

## AMERICA'S ROLE IN THE WORLD

The United States of America is at a crossroads, and every American has a decision to make. ***What kind of country do we want to be?*** See, that's the beauty of being Americans. ***We can choose to be anything we want.***

We can view the United States of America as an idea, a promise, a Dream. We can be a country that deeply believes in our elections, our institutions, our intelligence agencies, checks and balances, and the awesome Americans who work tirelessly for us on every level of our government.

We can be a country that is committed to fiscal responsibility and has: manageable debt; a sensible plan to stabilize our entitlement programs; an uncomplicated tax code; a smart immigration policy; an evolving, self-reliant energy policy; affordable, high-quality health care; and a government that runs like a well-oiled machine. We can be a country that is wowed by the marvels of science; is committed to ground-breaking research and development; supports academic and scientific innovation; and creates a welcoming climate that attracts international capital and talent.

We can be a country that properly educates our children and values a healthy planet. We can be a country that believes that, just because one income level benefits, the others don't have to lose. A country where we can implement policies that help ALL Americans thrive – not with handouts, but with opportunity. A country that understands that to be successful, every player on Team America needs to make sure every other player has access to the very best education, health care, and job opportunities, and that other things – like housing and wages – are fair and equitable for every American.

We can be a United States of America that is the Gold Standard. A country that has unimpeachable integrity. A country that is committed to the rules-based global world order that has successfully governed peace, security, democracy and prosperity since World War II, and one that defends the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other countries. ... a country that is the go-to nation during an international crisis – not

to foot the bill for everyone, but to offer bold solutions and coordinate multilateral responses.

We can be a United States that is a reliable and trustworthy friend. One that is fiercely loyal to our allies. An America that is *partners* with other countries, not one that arrogantly tries to dominate the entire world by acting superior and bossing everyone around.

We can be a United States of America that ensures our light shines far beyond our shores... a country that takes tremendous pride in our accomplishments but that is empathetic and supportive of those with less opportunity. One that champions human rights and works to improve the factors that enable violent extremism such as poverty, inequality and repression by creating economic advancements for those who don't have the opportunities we are blessed with. One that always strives to honor the motto of the United States Army Special Forces: *De Oppresso Liber...To Free the Oppressed...* and anytime anyone asks why we help defenseless people around the world? We say: *Because we are the United States of America, and it's our honor.*

## OR

We can be a country with no heart and no soul... just a place on a map to simply exist. We can be a country where power is concentrated in a small, elite group distinguished by wealth, with a government that focuses on *their* interests, all but guaranteeing significant inequality – even though history tells us that, when that happens, this small, elite group will do anything necessary to keep that power, embracing autocratic ambitions and fascist tendencies.

... or a country where the president and his staff use their positions as a national extortion scam, taking their culture of corruption to Russia-level oligarchy proportions – unprecedentedly and unabashedly using the power and resources of the U.S. government to enrich themselves, their families, and their friends.

We can be a country where those same people – who have been given so many advantages by doing nothing more than being in America – only want to see the bad in it. It's failing. It's in decline. It's

filled with carnage, violence, and danger. American cities are killing fields, overrun with violent gangs and bloodthirsty criminals, and need to be under military control like in Russia and North Korea.

We can be a country that allows our leaders to trample all over the First Amendment, due process, and checks and balances. We can be a country that enables our leaders to curtail civil liberties, reject democratic principles, attack higher education, and strongarm law firms and private corporations. We can be a country whose leaders openly defy federal courts, unconstitutionally bypass Congress, and declare “national emergencies” on false pretenses. We can be a country where our leaders do everything under the sun to stifle free speech; control the news media; suppress inconvenient truths; eliminate dissent; silence political rivals; make political opposition more difficult; and punish those they perceive slight them in any way.

We can be a country that is fiscally irresponsible; is comfortable having a \$1.8 trillion deficit and so much debt that it exceeds 100% of our entire gross domestic product; forsakes the education of our children; is perfectly fine having 38 million people live in poverty, plus staggering inequity in everything from wealth to incomes to education to our criminal justice system; abandons research and development; vilifies science; disregards the health of our planet; and gives tax cuts to the wealthy while cutting funding for everything from preschools to help for the vulnerable to emergency funding for federal programs that provide food, shelter, and housing for Americans after disasters.

We can be a country that turns its immigration enforcement agency into an unconstrained paramilitary force and one that dispatches the military into American streets to incite fear and suppress opposition – but then lets people who violently storm our beloved Capitol and try to disrupt our sacred elections completely off the hook.

We can be a country whose leaders govern through rash impulses and political theatre instead of substance, and who believe: flattery is more valuable than competency; expertise and intelligence are a negative; and empathy is a weakness.

We can be a country whose leaders are crude, harsh and mean; are fueled by ego, anger, grievance, revenge, and retribution; and who gaslight, point fingers, place blame, and provoke envy. We can be a

country whose leaders lie, invent villains, and encourage cruelty just for cruelty's sake. We can be a country whose leaders rewrite history, vilify marginalized groups, and think of Americans as factions divided by race, money and social class – and try hard to make everyone else think that way too. We can be a country whose leaders invent then stoke culture wars and try to weaponize the color of our skin, picking at old wounds and trying to revive outdated narratives.

We can be a country that doesn't have or deserve respect from those around the world. A country that kills survivors clinging to the wreckage of supposed drug boats we bombed and one that invades and takes over other countries with no legal basis or congressional oversight – saber-rattling and running roughshod over everyone in a reign of aggression and chaos, free from the rules-based international order established after World War II.

We can be a country that doesn't help desperate and defenseless nations; starts trade wars; withdraws from major global agreements; abandons our faithful military allies like the Syrian Democratic Forces; reneges on our promise to protect the incredibly brave men and women who risked their lives to serve alongside us in Afghanistan; and is rude to NATO members and world leaders, treating our most trusted allies like they are enemies – insulting them, bullying them, and threatening them right in the Oval Office.

*It's time to choose. We can have any kind of country we want.*



My fellow Americans, we are awesome people, but we have been asleep at the wheel for far too long – and this started way before Donald J. Trump.

We have allowed our politics to become a reality television show that we seem disengaged from; like we're watching an unavoidable train wreck from the side of the tracks. Our political state of play reminds me of those tricky Chinese finger traps we played with as kids

– the bamboo contraptions where you stick one of your fingers in each end. After fighting it the entire recess, you finally realized that the harder you pulled, the tighter it became.

It's abundantly clear that finding solutions to our problems is not the goal of most of our politicians and it hasn't been for a long time. Instead of constructing an arsenal of intelligent and thoughtful ideas, most of them lob Molotov cocktails of anger, frustration, blame, and fear. They distract with hateful attacks on one another; government shutdowns; whataboutism and false equivalencies; scapegoating; and – in the case of the Trump/Vance administration – made-up crime sprees; fake national emergencies; “threats” from peaceful protesters; plastic straws; windmills; the flushing power of toilets; pronouns; the “evilness” of DEI; and who is and is not “woke” (whatever that means).

Meanwhile, our total public debt is over \$39 trillion, our federal budget deficit is \$1.8 trillion, and all three major credit rating agencies have downgraded the U.S. debt rating. Our checks and balances are way out of whack; our First Amendment rights are being trampled on and our civil liberties are at risk; government waste is colossal; and lobbyists almost exclusively write our public policy. Almost 38 million Americans are trapped in poverty; our inequality gaps in practically every category are massive; and our Medicare and Social Security funds are insolvent. We *still* have broken health care, education, and criminal justice systems, and our immigration policy is in total chaos.

