





**Elizabeth Peak**

**From:** Devpol News <devpolicy@lists.anu.edu.au>  
**Sent:** Friday, 31 January 2025 12:00 PM  
**To:** Elizabeth Peak  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Pacific political turmoil | US aid chaos | Sols aid failure

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## DEVELOPMENT POLICY CENTRE



# Devpol News

31 January 2025

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### Happy New Year from Devpol

We are looking forward to an exciting year of events and publications in 2025.

Our first major event will be Pacific Update, co-hosted with the University of the South Pacific in Fiji. The conference, which this year incorporates

### BLOG HIGHLIGHTS

[Vale Charles Lepani](#)

[January 2025 aid news](#)

[Seasonal workers  
program numbers falling](#)

### DEVPOLICY TALKS

The 2025 season is launching next week!

[Listen and subscribe.](#)

the Pacific Migration Workshop, will be held on 3–5 June. Keep an eye on this newsletter for the announcement of the call for papers.

We hope you enjoyed the [2024 Best of the Blog](#).

The Devpolicy Blog has recommenced publication for 2025. Are you and your colleagues interested in contributing to Devpolicy Blog this year? You can read the submission guidelines in the [About section](#).



### Pacific politics in turmoil

Dr 'Aisake Valu Eke was elected Prime Minister of Tonga on 24 December after [the shock resignation](#) of Siaosi Sovaleni Hu'akavameiliku earlier that month.

Writing for [Devpolicy Blog](#), Lopeti Senituli says Eke is academically well qualified for the post. He was first elected to Parliament as an independent in 2010 after the constitutional and democratic reforms.

With just over a year left in her tenure as Samoa's Prime Minister, Fiame Naomi Mata'afa faced political upheaval in the last month that threatened a peaceful end to her term, reports Lagipoiva Cherelle Jackson in a two-blog series.

If you have suggestions of podcast guests, email [devpolicy@anu.edu.au](mailto:devpolicy@anu.edu.au).

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### UPCOMING EVENT



#### Arndt–Corden Dept of Economics Seminar

Narratives, information and immigration policy

Speaker: Alyssa Leng

Tues 11 March

2pm – 3:30pm

[Register](#).

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### CATCH UP ON OUR EVENTS



#### Australian AID Conference

View recordings on [Devpolicy Youtube](#).

View dinner speech on

Ironically, the rule of law become the source of the [current challenges within her party](#) but Fiame [survived and retained in her position](#) with the support of the speaker of the parliament.

Meanwhile in Vanuatu, a snap election gives the newly formed parliament an opportunity to rebuild trust with citizens, according to [a new blog](#) by Anna Naupa. She says the newly elected parliament needs the ability to separate local constituency interests from the work of running an entire country.

[Devpolicy Youtube.](#)

View presentations on [Devpolicy ANU website.](#)



### **US aid freeze: “manufactured chaos”**

The 90-day freeze on US development assistance announced by the newly sworn-in Trump administration, reflects a distinct shift from Trump first term, both in terms of both the administration’s policy intent and its power, says Cameron Hill [in a new blog](#).

The future status of these agreements and of the programs that they support are now uncertain – a situation that one former USAID senior official has described as manufactured chaos.





## How Solomon Islands' water plant became an aid failure

Devpolicy Blog this month republished in two parts an important investigation regarding an Asian Development Bank project in Solomon Islands undertaken by In-depth Solomons in collaboration with the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project.

Charley Piringi, Ofani Eremae, Ronald Toito'ona and Dan McGarry describe the circumstances leading to the award of a contract to the Rean/PCS consortium for the construction of the Kongulai water treatment plant in Honiara in [Part 1](#).

The authors explain that the stalled project has ongoing health implications for the community in [Part 2](#).

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# DEVPOLICYBLOG

[January 2025 aid news](#)

by Development Policy Centre

[Deadline needed to end foreign exchange shortages in PNG](#)

by Thomas Wangi

["Manufactured chaos": Trump 2.0 puts his stamp on US foreign aid](#)

by Cameron Hill

[How can Vanuatu's new parliament rebuild public trust?](#)

By Anna Naupa

[Where is Mendi? How PNG's electoral map broke: part 2](#)

by Thiago Cintra Oppermann

[What's driving avian influenza virus evolution? Human food systems](#)  
by Robyn Alders and Dirk Pfeiffer

[Samoa political update: Fiamē prevails](#)  
by Lagipoiva Cherele Jackson and Lilomaiva Maina Vai

[Where is Mendi? How PNG's electoral map broke: part 1](#)  
by Thiago Cintra Oppermann

[Vale Charles Lepani](#)  
by Stephen Howes

[Trouble is brewing in paradise: Fiamē's leadership hangs in the balance](#)  
by Lagipoiva Cherele Jackson and Junior S. Ami

[Why do Australia's seasonal worker numbers continue to fall?](#)  
by Richard Curtain

