**Season 19  
—  
Debating the 2018-2019 Stoa Policy Resolution**

Policy debaters should be aware of current issues being discussed in this year’s topic area. The purpose of this article is to give competitors the underlying knowledge of current issues relating to the following resolution:

***Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially reform its foreign aid.***

**Table of Contents**

Current Issues in U.S. Foreign Aid 2

Resolutional Analysis 2

Affirmative View 3

Negative View 3

Alphabet Soup 3

Quantifying and Setting Expectations 5

Goodwill and “Soft Power” 7

Food Aid 8

Military Aid 9

Development Aid 10

Economic Aid 10

Health Care & Disease Prevention 11

The Peace Corps 12

Democracy & Political Transitions 12

Private Charities 13

Generic Issues 13

Worksheet: Status Quo of Foreign Aid 15

Answers 18

*Content collected and written by Vance Trefethen. Chris Jeub wrote the worksheets at the end of the essay.*

Current Issues in U.S. Foreign Aid

**

Stoa’s 2018-2019 Policy Resolution:

Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially reform its foreign aid.

Resolutional Analysis

Let’s start by focusing on a key word in this resolution: “reform.” Since the word “abolish” is not in the resolution, we can start right away by questioning whether any plan to abolish some foreign aid program (or even all foreign aid) is topical. Reform means “to amend or improve by change of form or removal of faults or abuses.”[[1]](#footnote-2)

Affirmative View

The resolution calls on us to reform the entire scope of US federal foreign aid, and we can do that by removing the faults and abuses of the one program we are abolishing. Removing this one program makes all of US foreign aid better by removing a part of it that’s bad.

Negative View

The resolution requires the Affirmative to remove abuses or faults, not remove the aid itself. Make the aid better by changing it, but abolishing it is extra-topical. If abolishing were an option, it would have been stated in the resolution text.

You don’t have to settle which of these is the “right” interpretation of the resolution, but you should be prepared to argue both ways, depending on what position you are assigned. If you are going Negative and want to run a Counterplan to abolish whatever program the Affirmative is reforming, you will likely want to argue that abolishing isn’t reforming, so you are still clearly denying the resolution. It is possible that the word “abolish” was left out of the resolution intentionally to encourage Negatives to think in this way and to leave the “abolish” option available as Negative territory in debate rounds this year.

Alphabet Soup

FAO – Food & Agriculture Organization – A UN agency that provides technical assistance to help modernize and increase food productivity in poor countries.

FMF – Foreign Military Financing – The US federal government gives money to foreign governments that must be spent on American-made military equipment, services or training.

GDP – Gross Domestic Product – The sum value of all the goods and services produced in a nation. It’s a measure of the economic development of a nation, particularly when divided by a nation’s population (per capita GDP), indicating a rough estimate of how well-off the average person in a country is.

IMF – International Monetary Fund – An organization founded originally under the auspices of the UN but with its own separate budget and management. The IMF gets money from rich countries and loans it to countries in financial distress to solve currency or budget crisis situations. An example is bailout money loaned to Greece to prevent them from defaulting on government bonds.

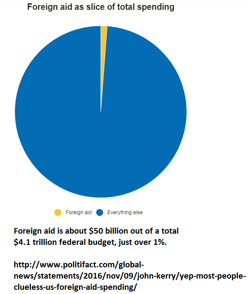
NGO - Non-Governmental Organization – A charitable organization not owned by any branch of any government (but, ironically, which may get much of its funding from governments). Foreign aid is often contracted out to NGOs, who actually put the people on the ground in the affected regions needing aid.

PVO – Private Voluntary Organization – A type of NGO, an agency that receives money from private sources but also may register with USAID to apply for grants and do aid projects.

Sahel – Semi-arid climatic region of Africa just south of the Sahara Desert, as shown in this map.

World Bank - – An organization founded originally under the auspices of the UN but with its own separate budget and management. The World Bank gets money from rich countries and loans it to poor countries for specific development projects that the poor country would not be able to get financed by market investors or at lower interest rates than would otherwise be available. Examples include things like agricultural development projects, waterway improvements, and electrical power delivery.

WFP – World Food Program – UN agency that distributes food aid in poor countries.