Our closest allies are confused, deeply concerned, and making alternative plans; Russia and China have exploited our internal division and even made it far worse by interfering in our sacred elections; our exit from Afghanistan was a disaster; we are invading and/or bombing countries on a seemingly monthly basis; and Xi Jinping, Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong-un are essentially shooting us the bird.

This snake oil, smoke and mirrors, side show approach to governing is absurd. THIS IS THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. We should be way past this by now.

The most damaging consequence of us allowing our leaders to distract us with shiny objects and drive us to the lowest-common denominator is that we have not had a long-term, comprehensive

strategy *for decades*... which is *not good* because, as Sun Tzu said in The Art of War, “Every battle is won before it’s ever fought.”

In the absence of any kind of strategy, we have relied on our strong economy and decades of global goodwill to sustain us while we fly blind with no plan and no navigation system. It’s unsustainable.

You know who doesn’t fly blind with no navigation? China.

China has had a strategy – and followed it come hell or high water – since Mao Zedong founded the People’s Republic of China in 1949. Mao (a.k.a. the Great Helmsman) first detailed his vision for winning what he considered a long-drawn-out war in a series of 1938 speeches he collectively called *On Protracted War*. His idea was that a weaker force could defeat a stronger one through a long-term, multi-stage war of attrition (meaning, essentially wearing them down). Uh oh.

Mao originally developed his theory in response to the Second Sino-Japanese War, but this is clearly the strategy the Chinese are following in their current quest to defeat the United States.

It appears to me that we are already well into Phase Two of China’s grand plan. Very regrettably for you and me, since both Republicans and Democrats in the U.S. Congress and the White House were not paying attention (*for decades*), the Chinese blew right through Phase One, known as the *strategic defensive* phase.

In Mao’s *strategic defensive* phase, the stronger enemy is on the offensive and the weaker force retreats strategically. But don’t mistake “retreats” for inaction. Phase One is not passive; its preparatory. In this case, the communist forces (China) prioritized survival, concentrating on building a sustainable base, gathering intelligence on the advancing “enemy” (the U.S.), and building strength for the future. The entire point of Phase One is to transform the revolutionary force from a weak movement into one capable of transitioning to the next two phases: the *strategic stalemate* and, ultimately, the *strategic offensive*.

The Chinese slayed Phase One. In 1978, they started opening their economy and implementing substantial reforms. Since then, gross domestic product (GDP) growth has averaged over 9 percent a year, over 800 million people have been lifted out of poverty (representing

about 75 percent of global poverty reduction), and they have made sizeable gains in access to health, education, and other services.

Now an upper-middle-income country, China is now the world's second largest economy, with a nominal GDP of \$19.4 trillion. While the United States is still number one, with a nominal GDP of \$30.62 trillion, purchasing power parity (PPP) adjusted GDP puts China at \$43 trillion to America's \$27.6 trillion (this number adjusts currencies based on what goods a country can buy rather than currency exchange rates, which basically adjusts for the difference in the cost of living among countries). For 2026, these numbers are estimated to be \$45 trillion and \$28 trillion, respectively. At the end of 2025, China held \$750 billion in U.S. debt.

Credit Suisse's (now UBS) 2018 Global Wealth Report revealed that "aggregate global wealth rose by \$14 trillion to \$317 trillion, representing a growth rate of 4.6 percent." But here was the big red flag for the U.S.: "China was the main beneficiary of the newly recorded wealth. China is now clearly established in second place in the world wealth hierarchy... China overtook Japan with respect to the number of ultra-high net worth individuals in 2009, total wealth in 2011, and the number of millionaires in 2014." The following year, the same report revealed that "China overtook the United States to become the country with most people in the top 10 percent of global wealth distribution." The 2025 report revealed that the "U.S. and mainland China jointly account for more than half of the entire personal wealth."

China is now the world's largest exporter of goods, expanding its exports over 25-fold over the past two decades. In 2024, its exports amounted to \$3.57 trillion, accounting for 15.9 percent of all global exports. To put this in perspective, that basically means that China was responsible for around one in every seven export dollars worldwide.

One of the most consequential moves China made during Phase One was to begin pursuing economic self-reliance by actively weaning its economy from the United States – enabling China to withstand both of Donald Trump's Trade Wars (one launched in 2018 and the other in 2025).

Far from being crushed by Trade War 2.0, as our Dear Leader intended and predicted, China's GDP expanded five percent in 2025 when adjusted for deflation, meeting Beijing's official growth target.

Although China's growth slowed as the year went on – suggesting a potentially lower rate of expansion in 2026 – its trade surplus reached a record \$1.2 trillion in 2025, up 20 percent from 2024, which could cushion it in the months to come.

Meanwhile – far from our Dear Leader's promise that his steep tariffs would reduce U.S. imports, shrink our trade deficit, and bring American manufacturing “roaring back” – beginning in April, U.S. manufacturing employment declined every month in 2025 (factories employed 72,000 fewer people at the end of the year than when President Trump declared “Liberation Day” in April). This extended a contraction that has seen over 200,000 roles vanish since 2023.

American imports *grew* in 2025 and the trade deficit in goods hit a record high. It's true that the total trade deficit (i.e., trade in both goods and services) shrank slightly as growth in exports narrowly outpaced growth in imports. However, that was solely the result of an expanding trade surplus in services. Even though the global tariffs announced by the Trump/Vance administration in April were designed to specifically target the trade imbalance in goods, the trade deficit in physical goods rose to a record \$1.24 trillion, up from \$1.22 trillion the year before.

In China's quest for self-reliance, Beijing's first order of business was to identify domestic “chokepoints” (i.e., sectors where it was too reliant on the West) and worked to diffuse these points of leverage, strengthening its domestic industries and developing alternative sources to the United States for resources that might be tight.

Although this cost them a fortune and was at times inefficient, this strategy allowed China to turn the tables and establish choke points to pressure the *American* economy.

... which has worked beautifully for them. Their switcharoo is the reason Beijing was able to call Donald Trump's bluff – and why he retreated – over and over again in 2025. Our president obviously forgot (or more likely never understood) that U.S. negotiations with China are not like those in the Middle East, where the U.S. has leverage thanks to

weapons systems, security umbrellas, superior technology, and a U.N. Security Council veto.

In quite an opposite scenario, China and the U.S. are bound by mutual dependence – which means that bullying, bluffing and bombastic tactics will not work. While China depends on America for advanced chip design and aerospace technology, America depends on China for about 70 percent of our rare earth imports, over 70 percent of lithium-ion battery imports, and A LOT of semiconductors and pharmaceuticals.

American importers have little choice but to continue buying smartphones, laptops, lithium-ion batteries, etc. from China because no other country can produce them at the levels Americans buy them. That's just a fact.

Bloomberg tracks 13 critical industries and says China dominates in five of them (unmanned aerial vehicles, solar panels, graphene, high-speed rail and electric vehicles/lithium batteries) – and is “catching up fast” in all the rest. China already leads the world in producing active pharmaceutical ingredients, aluminum, batteries, bullet trains, drones, consumer electronics, electric vehicles, equipment for 5G, ships, solar power, steel, and wind turbines.