[Time to decolonise international development](#)  
by Biman Prasad

[Tonga's new Prime Minister, Dr 'Aisake Valu Eke](#)  
by Lopeti Senituli

[How Solomon Islands' water plant became an aid failure: part 2](#)  
by Charley Piringi, Ofani Eremae, Ronald Toito'ona and Dan McGarry

[Gaza: a death trap caught in Israel's campaign of total destruction](#)  
by Christopher Lockyear

[How Solomon Islands' water plant became an aid failure: part 1](#)  
by Charley Piringi, Ofani Eremae, Ronald Toito'ona and Dan McGarry

[The fog of COP29 delivers a foggy climate goal](#)  
by Fiona Ryan

[Mobile internet prices stable in Papua New Guinea](#)  
by Amanda H A Watson, Jonathan Zureo, Loretta Dilu and Hafford Norea

[A rare aid success story brought riches to Bougainville but will it last?](#)  
By Gordon Peake and Terrence Wood

[Development Policy Centre Website](#) | [Australian Aid Tracker](#)  
[Femili PNG](#) | [PNG Project](#)



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**Elizabeth Peak**

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**From:** DFAT Talking Points  
**Sent:** Tuesday, 4 February 2025 7:19 PM  
**To:** DM SES All  
**Subject:** DFAT Talking Points - United States - Trump Administration - v23  
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**Subject: United States - Trump Administration**

**Originating Division: GPD**

s 22(1)(a)(ii)









### *International System*

**If raised: How will the US pause on ODA (foreign aid) and uncertain future for USAID affect Australia's interests?**

- *The decision to pause US official development assistance (ODA) is a matter for the US Administration.*
- *It would be premature to speculate on how the pause, review and changes at US Agency for International Development (USAID) will be implemented.*
- *We are working with our partners to understand the potential impacts and will engage with the US on key issues as it conducts its review of foreign aid.*
- *Australia's development program is focused on being a partner of choice for our neighbours – this is fundamental to our region's prosperity, stability and security.*



















s 33(a)(iii), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b)

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**From:** Heather Cox Richardson from Letters from an American

<heathercoxrichardson@substack.com>

**Sent:** Tuesday, February 4, 2025 6:05:50 PM

**To:** s 33(a)(iii), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b)

**Subject:** February 3, 2025

s 33(a)(iii), s 47G(1)(a), s 47G(1)(b)

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## February 3, 2025

HEATHER COX RICHARDSON

FEB 4



READ IN APP

I'm going to start tonight by stating the obvious: the Republicans control both chambers of Congress: the House of Representatives and the Senate. They also control the White House and the Supreme Court. They wanted to get rid of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), for example, they could introduce a bill, debate it, pass it, and send it on to President Trump for his signature. And there would be very little the Democrats could do to stop that change.

But they are not doing that.

Instead, they are permitting unelected billionaire Elon Musk, whose investment of \$290 million in Trump and other Republican candidates in the 2024 election apparently has bought him freedom to run the government, to override Congress and enact whatever his own policies are by rooting around in government agencies and cancelling those programs that he, personally, dislikes.

The replacement of our constitutional system of government with the whims of an unelected private citizen is a coup. The U.S. president has no authority to cut programs created and funded by Congress and a private citizen tapped by a president has even less standing to try anything so radical.

But Republicans are allowing Musk to run amok. This could be because they know that Trump has embraced the idea that the American government is a "Deep State," but that the extreme cuts the MA

Republicans say they want are actually quite unpopular with Americans in general, and even with most Republican voters. By letting Musk make the cuts the MAGA base wants, they can both provide those cuts and distance themselves from them.

But permitting a private citizen to override the will of our representatives in Congress destroys the U.S. Constitution. It also makes Congress itself superfluous. And it takes the minority rule Republicans have come to embrace to the logical end of putting government power in the hands of one man.

Musk's team in the so-called Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, has taken control of the U.S. Treasury payment systems that handle about \$6 trillion in annual transactions for the U.S. government, thus gaining access to Americans' personal information as well as information about Musk's competitors. From there, Musk claims to have been cancelling those transactions he thinks are wasteful. He claims, for example, to have "deleted" the popular Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Direct File system that enabled people to file their taxes online for free, without the help of paid tax preparers.

Musk's team apparently consists of six engineers, aged 19 to 24, who are taking control of the computers at government agencies. From the Treasury Department, they went on to the U.S. Agency for International Development, which receives foreign policy guidance from the State Department. Their breaching of the computers there compromises our national intelligence systems, which must now be considered insecure.

From there, they went on to the General Services Administration (GSA), which manages the federal government's 7,500 or so buildings. Musk's people sent an email to regional managers telling them to begin ending the leases on federal offices. According to Chris Megerian of the Associated Press, the person in charge of that initiative is Nicole Hollander, who describes herself on LinkedIn as employed by Musk's social media company, X.

Today, according to an email sent to employees of the Small Business Administration, Musk's people have gotten into that agency's human resources, contracts, and payment systems. The Small Business Administration supports small businesses and entrepreneurs, and under the Biden-Harris administration, small businesses boomed thanks to small-dollar loans to women, Black, and Latino entrepreneurs.