Quantifying and Setting Expectations

The American public tends to overestimate the size of US federal government foreign aid. Foreign aid, including economic and military, is only around 1% of the federal budget. There may be lots of good reasons to reform or cut it, but Affirmatives are going to be on shaky ground if they argue that they are going to be rescuing taxpayers or solving the federal deficit.

James McBride at the Council on Foreign Relations gave this summary of US foreign aid:

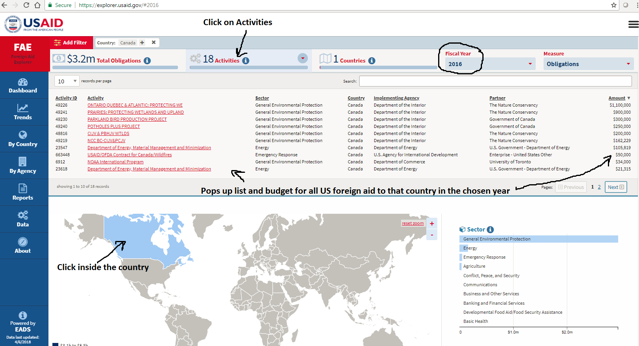
**“Long-term development aid (38 percent)** provides ongoing funding for projects to promote broad-based economic growth and general prosperity in the world’s poorest countries. More than half of this goes to bilateral global health programs, including treatment of HIV/AIDS, maternal and family health, and support for government health-care systems, mostly in Africa. About 15 percent of this goes to multilateral institutions such as the World Bank and the UN Development Program.  
**Military and security aid (35 percent)** primarily goes toward helping allies purchase U.S. military equipment, training foreign military personnel, and funding peacekeeping missions. A smaller slice goes to “non-military security assistance”, which includes counternarcotics programs in Afghanistan, Colombia, Peru, and elsewhere, as well as nonproliferation and counterterrorism efforts.  
**Humanitarian aid (16 percent)** is spent to alleviate short-term humanitarian crises, such as those resulting from famine, earthquakes, war, failed states, or other natural or man-made disasters. This includes State Department and Defense Department disaster relief efforts, as well as purchases of U.S. agricultural goods and funding for organizations such as the International Red Cross and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.  
**Political aid (11 percent)** is intended to support political stability, free market economic reforms, and democratic institutions. Programs include governance and justice system reforms, backing for human rights organizations, and support for peace talks and treaty implementation.”[[2]](#footnote-3)

Here’s a list of the top 10 current recipients of US foreign aid and a summary of their situation.[[3]](#footnote-4)

1. Israel - $3.1 billion. Military aid  
2. Egypt - $1.39 billion. Most of it is military aid, but some is for food, health and education.  
3. Jordan - $1 billion. Handling massive inflow of Syrian civil war refugees.  
4. Afghanistan - $782.8 million. Perpetually on the brink of collapse, aid intended to help security against Taliban insurgency and stabilize democracy and economic conditions.  
5. Kenya - $639.4 million. Funding for improved governance and accountability and improving agricultural productivity in drought areas.  
6. Tanzania - $535.3 million. Poverty and economic aid.  
7. Uganda - $436.4 million. Economic development, promotion of democratic institutions, and public health improvement to prevent spread of diseases.  
8. Zambia - $428.9 million. Economic development, agricultural improvement, disease reduction.  
9. Nigeria - $419.1 million. Economic development, reduction of poverty.  
10. Iraq - $347.9 million. Economic assistance, rebuilding areas destroyed by ISIS, recovery of displaced citizens.

An extremely valuable resource is the USAID’s Foreign Aid Explorer website: <http://explorer.usaid.gov>

You can click any country and get a report on how much foreign aid we gave and all the line items with their budget for any chosen year. For example, did you know we gave over $3 million in foreign aid to Canada in fiscal year 2016?[[4]](#footnote-5) Here are the results of that query:



Goodwill and “Soft Power”

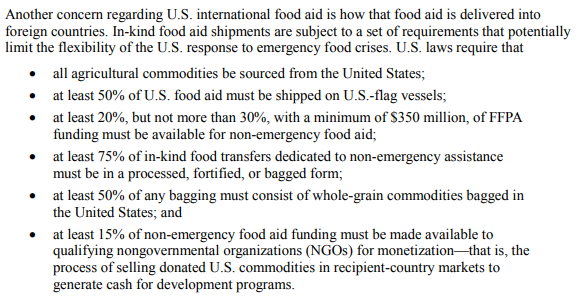
Foreign aid may be an effective way to influence people toward a more favorable view of the United States. This, in turn, may increase our nation’s ability to move policies and actions by other nations in directions we want, without using threats or force. This favorable foreign policy influence is often referred to in the literature as “soft power.”