While our Democratic and Republican leaders were repeatedly hitting the snooze button, China was amassing dominant control over global rare-earth mining and processing and now produces and/or controls roughly 90 percent of the world's supply of these and other critical minerals ... oh, you know, the very ones the U.S. military needs for things like drones, fighter jets, radar systems and precision-guided munitions. In fact, there aren't many things this doesn't affect, like medical lasers, electric-vehicle engines, and most consumer electronics.

So, naturally, after President Trump threatened China with “100 percent tariffs” on October 10, 2025 and warned that he would cancel a planned meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping, China immediately announced sweeping countertariffs of its own, complete with strict restrictions on rare earth exports.

So, naturally, President Trump quickly backed down, posting an extremely rare – and off-brand – chummy message on social media about his desire to “help China, not hurt it,” and that, *of course*

the U.S.-China summit would take place after all. He even agreed to suspend a policy he had enacted months earlier that had expanded the number of military-related Chinese companies that Americans were not allowed to do business with.

One of the projects China designed in its pursuit of economic self-reliance – something called *Made in China 2025*, launched in 2015 – is a state-run initiative that uses government subsidies to upgrade its manufacturing sector from low-cost goods to an innovative, highly advanced dynamo. As a result, China’s manufacturing ascendancy happened quickly during Phase One. The share of Chinese global production increased from 3 percent to over 30 percent between 1990 and 2022 and is projected to account for 45 percent of global manufacturing by 2030.

While the Trump/Vance administration cuts/delays/reallocates billions of dollars of funding provided for by the CHIPS and Science Act without providing an alternative investment plan (their “strategy” relies mainly on high tariffs and tighter export controls), China remains steadfast in its commitment to funding the research and development and manufacturing of “hard technologies” like quantum computing, new AI models, robotics, and semiconductors.

< Sidebar: As it stands today, the U.S. accounts for 17 percent of global manufacturing (and shrinking) while China controls 30 percent (and growing). In August 2022, the U.S. Congress passed the CHIPS and Science Act, authorizing around \$280 billion over ten years for U.S. research, development and manufacturing of semiconductors (and research and development money for artificial intelligence and clean energy). This legislation was in response to the fact that the U.S. manufactures only 12 percent of the world’s semiconductors – a significant drop from around 40 percent in 1990. This is a top national security issue because most of the existing semiconductor plants are near China. Just one Taiwanese company, for example, manufactures over 70 percent of all microcontrollers, a chip used in practically every vehicle in the entire world. (Please believe, I recognize that \$280 billion is a ton of money and, if we invest in things like this, cuts will have to be made elsewhere... which we’ll get to in a few minutes.)

Within two years of the CHIPS Act passing, the U.S. Commerce Department reported that the U.S. was on track to manufacture almost 30 percent of the world's leading-edge chips by 2032. In its 2025 report, the Semiconductor Industry Association said the legislation had ignited over 100 projects in 28 states, totaling over half-a-trillion dollars in private investment. These projects were expected to create and support over 500,000 American jobs and help triple U.S. chip-making capacity by 2032. Projects included the construction of new manufacturing facilities for advanced logic, memory, analog, and legacy chips; expansions of existing sites; and facilities that supply the key materials and equipment used in chip manufacturing. >

The CHIPS Act certainly wasn't perfect. *But it was at least a start* – at a time when China's research and development budget has been growing at an average of 8.9 percent a year... and that was *before* Beijing announced a new \$138 billion state-backed research and development fund in March 2025.

China doubled down on this the following October – nine months into Trade War 2.0 – when Xi Jinping announced yet another new strategy that will take “extraordinary measures” to help China secure a global lead in advanced manufacturing and technology, saying, “The balance of global power is undergoing profound readjustment, and break-throughs in a new phase of technological revolution and industrial transformation are accelerating.”

“Unilateralism and protectionism are raising their heads, and the threats from hegemony and power politics are escalating.” So, China must “seize the window of opportunity to consolidate and expand our strengths, break past bottlenecks and surmount weaknesses, to gain the strategic initiative in intense international competition.”

Nevertheless, Donald Trump immediately went after the legislation upon his return to the White House – again, with zero strategy of his own to replace it – calling it a “horrible, horrible thing” and telling lawmakers to “get rid” of the law in his joint address to Congress on March 4, 2025... which means we are likely to continue to fall behind.

The Information Technology & Innovation Foundation warns that recent data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and

Development (OECD) shows that “U.S. growth in Gross Domestic Expenditures on R&D (GERD) is slowing, while China’s has remained relatively high and stable. In three key categories of research and development that contribute to GERD, U.S. spending growth is now only a fraction of China’s. Even when adjusted for GDP, China’s growth still exceeds that of the United States. At this rate, China will soon surpass the United States in gross R&D investment.”

“Moreover, because Chinese R&D is less expensive than U.S. R&D, China likely already conducts more R&D activity than the United States... for every U.S. R&D worker supported by \$100,000 of R&D spend, a Chinese firm spending \$100,000 on R&D can throw 2.3 workers at the [same] problem.”

Even before the Trump/Vance administration started slashing funding for research and development; spreading misinformation and perpetuating mistrust in basic science; driving talented researchers out of the country; and declaring war on our most prestigious academic centers – essentially sabotaging America’s long-standing supremacy in scientific leadership – Chinese biotech companies were developing drugs faster and cheaper than ours. In 2020, China was involved in less than five percent of pharmaceutical transactions worth \$50 million or more. Four years later, that number had risen to almost 30 percent.

Now, because of the administration’s war on vaccines, China is even better positioned to overtake us as the world’s pharmaceutical leader. In January 2026, Moderna – a leading U.S. pharmaceutical and biotechnology company – announced it had scrapped plans to invest in new late-stage vaccine trials because of growing opposition to immunizations from U.S. officials.

At the World Economic Forum in Davos, Moderna CEO Stéphane Bancel said in an interview with Bloomberg TV that companies like his “cannot make a return on investment if you don’t have access to the U.S. market” and that regulatory delays and a lack of support from U.S. authorities make the market size “much smaller.”

This is one of the more outrageously irresponsible decisions being made by the Trump/Vance administration – and the list is getting long. Putting a pin in the fact that they are making life far less safe for many Americans, in 2016, the U.S. government invested heavily in a vaccine

technology called mRNA, a flexible, rapid-response tech that can be reprogrammed for other pathogens after learning its genetic sequence (scientists call this a “platform” because it can be adapted quickly for new or mutating viruses). This tech is now being tested for personalized cancer vaccines, autoimmune therapies, and treatments for rare diseases.

The Department of Defense and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency have also invested in research and development for mRNA after realizing its potential for neutralizing biological threats, including those that may be weaponized.

These investments paid off big time. American mRNA technology is widely considered to be one of the most momentous medical advancements in decades. This breakthrough was the reason scientists were able to design a vaccine for Covid-19 so quickly, saving an estimated 20 million lives worldwide, including one million in America (human trials for the vaccine began in under 70 days).

Astonishingly, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recently announced it was unwinding 22 mRNA vaccine development projects under the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA), canceling almost \$500 million in investments.

The long-term, real-world consequences of the administration’s snidely cavalier disdain for science is chilling. Thanks to the Trump/Vance administration, the European Research Council, the funding organization for academic work in the European Union, has seen a surge in applications, including nearly three times the number of American applicants compared with 2024. Seventy-five percent (75%) of the scientists and researchers who responded to a recent Nature survey said they are considering positions abroad.