By this afternoon, Musk's people were digging into the data of the Department of Education with an eye to dismantling it from the inside before Trump tries to shut it down with an executive order, although only Congress itself can shutter the department. According to Laura Meckler, Danielle Douglas-Gabriel, and Hannah Natanson of the *Washington Post*, Musk's DOGE staffers had accessed sensitive internal data systems, including the personal information of millions of students who are taking part in the federal

student aid program. It is highly unlikely that Congress would destroy the Department of Education, so Musk and Trump hope to hollow it out from within.

On a livestream last night, Musk said of his destruction of the federal government: “If it’s not possible now, it will never be possible. This is our shot, This is the best hand of cards we’re ever going to have. If we don’t take advantage of this best hand of cards, it’s never going to happen.”

Three federal employees unions are suing the Trump administration to stop Musk, and today, Democratic members of the House and Senate tried to enter the USAID building but were denied entry. Led by Senators Chris Murphy (D-CT), Brian Schatz (D-HI) and Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) and Representatives Jamie Raskin (D-MD) and Gerry Connolly (D-VA), the Democrats condemned what Raskin called Musk and Trump’s “illegal, unconstitutional interference with congressional power.”

“Elon Musk, you may have illegally seized power over the financial payment systems of the United States Department of Treasury,” Raskin said, “but you don’t control the money of the American people. The United States Congress does that—under Article I of the Constitution. And just like the president, who was elected to something, cannot impound the money of the people, we don’t have a fourth branch of government called Elon Musk. And that’s going to become real clear.”

Senator Murphy said: “[L]et’s not pull any punches about why this is happening. Elon Musk makes billions of dollars based off of his business with China. And China is cheering at [the destruction of USAID]. There is no question that the billionaire class trying to take over our government right now is doing it based on self-interest: their belief that if they can make us weaker in the world, if they can elevate their business partners all around the world, they will gain the benefit.”

Murphy continued: “But there’s another reason this is happening. They’re shuttering agencies and sending employees home in order to create the illusion that they’re saving money, in order to...pass a giant tax cut for billionaires and corporations.”

While Musk and his DOGE team are trying systematically to dismantle the government, today Judge Loren L. AliKhan of the Federal District Court for the District of Columbia blocked the Trump administration’s attempt to freeze trillions of dollars in grants and loans before DOGE got going. AliKhan said that by impounding funds—which Congress declared illegal in 1974—Trump’s Office of Management and Budget “attempted to wrest the power of the purse away from the only branch of government entitled to wield it.” It is Congress, not the president, that determines federal spending.

Meanwhile, the elected president, Donald Trump, sparked a crisis last Friday when his White House press secretary, Karoline Leavitt, announced that he fully intended to go through with the trade war he had hyped on the campaign trail. Trump announced he would levy tariffs of 25% on most products from

Mexico and Canada and of 10% on products from China, beginning at 12:01 a.m. on Tuesday, in violation of the trade agreement his own team had negotiated during his first term.

As soon as Leavitt announced the upcoming tariffs, the stock market began to fall, and by last night, stock market futures had fallen 450 points on the expectation of tariffs hitting at midnight tonight. Today the stock market continued to fall. Even reliable Trump allies began to complain that the tariffs would raise prices. The Wall Street Journal editorial board called Trump's tariffs "the dumbest trade war in history."

Today, the president of Mexico, Claudia Sheinbaum, announced that she and Trump had "reached a series of agreements" that would pause the threatened tariffs for a month. Mexico agreed to "reinforce the northern border with 10,000 elements of the National Guard immediately, to prevent drug trafficking from Mexico to the United States," while the U.S. "commits to work to prevent the trafficking of high-powered weapons to Mexico."

When Trump announced their conversation shortly afterward, he omitted the part of the agreement that committed the U.S. to try to stop the flow of guns to Mexico. He also did not mention that, in fact, Mexico committed to putting 10,000 troops at the border in 2021. As Catherine Rampell of the *Washington Post* commented above a record of Mexican troop deployments: "Any news outlet reporting Mexico conceded anything to Trump to get him to delay tariffs has not done its homework. Trump boasts he got Mexico to commit to stationing 10K troops at our border. Apparently he didn't realize Mexico already has 15K troops deployed there[.]"

The crisis at the northern border worked out in a similar fashion. After conferring, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Trump announced a 30-day pause in the implementation of tariffs. Trudeau agreed to appoint a border czar and to implement a \$1.3 billion border plan that Canada had announced in December.

In other words, while Musk was causing a constitutional crisis, Trump created an economic crisis that threatened both domestic and global chaos, then claimed Biden administration achievements as his own and declared victory.

The tariffs on Chinese goods went into effect as planned. China has promised to levy tariffs of up to 15% on certain U.S. products beginning a week from today. It also said it will investigate Google to see if it has violated antitrust laws.

Notes:

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