

The future of USAID and more

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Aid and foreign policy geeks alike should listen to the [latest episode](#) of the *Pod Save the World* podcast, where former National Security Council (NSC) spokesperson under Obama, Tommy Veitor, interviews Gayle Smith, the former head of USAID. Her stint in the administrator role lasted little more than a year due to the change in government (her replacement is yet to be named), but Smith was [recently appointed](#) CEO of Bono's ONE Campaign and had career-long engagement in Africa.

The conversation in the podcast focuses heavily on Sudan and South Sudan, particularly on Smith and Veitor's time working together as the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the transition to independence for the south were negotiated between Juba and Khartoum (Smith served on the NSC prior to her role at USAID). They also discuss the current concerning situation in the region as the civil war in South Sudan rages on (six aid workers and their driver were [killed](#) there just last week), with [famine](#) declared in several regions and hundreds of thousands displaced. Smith argues that there needs to be a concerted effort to 'follow the money' – she is a co-founder of the [Enough Project](#) which has produced multiple reports on how corruption issues contribute to the conflict — and that more attention is needed globally on the worsening humanitarian situation.

The conversation then moves on to broader issues, including Smith's own start as a journalist covering East Africa, and how she moved into policy. Her frustration on how African countries are covered in the press parallel what many of us in Australia often feel about media coverage of PNG and the Pacific.

Trump's [proposed aid cuts](#) of course do not go undiscussed, and Smith makes a strong case for the importance of USAID and the skills and value of its staff, highlighting some of its success stories in recent years. She argues that the agency is in the strongest place it has been in decades (perhaps indirectly addressing [fears](#) that it would go the way of AusAID and be swallowed by the State Department), and augurs that the cuts will do great damage if they go ahead.