Funds for the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Food and Drug Administration have been decimated. The Trump/Vance administration pulled one billion dollars of funding from Johns Hopkins, a university world renowned for pioneering medical and public health research (they are suing). The University of Pennsylvania – famous for its work in mRNA vaccine technology and CAR T-cell therapies – originally lost \$175 million (it was later restored). Columbia – distinguished for its high-level research

in medicine, physics and engineering, especially nuclear science, laser technology and medical imaging – lost \$400 million (this was later reduced to \$180 million). Harvard University – revered for researching almost everything – initially lost \$3.2 billion (a federal judge later ruled the cuts illegal).

The National Science Foundation – an independent government agency that once directly supported 357,600 students and researchers – is awarding new grants at the slowest pace in at least 35 years (this includes STEM education, and research for biology, chemistry, climate and computer science, engineering, geosciences, math, manufacturing innovations, physics, social sciences, and weather forecasting).

A study published in JAMA Internal Medicine in November 2025 revealed that, from the end of February to August 2025, grants for 383 clinical trials were cancelled, affecting over 74,000 trial participants. Over 100 of the axed grants were for cancer research.

Although the Trump/Vance administration claims they are simply eliminating wasteful “woke programs” that “poison the minds of Americans,” what they are really doing is cutting funding for neurodegenerative diseases (Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s, ALS), cancer (breast, ovarian, pancreatic, and others), mental health, diabetes, strokes, sickle cell anemia, and infectious diseases. This is devastating because around 40 percent of Americans will be diagnosed with cancer at some point in their life. Strokes are the leading cause of adult disability in the United States and roughly 1 in 4 Americans over the age of 25 will have one in their lifetime.

This is insanity. Without question, one of our greatest national strengths is our revolutionary, leading-edge scientific research. Our research solves complex problems, advances technological innovation, improves public health, and strengthens national security. It propels economic growth and prosperity – generating jobs, creating new industries, boosting GDP, and ensuring the United States remains globally competitive.

Our research universities are immensely important engines of innovation, and federal support for them has been a driving force in our economic and military competitiveness as well as our biotechnology and pharmaceutical industries. The United States has almost 300 Nobel

Prizes in the sciences, with Britain coming in second with only around one-third of that number.

When the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) was created in 1946, the average life expectancy in the United States was around 66 years. Today it is 78 years. In the mid-1970s, the five-year cancer-survival rate in the United States was 49 percent. Today it is 70 percent... with the most significant survival gains happening among people diagnosed with cancers that are generally more fatal, like myeloma, liver cancer, and lung cancer. Between 1991 and 2022 alone, the death rate from cancer in the U.S. fell by 34 percent, meaning 4.5 million fewer people died of cancer than otherwise would have.

The Trump/Vance administration is jeopardizing eighty years of American greatness that has not only transformed our country but has transformed the entire world.

And for what? It can't be about money because, when it comes to scientific research, the return on our investment is enormous. A study in the *Journal of Clinical Oncology* says that every \$326 that the U.S. government spends researching cancer extends a human life by one year. Other studies have found that every dollar invested in research and development returns around \$5 in economic gains – and this doesn't consider other benefits to our GDP, like people living longer and having more leisure time.

A study from American University's Institute for Macroeconomic and Policy Analysis found that “budget cuts to public R&D will significantly hurt the economy in the long run, with large negative effects on GDP, investment, and government revenue. A 25 percent cut to public R&D spending would reduce GDP by an amount comparable to the decline in GDP during the Great Recession. Cutting annual public R&D spending in half would making the average American approximately \$10,000 poorer (in today's dollars) than the value implied by the historical trend in GDP. Cutting public R&D would also shrink federal government revenue. A 25 percent cut in R&D would decrease revenue by approximately 4.3 percent annually, while a 50 percent cut would decrease it by 8.6 percent annually.”

... and with their eyes on the prize, China just keeps marching on.

For decades – as our leader’s turned their attention to wars in the Middle East and domestic political squabbles – China was playing three-dimensional chess, developing not just cutting-edge industries, but entire technical ecosystems that all work in tandem with one another. Because China is designing their industries to overlap and interlock, they can leverage them in ways that significantly multiplies their efficiency, effectiveness and profitability.

They are also making sure they have the human resources necessary to continue their strategy far into the future. While the Trump/Vance administration focuses on fueling culture wars in our public schools through things like “critical race theory,” who uses what bathroom, and putting the Ten Commandments in every classroom, China is focused on establishing national laboratories to develop top-level talent from an early age, giving tremendous state support to young scientists and engineers.

Every year, universities in China graduate roughly 3.5 million STEM graduates (science, technology, engineering and math), just short of the number of total graduates (associate, bachelor’s, master’s and PhD programs) in all disciplines in the United States.

These graduates are busy working on things like a low-earth orbit (LEO) satellite Internet service to compete with Western commercial satellite Internet services; future robot moon landings to follow-up those in 2020 and 2024 that returned with lunar samples; tweaks to the Tiangong (“Heavenly Palace”) space station China established in 2022; developing antisatellite weapons that can cripple GPS and other U.S. space-based systems; and the space-based data centers that China plans to use to expand its already significant presence in space (this is in addition to their plans to expand resource development like asteroid mining; space debris monitoring; and an expansion into space tourism).

While America spends billions on reheating antiquated design concepts and overhauling outdated infrastructure, China is investing in infrastructure straight out of The Jetsons television show – enjoying practically full 5G coverage, a matrix of bullet trains, and almost nine times as many robots as the U.S. (and more than the rest of the world combined... in 2024, over two million robots were working in Chinese factories).

While Donald Trump, JD Vance, and most Republicans double-down on America remaining a petro-state, China is fast becoming what people in Silicon Valley call the world's first electrostate – meaning, a nation that dominates the global energy transition by pivoting from fossil fuel dependency to an economy driven by electricity, clean tech manufacturing, and advanced digital infrastructure. Even its 30,000 miles of high-speed rail run on electricity.

Donald Trump often says that China remains completely reliant on coal and that “we’re putting ourselves at a disadvantage” believing their “climate fairy tales,” but unsurprisingly that is a false premise. China’s national consumption of oil is expected to peak by 2027, then begin to fall. While China is still forced to rely on coal through its evolution from fossil fuels to green technologies – – it is still the world’s largest consumer of coal, accounting for 58 percent of global coal use in 2024 – – they have already made massive strides in the transition. By mid-2025, the share of coal in their power generation had dropped to a nine-year low of 51 percent and made-up only 34 percent of China’s total installed capacity, while non-fossil fuel power generation accounted for over 60 percent of total installed capacity – making it the new dominant source of China’s electricity.

China’s huge shift from fossil fuels to becoming an electrostate is a brilliant move because it has allowed China – in classic Phase One fashion – to blunt a major U.S. pressure point. Now that the Chinese are curbing their domestic fossil fuel addiction, the United States can no longer compromise their economy by choking off supply of the foreign oil they once heavily depended on.

< This is the main reason the Trump/Vance administration’s plan to topple Venezuela and Iran to, (supposedly) in part, cut off China’s oil supply will not be effective long-term. Sure, it may sting a little at first, but China has lots of crude in storage and had already started reducing its imports of Iranian oil while bringing in more of Russia’s ... but more on this later. >

Not so long ago, in 2013, China became the world’s largest net oil importer, meaning its reliance on foreign crude – which accounted for roughly half of global demand growth – had become a major

vulnerability for them (not to mention the country's smog problem was becoming unbearable).

