the money spigot and hoping it doesn’t land in extremist coffers.

How to Fix It

1. **Immediate Pause and Audit**
 - Suspend new obligations until we can scrub grantees and sub-grantees—especially in high-risk areas.

2. Proper Vetting & Full Transparency

- No more “miscellaneous” listings. Use public vetting processes that require complete transparency, encourage independent audits, and mandate strict screening for both foreign and domestic charities. Every employee, vendor, and local partner must be disclosed.

3. Stronger Accountability Mechanisms

- Enact clawback provisions, stiff penalties for misuse, and external audits with teeth. Don’t rely on self-reporting from potentially complicit NGOs.

4. Allow Necessary Reviews

- The State Department, under Secretary Rubio’s review, has a roadmap for better oversight. Its warnings must not be buried or lost if USAID merges into the State Department.

5. Legislative Teeth

- Congress should pass laws with robust penalties, transparency mandates, and real-time oversight tools. End the shell game of incomplete data and hidden awards.

Addressing Concerns

Some might worry, “What about the needy? Won’t a pause hurt them?” The real hurt is letting this fiasco continue. Every dollar that buys a bomb instead of a blanket is a betrayal of those we aim to help. A pause isn’t the end of compassion – it’s the beginning of accountability, ensuring that our aid feeds children rather than chaos.

I urge this committee to make a formal criminal referral to the Department of Justice regarding USAID’s systemic failure to prevent taxpayer dollars from reaching terrorist organizations. USAID’s reckless bureaucrats should be dragged not just in front of this committee, but before a criminal court judge who can get to this bottom of this travesty and lock up any government official who risked the lives of innocent people around the world to advance these radical anti-American pet projects.

If members of the committee, myself, or any other hard-working American gave even a fraction of this money to these terror-linked groups, we could be thrown in jail for the rest of our lives. Americans deserve to know the hard truth of the matter: a portion of their wages over the past decade or longer have gone to bankroll groups that celebrated some of the darkest days in modern history - days like September 11 or October 7 – if they didn’t actively participate in these atrocities.

And a criminal inquiry shouldn’t stop with the bureaucrats. The American charities that take USAID cash and transfer this money to Islamists and jihadists around the world deserve their day in court, too. This committee has the authority and the responsibility to demand this level of accountability to protect both our national security and the integrity of our foreign assistance programs.

Conclusion

So let’s not kick this can down the road or slap a band-aid on a broken leg. Let’s fix foreign aid once and for all—because when it comes to national security and the trust of the American taxpayer, we can’t afford to miss the mark. Thank you for your time, and I welcome your questions.