“In a world transformed by globalization and challenged by terrorism, foreign aid deserves attention as a critical instrument of American soft power and a key determinant of the face of America seen by poor people around the world. With hard power assets stretched thin and facing 21stcentury threats from global poverty, pandemics, and terrorism, the U.S. must deploy its soft power more effectively. … Terror Free Tomorrow found that foreign aid dramatically improved public perceptions of the United States in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Indonesia, for a sustained period following U.S. generosity in the wake of the tsunami and the Pakistan earthquake. Here at home, a majority of Americans appreciate that linkage: the Program on International Policy Attitudes/Knowledge Networks found that fully 57 percent of Americans favor “building goodwill toward the US by providing food and medical assistance to people in poor countries.” When designed and executed well, foreign assistance is not just soft power but smart power, working to advance national security, national interests and national values.”[[5]](#footnote-6)

Negatives need to be prepared to deny or minimize the effectiveness of “soft power” and to critique the theories that support it. They also need to be prepared to cut the link between aid and soft power by arguing that even if soft power is a “thing,” US foreign aid doesn’t achieve it.

Food Aid

US food aid has several areas that may be ripe for reform.[[6]](#footnote-7)



The requirement that most aid has to be physical bags of grains sourced in the US potentially creates problems for the effectiveness of food aid, although it is beneficial to US farmers. Many have argued that it would be faster for the US government to just cut a check to NGO’s in the field and have them buy grain near the affected regions. Such would probably cut down the response time, since the grain wouldn’t have to travel all the way across the ocean from the U.S.

Many have also criticized the US shipping requirements,[[7]](#footnote-8) also known as Cargo Preference for Food Aid, as placing further cost burdens and time delays on food arrival. Waiting for US ships to become available and paying the extra costs associated with them, rather than taking the first and lowest-cost ship available, takes money away from actually helping hungry people.

Another area of reform is the “monetization” rule mentioned above. It’s a cumbersome and inefficient process to bag up food in the US, wait for US ships to be available, pay for it to be sent halfway around the world, and then sell it to raise money. Why not just cut a check and be done with it?

And what happens when all of this free or low cost food arrives in poor regions overseas? Imagine a poor farmer raising crops for local markets in areas where food is desperately needed. As soon as word gets out that free food is available down at the harbor on the arriving aid boat or at the marketplace at reduced price or free from the NGO, what happens to the profitability of his farm? It will soon be out of business, to the long-term detriment of his nation. Farms can’t profitably produce and sell crops when they have to compete with food priced at zero. And countries where the farms go out of business will be stuck in endless cycles of famine.

Military Aid

Military aid is sure to be a popular topic of reform this year because there are so many things that can go wrong with it. Israel is the top recipient of US military aid, much of which must be spent back in the US on American-made hardware. Questions abound regarding whether this is a good policy, starting first with whether Israel even needs any military aid at all. As the strongest military power in the region, with no looming threats, and a well-functioning economy that can pay for its own defense, it’s hard see why they need any US aid at all. And some of the uses to which Israel puts that military equipment are certainly not helping the US image abroad. For example, it could be a bad thing if US weapons enable oppression of Palestinians in the occupied territories and delay the day when Israel has to come to some kind of terms with settling this conflict once and for all.

Egypt is the number two recipient of military aid, and questions are raised about it as well. Egypt has a poor record on human rights and democracy, but has valid security concerns and threats from terrorism. Unfortunately, some of those threats are generated by oppressed groups aggrieved by the Egyptian government’s own failures on human rights and democracy. Egypt also acts contrary to U.S. policy on numerous occasions, raising doubts about whether our aid is buying the kind of influence it was expected to have.