But then – surprise, surprise – Xi Jinping took a quick look at his notes from Mao's Phase One playbook and put an end to *that* nonsense. “The energy rice bowl must be held in our own hands,” he told his advisers – then launched an energy revolution for the ages.

China generates more electricity every year than the United States and the European Union *combined*, and A LOT of it is now generated by nuclear, hydro, solar and wind.

In the first half of 2025, China alone installed over twice as much solar capacity as the rest of the world. China is not only building hundreds of square miles of solar panels, but they are building many on the Tibetan Plateau, the world's highest – almost 10,000 feet above sea level. Why? Because the panels soak up brighter sunlight since the air is so thin. At last count, these solar panels cover an area seven times the size of Manhattan. When the sun isn't shining, wind turbines and hydropower dams located on the Plateau pick up the slack.

In the same time that it took two U.S. nuclear power reactors to be completed – seven years late and \$17 billion over budget – China built 13 new reactors and had 33 more under construction. China's nuclear power generation capacity is expected to surpass America's by 2030, making them the new global leader in nuclear power – a technology WE invented. < Even though the U.S. has more nuclear power reactors than any other country, we're way behind in building new ones. >

China is also going all-in on nuclear fusion. Nuclear fusion – often called the holy grail of clean energy – is the melding together of atoms to release extraordinary energy, providing a potentially limitless source of carbon-free electricity that never has meltdowns and leaves no long-lasting radioactive waste. Nuclear fusion creates 4 times more energy per kilogram of fuel than nuclear fission and 4 *million* times more than burning coal.

China's state-owned nuclear company says nuclear fusion is “the main racetrack in future scientific and technological competition among the great powers” – which is probably a safe bet.

< Note: Nuclear power refers to electricity generated through nuclear fission, or the splitting of heavy atoms like Uranium. Nuclear

fusion is the opposite process, combining light atoms like Hydrogen to release energy. Fusion is still an experimental, extremely expensive, and technically challenging endeavor and cannot be used to generate electricity for the grid yet. It also has enormous potential as a source for nuclear-weapons development >.

The good news is that, from the start, the United States has led in nuclear fusion, pulling off the first-ever controlled fusion ignition at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory's Ignition Facility in 2022. This breakthrough is widely hailed as one of the most impressive scientific feats of the 21st century. Yay, America!!

Since then, private investment in the 53 fusion companies around the world totals almost \$10 billion (up five times from 2021), and more than half of the fusion energy startups are based in the United States. By some accounts, fusion will be at least a \$1 trillion market by 2050.

The bad news is that we're in danger of falling behind. Again. Not only are the Chinese seriously outpacing us in nuclear power, but they are also making remarkable breakthroughs in next-generation nuclear technology in general (China is now operating the world's first fourth-generation nuclear reactor, personally developing 90 percent of the technology). From 2008 to 2023, China's share of nuclear patents grew from 1.3 percent to 13.4 percent, and they now lead in the number of nuclear fusion patent applications. China has ten times the number of doctorates in fusion science and engineering as the United States.

They are also dedicating way more public money to the effort. Beijing is reportedly investing \$1.5 billion a year in fusion while our annual federal investment has hovered around \$800 million for years. This is frustrating because, in 2020, hundreds of scientists published a long-range plan for the United States to deliver fusion energy and to advance plasma science.

But the United States Congress chose to do nothing. After it was announced that a massive state-funded Chinese project called the Comprehensive Research Facility for Fusion Technology (CRAFT) was close to coming online – complete with a \$700 million 100-acre fusion campus in eastern China that will house a new tokamak (a magnetic confinement machine designed to harness fusion energy by containing superheated plasma in a vacuum vessel) – Andrew Holland,

the CEO of the Fusion Industry Association, noticed that China's CRAFT facility looked an awful lot like one included in the plan our scientists released in 2020: "Congress has not done anything to spend the money to put this into action," he said. "We published this thing, and the Chinese then went and built it."

Not only are they copying our designs and moving fast to make them a reality, but they are also investing heavily in advanced material development – quickly cornering the supply chain for many of the materials needed for fusion projects (think high power magnets, specific metals, capacitors, and power semiconductors).

... and that just covers the fusion projects China is somewhat transparent about. In January 2025, satellite photos were released that appear to show a new large-scale laser fusion research center in Mianyang, China. Analysts believe this facility is likely focused on inertial confinement fusion (ICF), which rapidly compresses and heats tiny fuel pellets until their atoms fuse. This allows scientists to replicate and study the effects of nuclear weapons without performing an actual nuclear test. These types of facilities can also work on pulsed-power fusion. Pulsed power releases stored electrical energy in short, intense bursts to compress and heat fuel to extreme temperatures (kind of like a controlled lightning bolt).

Either way, these types of military fusion programs are positioning China to lead in next-level, pioneering nuclear-weapons science.

We can't let this go unanswered. President Trump boosted support for nuclear, including fusion, in his first term. In his second, he *says* the administration has prioritized fusion, with proposals aiming for over \$1 billion a year for Fusion Energy Sciences and a newly created Office of Fusion to accelerate commercialization. There is also \$1 billion in loan guarantees to restart the Three Mile Island power plant and funding for private-public partnerships, like a \$130 million milestone program for fusion R&D.

But this is not nearly enough money *or* attention. In February 2025, several U.S. senators and fusion experts published a report to help ensure the U.S. maintains its scientific leadership in fusion and "catalyze private sector involvement and accelerate innovation." The report calls for a one-time, \$10 billion investment to build critical

research infrastructure, accelerate commercialization-focused R&D programs, and support the eventual demonstration of fusion pilot plants through cost-share programs and supply chain development. < Again, I recognize this is a ton of money and cuts will have to be made elsewhere... read on! >

In classic Phase One style, China's energy revolution kills multiple birds with one stone. Not only does it call for widespread domestic electrification, but also for dominant green energy exports... which means that China is becoming a green-energy superpower... which means they are quickly conquering the global market.

From solar farms to wind turbines to batteries to electric buses, Beijing's lead as the world's green salesman is overwhelming. Chinese firms produce over 80 percent of the world's solar panels, around 92 percent of solar cells, and roughly 98 percent of solar wafers. They own the global wind energy sector, controlling over 60 percent of wind turbine production capacity. Chinese manufacturers account for over 70 percent of new global wind installations and China holds around 90 percent of global wind energy patents.

Chinese firms control 75-80 percent of global lithium-ion battery cell production capacity and over half of the global battery material export trade, which leads to...

China's electric vehicle (EV) manufacturing industry – which is largely powered by their new non-fossil fuel power generation – crushes even the closest competitor. China now has over 200 brands offering electric cars and half of its domestic new cars are powered by batteries.

The leading Chinese electric vehicle maker BYD (short for “Build Your Dreams”) – which, in an 2011 interview, Elon Musk laughed off as bush league but now expresses great admiration for – passed Tesla as the world's leader in electric car sales in 2025 and is building assembly lines in Brazil, Hungary, Thailand and Uzbekistan, with future ones planned for Indonesia and Mexico.

BYD delivered over a million vehicles beyond China's borders in 2025, over double the year before. In the first quarter of 2025, BYD's market value hit almost \$162 billion – more than the value of Ford, General Motors, and Volkswagen combined.

Not only are China's sales numbers larger, but their cars are also better. Xiaomi – often called the “Apple of China” – offers cars that are setting records at major racetracks around the world, and some Chinese EVs can now travel 500 miles on a single charge and recharge to 80 percent in under twenty minutes.

After visiting China multiple times, Ford Motors Company's CEO Jim Farley said its electric vehicle progress is “the most humbling thing” he has ever seen and poses a serious threat to the American automaker: “They have far superior in-vehicle technology... the quality of their vehicles is far superior to what I see in the West. We are in a global competition with China, and it's not just EVs. And if we lose this, we do not have a future Ford.” Uh oh.

GUYS, THIS IS RIDICULOUS. WE ARE THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. THE GREAT NEWS IS THAT I KNOW WHAT THE PROBLEM IS. AND NOW THAT WE HAVE IDENTIFIED THE PROBLEM, WE CAN FIX IT.

The problem is our two-party political system. PERIOD. The fact that we have no long-term plan or strategy for practically anything – along with the vicious, fangs-out gang wars played out among political junkies – all comes down to Social Psych 101.

Realistic Conflict Theory explains that hostilities and resentments emerge when groups compete over what they believe to be limited but valuable resources. These emotions are amplified when the groups feel there can only be one winner and one loser (i.e., one group's gain is another's loss). This causes feelings of prejudice and discrimination and leads to groups developing negative stereotypes and antagonistic attitudes toward their “competitors.” Sound familiar?

As a result, it then becomes all about – not the American people or solving our problems or securing our future – but *the game of politics.*

For instance, instead of understanding that solar and wind projects and subsidies for electric vehicles and heat pumps aren't necessarily about “libtards” being “woke,” the current American president – – who believes coal is “beautiful” and “clean” and who calls petroleum the “liquid gold under our feet,” which is what Jed Clampett called it in 1962 – – energizes his political base by saying the green revolution is

the “greatest hoax in history” and that Chinese manufacturers sell wind turbines (which, of course, are the “SCAM OF THE CENTURY!”) to “stupid people.”

His comments underscore how we have allowed the Republican Party to capture the energy narrative and incorrectly frame the issue as some hippy-dippy, anti-oil and gas industry conspiracy – which is just not true. Every time Republicans say things like green technologies are the “greatest con job” ever, they think they are really stick’n it to those dumb tie-dye liberals in California. But what they’re really doing is sabotaging America’s ability to remain a dominant superpower.

It’s true that moving from a high-carbon to a low-carbon energy system will protect our environment. But it’s as much about moving to renewable resources before non-renewable ones run out. It’s as much about securing an energy source that is less economically volatile and more diversified both geologically and technologically – two things that will greatly strengthen our national security. It’s as much about market forces and straight-up economics. It’s about not only the U.S domestic market but even more about the world market.

The thing that makes ZERO sense is that the same people who are trying to kill solar and wind projects and subsidies for electric vehicles and heat pumps are the same people who say they want to revive U.S. manufacturing.

But revive it for *what*?

Sure, the pandemic proved we need to bring vital goods back from overseas and that we must stop solely relying on “just in time” supply chains. And – yes – it’s true the U.S. won World War II in part by producing more of everything than our enemies. In fact, in 1942 an American factory assembled a supply ship in less than five days.

But America no longer has that type of manufacturing capability. Hey, I’m all for building it back! But I hate to break it to the Trump/Vance administration: If we’re not going to sell our products to the world market, there is really no need to. Our domestic needs simply don’t justify it. This is yet another reason – out of many – their trade wars make no sense (read more on p. 637). Being a good ally isn’t

about just about being nice to our friends. If we push everyone away, who are we going to sell our stuff to? Does Donald Trump & Co. ever even think about that reality?

On the flip side, it will be a slam dunk for America if we decide to go all-in on global trade. Many analysts say there is potentially a \$130 *trillion* global market opportunity in clean energy technology through 2050. Right now, the United States accounts for only 6 percent of those exports – so just imagine the possible upside!

< Sidebar: A quick word about “globalization,” defined here as the interconnectedness and interdependence of world economies, cultures, and populations, driven by cross-border trade in goods, services, tech, and capital flows.

Some people say globalization has resulted in wage stagnation for low-skilled U.S. workers and has led to job losses through outsourcing.

Without question, global trade has hit certain sectors of our economy hard. That said, globalization is not wholly responsible for the displacement of the American worker. Even if we halt all progression toward globalization, including imports and outsourcing, advancements in technology alone are causing some jobs to become obsolete. The coolest thing about a capitalist economy, however, is that it can offer everyone an opportunity to adjust as the demands of the economy evolve (read more on p. 201 of the *Policy Guide*).

The great news is that, if we are *proactive*, we can make the landing as soft as possible for those who may face hardships because of these shifts. Believe me, it is far better to endure a little pain now – while we still have control over how to absorb it – than to live in denial until the music just stops and there aren’t enough chairs... *which is exactly why we need a comprehensive, well-planned strategy.* >

A two-part report from Boston Consulting Group – one the world’s “Big Three” management consulting firms – found that the U.S. has an opportunity to boost economic growth, create millions of jobs, and solidify America’s position as a global leader in the clean energy marketplace by creating an unparalleled advantage across ten clean

energy technologies (the think tank Third Way and Breakthrough Energy commissioned the report).

The first part of the report revealed six of these – electric vehicles, clean steel, low-carbon hydrogen, long-duration energy storage, direct air capture, and advanced nuclear small modular reactors – and estimated that “American players could enjoy a cumulative domestic market in these technologies that will be worth from \$9 trillion to \$10 trillion from now through 2050.”

But it gets even better: “U.S. players stand to gain far more by developing a competitive edge that gives them a leading position in global markets. We estimate that the cumulative global serviceable addressable market (SAM) for U.S. companies in the six technologies – which encompasses all countries where US exports are possible – could be worth a staggering \$60 trillion through 2050 in prioritized value chain segments.”

The second part of the report added geothermal, carbon capture utilization and storage, offshore wind, and solar to the list and surmised that “the priority value chain segments within these four technologies will have a cumulative global market size of \$70 trillion between now and 2050, and U.S. industries are well-positioned to grab a large share.”

So, here’s the trillion-dollar question: If we do decide to bring our manufacturing, in Donald Trump’s words, “roaring back,” why on God’s green earth would we not kill multiple birds with one stone when we do it – *like China does?*

Ships are a great example. Since 2017, China has been the largest shipbuilder on the planet. Fourteen of the twenty largest shipyards in the world by the size of their order book are Chinese. Of the 89 million deadweight tons of commercial ships built in 2024, 50.8 million of them – 57 percent – were Chinese. Its largest state-owned shipbuilder produced more commercial vessels by tonnage that year than the entire American shipbuilding industry has built since the end of World War II. The U.S. Navy confirms that China’s shipbuilding capacity is over *200 times* that of ours. In 2023, China delivered 972 commercial ships; the United States delivered 7.

China isn’t building ships because they like to see them bob up and down in their own harbor – *they sell them to people around the world.*

Companies around the globe purchase 75 percent of ships built at China's dual-use shipyards. This obviously provides billions of dollars in revenue, but it does *way* more: It transfers key technologies from government laboratories and academic institutions into China's naval industrial base.

This so-called "military-civil fusion" strategy – one that integrates military and commercial production at China's shipyards – speeds up the adoption of innovative technology, reduces production costs, and increases their capacity to build, repair and sustain its fleet.