Pakistan is another country with a troubled history of receiving US military aid. Ostensibly a key ally in the war on terror and in the war in Afghanistan, many were troubled when Osama Bin Laden was found hiding in plain sight in Pakistan. Pres. Trump recently announced suspension of military aid to Pakistan, tweeting that “The United States has foolishly given Pakistan more than 33 billion dollars in aid over the last 15 years, and they have given us nothing but lies & deceit.”

These examples illustrate some of the risks and problems associated to foreign military aid. Canceling military aid also has risks. It could weaken a key ally or cause them to discontinue supporting US policies in some key region, with results that might harm US national security.

Be careful to distinguish “arms sales” policies from “military aid” when writing Affirmative cases or when going Negative against them. Arms sales policies, where countries spend their own money on US military equipment, are an interesting debate but they are not the same as foreign aid, where we give them the money and they spend it on our equipment, or we just give them the equipment outright.

Development Aid

Economic Aid

**There are numerous studies available in the literature discussing the effectiveness of foreign aid on developing the economies of poor countries. The fact that many countries remain poor after decades of aid suggests to many that aid is ineffective at spurring the economic growth that would be the long-term solution to poverty.**

**“**The West’s efforts to aid the Rest have been even less successful at goals such as promoting rapid economic growth, changes in government economic policy to facilitate markets, or promotion of honest and democratic government. The evidence is stark: $568 billion spent on aid to Africa, and yet the typical African country no richer today than 40 years ago.”[[8]](#footnote-9)

**Others argue that, as poor as they are, these nations would be much worse off had we not spent all that money on aid.**

“Accompanying the MDGs is a recently found optimism associated with official aid. This is based on findings of a growing body of empirical research on the macroeconomic impact of these inflows, most of which involves the econometric analysis of panel data sets. Aid now appears to work in the sense that per capita economic growth would have been lower in its absence, according to the findings of this research. This is the clear, unambiguous finding of practically all empirical studies conducted over the last seven or eight years, one that marks a remarkable turnaround in the literature on aid effectiveness, which for decades provided rather inconclusive, often contradictory findings. The overall message from the empirical literature is thus reasonably clear: to the extent that growth is good for poverty reduction, it can reasonably be inferred that poverty would be higher in the absence of aid flows.”[[9]](#footnote-10)

Health Care & Disease Prevention

**The U.S. has some substantial programs intended to reduce the spread of infectious diseases in poor countries around the world. Two of the biggest health threats in poor countries are malaria and HIV/AIDS.**

“USAID has been committed to fighting malaria since the 1950s. Malaria prevention and control remains an important U.S. foreign assistance priority. Effective foreign assistance, including malaria control, is a critical component of the U.S. Government’s national security strategy with investments in global health and malaria contributing to economic and political stability.”[[10]](#footnote-11)

USAID’s programs that it operates or external programs it contributes to that involve combatting malaria include[[11]](#footnote-12):

- [RBM Partnership to End Malaria](https://rollbackmalaria.com/)  
- [World Health Organization Global Malaria Programme](http://www.who.int/malaria/about_us/en/)   
- [Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria](https://www.theglobalfund.org/en/malaria/)  
- USAID funded research and development of malaria vaccines and new antimalarial drugs  
- [U.S. President’s Malaria Initiative (PMI)](http://www.pmi.gov/)   
- Funding for [malaria control efforts to Burundi   
- Malaria control and elimination in Latin America and the Caribbean region](https://www.usaid.gov/what-we-do/global-health/malaria/countries).

**In 2003, Pres. George W. Bush advocated, and Congress began funding, the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), a massive program of foreign aid to combat HIV infection in poor countries. Now in its 15th year, many believe PEPFAR has been effective at controlling the epidemic and saving millions of lives.**[[12]](#footnote-13)

The Peace Corps

**Critiquing the Peace Corps will sound to many like critiquing the institution of grandmother hood. What could possibly be wrong with it? Give it a closer look and ask yourself this question: Is there any real value to people in poor countries, most in civilizations centuries or millennia older than ours, of us sending young people recently graduated from college with no life experience or technical skills, to tell them how their society should improve?**