*Guys, we have got to start thinking more like this.* Donald Trump, JD Vance, and other Republicans can call green technologies whatever kooky, eighth grade-schoolyard names they want, but whether they like it or not, this is where the world is headed... and if we don't pull ourselves together – fast – we're going to miss the boat from all sides.

Low-carbon power sources provided over 40 percent of the world's electricity in 2024, and money invested in clean energy was double what it was in fossil fuels. Ninety-three percent (93%) of new electricity capacity worldwide came from clean sources. Renewable energy is projected to be the world's largest source of electricity as soon as this year.

We've already covered China's insane progress in this transition, and in June 2025 the European Union (EU) – one of the world's largest economies – produced more electricity from solar power than from any other source for the first time ever. Three-quarters of EU electricity now comes from non-fossil fuel sources.

The New York Times reports that "countries like Brazil, India and Vietnam are rapidly expanding solar and wind power. Poorer countries like Ethiopia and Nepal are leapfrogging over gasoline-burning cars to battery-powered ones. Nigeria, a petrostate, plans to build its first solar-panel manufacturing plant. Morocco is creating a battery hub to supply European automakers. Santiago, the capital of Chile, has electrified more than half of its bus fleet in recent years." < They are doing this, of course, with cheap equipment coming from China. >

And despite what it sometimes feels like, the U.S. has made major progress as well. In 2005, non-fossil fuel sources supplied around 28 percent of American electricity consumption. By 2025, non-fossil fuel

sources accounted for 44 percent of our total generation (renewables made-up 26 percent and nuclear power contributed another 18 percent). Also in 2025, renewable energy sources and battery storage made up roughly 93 percent of new utility-scale power capacity added to the U.S. power grid. These numbers are a tremendous leap forward.

Texas, of all places, has become America's top wind power producer and is second only to California in total solar energy capacity and industrial battery storage. After the Biden-era Inflation Reduction Act passed in 2022 – allocating over \$370 billion to reduce carbon emissions through incentives for solar, wind, and electric vehicles – renewable energy companies announced plans for \$64 billion in new investments in Texas, mostly for solar and battery storage projects – exceeding the next five largest states combined.

This was an incredibly important development for Texas at a time when the state's power grid faces major challenges thanks to enormous surges in demand from new manufacturing plants and large data centers for artificial intelligence. The Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT) – Texas' grid manager – predicts its demand for power may double within five years, prompting Pablo Vegas, ERCOT's CEO, to say that any legislation restricting renewable energy sources would compound the grid's existing risks.

One of the Trump/Vance administration's justifications for their hardline stance against wind, solar, etc. is that relying on renewable sources of energy would make the electricity supply more unstable, but the evidence doesn't back this up.

Republicans often use Germany as an example to support this claim because of the country's aggressive shift from fossil fuels and nuclear energy to efficient use and renewables, although I'm not sure why they bring this up because the German experience seems to make my point far better than it makes theirs.

The most common metric to describe grid reliability, known as the System Average Interruption Duration Index (SAIDI), is the average power outage duration experienced by each customer in a year. By this standard, Germany's grid is one of the most reliable in the world. In 2020, only Liechtenstein, Finland and Switzerland did better in Europe, and the United States had *five times* Germany's outage rate.

Although it's not as scientific, I can offer real-life knowledge of this. Now I must warn you, this might sound a little hostile because I happened to be in Texas – without water and power for days and days – during the electricity fiasco that transpired there in February 2021 and I have never been so freak'n miserable in my entire life.

Never has a state loathed regulation or government intervention as has my beloved Texas. At one point during the crisis, former Texas governor and former Secretary of Energy Rick Perry actually said that “Texans would be without electricity for longer than three days to keep the federal government out of their business.” Speak for yourself dude. WE WERE FREEZING!

So, I was already in a bad mood when posts on my Facebook feed started blaming the Texas power outages on windmills (never mind that, at the time, two-thirds of the winter electricity demand in Texas was generated by natural gas and wind power made up less than 10 percent of the state's generation mix). After months of election lies and conspiracy theories, this idiotic, politically motivated garbage nearly sent me over the edge.

Texas Governor Greg Abbott went on The Sean Hannity Show and said, “This shows how the Green New Deal would be a deadly deal for the United States of America,” while the Fox News scroll at the bottom of the screen declared “Green Energy Failure.” I mean, what? These statements are just laughable.

Politicians and conservative media trying to gaslight people into believing this massive failure was the fault of windmills is beyond the pale. Yes, non-winterized wind turbines froze. But, since they were not properly winterized *because they weren't forced to be*, so did power plants, oil and gas wells, gas pipelines, oil rigs, piles of coal, and even a nuclear reactor water pump. This means that the main culprit in the Great Texas Blackout of 2021 was the inability of natural gas to get to power plants... and no amount of spin on Fox News is going to change that fact (read more about why and how this happened on p. 415).

< I wasn't going to mention this here but, while I'm at it – and since this traumatic flashback to 2021 is irritating me all over again – let me say this: *Global warming* refers to earth's overall temperature,

which is rising. That's just a fact. Global warming, in turn, causes the climate to change. *Climate change* causes extreme weather patterns, rising sea levels, shifting jet streams, and plenty of other things that are really bad. As a result of *climate change*, floods, droughts, ice storms, and heat waves become more frequent and more intense. Essentially, the extremes become even more extreme. So, when people use the fact that parts of America have historic cold and icy weather any given day as proof that there is no *global warming*, they are inadvertently proving the exact opposite. The twisting and misunderstanding of this bug me to no end, so I just wanted to clear it up while I had the chance. >

The takeaway from all this is that no energy source is completely reliable, which is the very reason we need to *diversify*. In truth, we don't have a choice. This country desperately needs more electricity – regardless of where it comes from.

Regional stress and/or capacity crunches are expected to become much more common as demand outpaces infrastructure deployment, driven mainly by semiconductor chip/battery manufacturing and massive AI data centers that companies like Amazon, Google, Meta, and Microsoft plan to build. These data centers can use as much electricity as entire cities and they are projected to burn through around 12 percent of U.S. power by 2028.

Jesse Dodge, a former senior research analyst at the Allen Institute for AI – a nonprofit research institute founded by the late Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen – put it this way: “One query to ChatGPT uses approximately as much electricity as could light one light bulb for about 20 minutes...so, you can imagine with millions of people using something like that every day, that adds up to a really large amount of electricity.” Put another way, research from Goldman Sachs says that, on average, a “ChatGPT query needs nearly ten times as much electricity to process as a Google search.”

A December 2024 report from Grid Strategies, a power sector consulting firm, reveals that the U.S. “5-year load growth forecast has increased by almost a factor of five, from 23 GW to 128 GW.”

“It is worrisome that strategic industries, such as the development of an American advanced manufacturing sector or AI leadership, may

face headwinds from the limited ability of the nation's electricity systems to respond. Electricity systems need to supply new generation, connect that generation to load, and – of course – connect new load to the system. There are real risks to America's economic, technological, and geopolitical leadership if the grid can't keep up with demand.”

Report after report like this one make clear: Our ability as a nation to generate huge amounts of electricity the cheapest and cleanest way possible has a direct connection to our ability to remain a superpower – both economically and militarily.

But I guess the Trump/Vance administration didn't get the memo. From the time the Inflation Reduction Act was passed in 2022 until the Republican's passed their One Big Beautiful Bill in 2025, companies had announced \$321 billion in clean investment, leading to the creation of 2,369 new facilities and over 300,000 jobs across the country. An additional \$522 billion and 686,000 jobs had been projected.