**When phrased that way, one wonders why such a program was ever started or why it remains popular. The answer to the first is youthful hope and optimism. The answer to the second is that most P.C. volunteers believe that it’s a wonderful experience – for themselves. There are no statistics that have ever been generated proving that the Corps has ever significantly expedited development or well-being in any country in which it has ever operated.**

Democracy & Political Transitions

**USAID operates programs in foreign countries designed to promote the transition toward democracy or to help restore peace after conflicts. Examples of its work include:**

**- A theater program in Nigeria that “calms religious feuding.”**[[13]](#footnote-14) **- A television station in Afghanistan broadcasting messages against religious extremism.**[[14]](#footnote-15) **- Youth discussion groups in Niger to resolve conflict non-violently.**[[15]](#footnote-16)

Private Charities

McBride defines foreign aid as:

“The current foreign aid system was created by the [1961 Foreign Assistance Act](https://www.usaid.gov/who-we-are/usaid-history), which attempted to streamline the government’s efforts to provide assistance around the world. The statute defines aid as “the unilateral transfers of U.S. resources by the U.S. Government to or for the benefit of foreign entities.” These resources include not just goods and funding, but also technical assistance, educational programming, and other services. Recipients include foreign governments, including foreign militaries and security forces, as well as local businesses and charitable groups, international organizations such as the United Nations, and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs).”[[16]](#footnote-17)

That definition is accurate but incomplete. For the purposes of Affirmatives running a plan and proving it’s topical, it might be fine to argue that your plan meets this definition. But Negatives looking for weak spots should begin looking at a big missing aspect to this perspective on foreign aid: Private charity.

While the United States is sometimes criticized for the percentage of its GDP spent on foreign aid by the federal government, this often underestimates American generosity because it ignores the additional billions donated to and spent by private charities. Carol Adelman estimated that private donations sent overseas from the U.S. equaled about 150% of federal foreign aid in 2006.[[17]](#footnote-18) Negatives should research the ongoing efforts of private organizations and use them as inherency arguments against Affirmative cases that increase non-military aid. In many cases, even if the federal government doesn’t have a program or has an underfunded program, private charities are already working on the problem, and may be solving it better than any government could.

Generic Issues

**This outline has only scratched the surface, and no matter how far you research, someone will find obscure programs and policies of which you were unaware. The sharp debater will prepare an arsenal of generic Negative briefs that could be useful against many Affirmative cases. We intend to help you with that by issuing some through Monument as the year unfolds, but we suggest you look into briefing these issues:**

**FOREIGN AID FAILS  
FOREIGN AID WORKS  
AFRICA GROWING ECONOMICALLY (STATUS QUO)  
TERRORISM RISK EXAGGERATED / NO LINK TO GLOBAL POVERTY  
MILITARY AID GOOD  
MILITARY AID BAD  
SOFT POWER GOOD / NEEDED / LOST WITHOUT AID  
SOFT POWER BAD / USELESS / NO LINK TO AID  
ALTERNATE ACTORS (WFP, PRIVATE CHARITIES, EU, JAPAN)**

Worksheet: Status Quo of Foreign Aid

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Answer the following in the spaces provided.

1. In your own words, explain the affirmative and negative positions of the resolution.

2. Match the following institutions with the correct definition.

\_\_\_\_ FAO – Food & Agriculture Organization

\_\_\_\_ FMF – Foreign Military Financing

\_\_\_\_ GDP – Gross Domestic Product

\_\_\_\_ IMF – International Monetary Fund

\_\_\_\_ NGO - Non-Governmental Organization

\_\_\_\_ PVO – Private Voluntary Organization

\_\_\_\_ Sahel

\_\_\_\_ World Bank

\_\_\_\_ WFP – World Food Program

a. The US federal government gives money to foreign governments that must be spent on American-made military equipment, services or training.

b. UN agency that distributes food aid in poor countries.

c. The sum value of all the goods and services produced in a nation. It’s a measure of the economic development of a nation, particularly when divided by a nation’s population (per capita GDP), indicating a rough estimate of how well-off the average person in a country is.

d. A UN agency that provides technical assistance to help modernize and increase food productivity in poor countries.

e. A charitable organization not owned by any branch of any government (but, ironically, which may get much of its funding from governments). Foreign aid is often contracted out to NGOs, who actually put the people on the ground in the affected regions needing aid.

f. A type of NGO, an agency that receives money from private sources but also may register with USAID to apply for grants and do aid projects.

g. An organization founded originally under the auspices of the UN but with its own separate budget and management. The IMF gets money from rich countries and loans it to countries in financial distress to solve currency or budget crisis situations. An example is bailout money loaned to Greece to prevent them from defaulting on government bonds.

h. An organization founded originally under the auspices of the UN but with its own separate budget and management. The World Bank gets money from rich countries and loans it to poor countries for specific development projects that the poor country would not be able to get financed by market investors or at lower interest rates than would otherwise be available. Examples include things like agricultural development projects, waterway improvements, and electrical power delivery.

i. Semi-arid climatic region of Africa just south of the Sahara Desert, as shown in this map.

3. How much of the federal budget constitutes foreign aid? Does this help or hurt affirmatives?

4. What is “soft power” and how can it be argued that foreign aid is a good use of it?

5. Of the issues raised with *food aid*, which do you feel is the most problematic?

6. Of the issues raised with *military aid*, which do you feel is the most problematic?

7. Of the issues raised with *developmental aid*, which do you feel is the most problematic?

8. Of the issues raised with *private charities*, which do you feel is the most problematic?

Answers

1. Affirmative: “The resolution calls on us to reform the entire scope of US federal foreign aid, and we can do that by removing the faults and abuses of the one program we are abolishing. Removing this one program makes all of US foreign aid better by removing a part of it that’s bad.” (Page 3) Negative: “The resolution requires the Affirmative to remove abuses or faults, not remove the aid itself. Make the aid better by changing it, but abolishing it is extra-topical. If abolishing were an option, it would have been stated in the resolution text.” (Page 3)

2. b, i, c, a, e, f, d, h, g

3. “The American public tends to overestimate the size of US federal government foreign aid. Foreign aid, including economic and military, is only around 1% of the federal budget. There may be lots of good reasons to reform or cut it, but Affirmatives are going to be on shaky ground if they argue that they are going to be rescuing taxpayers or solving the federal deficit.” (Page 5)

4. “Foreign aid may be an effective way to influence people toward a more favorable view of the United States. This, in turn, may increase our nation’s ability to move policies and actions by other nations in directions we want, without using threats or force. This favorable foreign policy influence is often referred to in the literature as “soft power.”” (Page 6)

5. Answers will vary and should reference the issues raised in the section.

6. Answers will vary and should reference the issues raised in the section.

7. Answers will vary and should reference the issues raised in the section.

8. Answers will vary and should reference the issues raised in the section.

1. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/reform [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. James McBride 2017. https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/how-does-us-spend-its-foreign-aid [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Info on this list is from Borgen Project, as of 2018. https://borgenproject.org/top-10-recipients-of-u-s-foreign-aid/ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. As of this writing, 2016 is the last year for which full data is available. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Lael Brainard 2007. https://www.brookings.edu/testimonies/foreign-assistance-reform-successes-failures-and-next-steps/ [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Randy Schnepf, Congressional Research Service 2016 https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R41072.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Though not part of the Jones Act, the US food aid shipping requirements are similar, for those who debated that issue last year. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. William Easterly 2006. https://www.cato-unbound.org/2006/04/02/william-easterly/why-doesnt-aid-work Easterly is a prolific and eloquent advocate against foreign aid and his articles would be a rich resource for debaters researching evidence against increasing foreign development aid. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Mark McGillivray 2005. https://www.oecd.org/dev/34353462.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. USAID https://www.usaid.gov/what-we-do/global-health/malaria [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. USAID https://www.usaid.gov/what-we-do/global-health/malaria [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. For example: https://www.pepfar.gov/press/274495.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. https://www.usaid.gov/political-transition-initiatives [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1870/VEI\_Policy\_Final.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1870/VEI\_Policy\_Final.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. James McBride 2017. https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/how-does-us-spend-its-foreign-aid [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. Carol Adelman 2008. https://www.hudson.org/research/5625-the-boom-in-private-giving [↑](#footnote-ref-18)