Even though almost three-quarters of these investments were flowing to states that voted for Donald Trump and JD Vance in the 2024 election, the Republican's Big Beautiful Bill eliminated tax credits for a wide range of climate-friendly technologies and threw up every roadblock imaginable to renewable energy projects (like blocking federal permits for wind and “farmer destroying Solar,” whatever in the world that means).

A solar project in the Nevada desert known as Esmeralda 7 – one of the world's largest that would have produced enough energy to power nearly two million homes – was cancelled, and construction of multiple wind farms was halted (although the administration has lost at least five federal court battles in a row on this count).

In October 2025 alone, the Energy Department announced the cancellation of \$7.5 billion for hundreds of projects without specifying which projects would see their funding terminated.

Now listen, I recognize there is no better example of the difference between China's form of government and our form of government than this. The Center for Strategic and International Studies estimates that, from 2009 to 2023, the Chinese government spent \$231 *billion* on electric vehicles. That's what one-party socialist republics can do. They can spend as much as they want on whatever they want. They can build

things fast and have little to no cumbersome regulation. They can force a punishing “996” work culture on people, making them work from 9am to 9pm six days a week.

They also call the shots – 100%. They want a new transmission line right through a heavily populated neighborhood? They go right ahead and build it no matter what’s in its way – regardless of how their citizens feel about it... unlike in America, where the Trump/Vance administration just cancelled a \$4.9 billion loan guarantee for the \$11 billion Grain Belt Express, a major transmission project that would cross 800 miles of farmland to deliver wind energy generated in Kansas to deliver electricity to more than three million homes (the project has drawn intense backlash from some landowners and Republicans).

I’m certainly not suggesting we adopt even one or two aspects of China’s economic model (as you will see in a few minutes when we cover the Trump/Vance administration’s embrace of corporate statism). But the U.S. giving tax breaks for domestic manufacturing or a federal government subsidy here and there for electric vehicles, batteries, wind turbines, solar panels and nuclear reactors until carbon-free technology matures beyond the need for subsidies does not make us China. It makes us responsible realists.

That said, one maddening thing we have to work through is the harsh reality that our Democratic and Republican leaders have allowed our budget deficit to drastically widen (\$1.8 trillion) and our total public debt to completely blow out (\$39 trillion) ...yet we don’t have squat to show for it because we have been spending on consumption instead of investment.

It would be one thing if our leaders had borrowed all this money to buy ourselves state-of-the-art airports, subways, railways and ports; sophisticated fiber-optic lines, bandwidth and wireless networks; modern schools, roads, bridges, levees, dams and water systems; hi-tech electricity-distribution grids; or extensive high-speed rail systems. But they didn’t. So, we have nothing. Nada.

You and I don’t have to be Nobel Prize-winning economists to understand that we can’t continue borrowing for consumption rather than investment. But we also can’t afford to not invest in our future, especially considering what China has been up to.

We'll discuss these and other budgetary issues later in this section and on p. 420. In the meantime, I hope we can all agree that to best leverage the dollars we do spend, we should start killing multiple birds with one stone like China does.

In the case of investing in American-made clean technologies, we can kill at least five birds with one stone. We can: 1) Increase our domestic electricity supply; 2) Move more quickly to renewable resources before non-renewable ones run out; 3) Secure energy sources that are less economically volatile and more diversified; 4) Shift more rapidly from a high-carbon to a low-carbon energy system to protect our environment for future generations; and number five....

We can finally give China a run for its money in the world market. Let's look at electric vehicles (EVs) as an example. Following years of investments into EV technology, the Detroit Big Three – General Motors, Ford Motor and Stellantis (formally Chrysler) – announced over \$50 billion in combined write-downs. EV sales fell over 30 percent in the fourth quarter of 2025 and over \$20 billion in previously announced investments in EV and battery facilities were cancelled.

Donald Trump, JD Vance and other Republicans would have you believe that this is because Americans just aren't interested in driving electric vehicles. But there is actually pretty strong evidence suggesting their claims are inaccurate.

Even though U.S. consumers remain a bit leery of fully committing to EVs – mainly because they still have relatively high sticker prices, plus worries over battery range and access to charging stations – sales of hybrids (that use both gasoline engines *and* batteries) continue to grow steadily. There is also strong demand for electric vehicles on the used market, which often cost less than comparable gasoline models, making the technology affordable for many more buyers. Sales of used electric vehicles rose 40 percent in July 2025 from a year earlier.

So then, what's up with the \$19.5 billion hit Ford was forced to take from its decision to make fewer EVs than planned while increasing its production of hybrids?

Answer: Ford didn't lose all that money because Americans don't want to drive EVs; they just misread the *kind* of EVs Americans want

to drive. When it comes to EVs, Americans seemingly want smaller, affordable models – not an expensive big ass F-150 Lightning pickup.

< Ford is not alone. Tesla’s Model S, Model X, and Cybertruck; GMC’s EV Hummer and Cadillacs; Honda’s Acura ZDX sport utility vehicle; and the Porsche Taycan all met similar fates. >

So, okay, U.S. automakers misread the market a little, which was a major factor in their write-downs. But perhaps an even bigger factor was the conflicting federal policies between the Biden administration and the Trump/Vance administration that took place within just four years. This is yet another clear distinction between China’s form of government and ours: consistent inconsistency.

After taking over, the Trump/Vance administration, together with Republicans in Congress, eliminated tax credits for people who bought or leased electric vehicles, and eliminated fines for automakers who violate the fuel efficiency standards – standards they simultaneously weakened – which obviously significantly reduces the incentives of automakers to make electric cars.

U.S. auto executives had just sharpened their strategy to comply with Biden-era policies... just to have the Trump/Vance administration come in with, not only a complete reversal of them, but also steep tariffs on steel and imported car parts which slashed billions of dollars from their bottom lines and disrupted their supply chains.

Chaotic and unpredictable policy is a killer for Corporate America. Companies that are responsible to shareholders, customers, employees and the communities they serve must make decisions based on the facts as they are today. They must decide how to deploy capital today. Which means they need consistency.

Remarkably, it seems like our automakers – God bless them – understand the future far better than the Trump/Vance administration and are committed to staying in the electrification game, despite the chaos, adversity, and red ink.

Despite its setbacks, Ford management has reiterated that, far from abandoning the idea of cleaner vehicles altogether, their new strategy is to pull back from unprofitable designs and redeploy capital to models with higher near-term profitability. They say they are still on track to produce a \$30,000 EV pickup by 2027, which will be the first in a new

string of low-cost EVs, and expect around half their global volume to consist of hybrids, extended-range vehicles, and EVs by 2030.

Even though General Motors' EV story is much like Ford's – GM took a \$6 billion hit for similarly shifting its strategy – its CEO Mary Barra recently said that the company “believes the long-term future is profitable electric vehicle production, and this continues to be our North Star.”

Foreign companies are also hangin' in there with the U.S. market. Around half of Toyota's U.S. vehicle sales are hybrids or EVs – around double the industry's overall share – and they expect 70 percent of U.S. vehicle sales across its Toyota and Lexus brands to be “electrified” by 2030. Already, some of their most popular models, like the Camry sedan and Sienna minivan, are now sold exclusively as hybrids.

Toyota's North Carolina plant is a huge \$13.9 billion facility that began production in late 2025 as the company's first U.S. automotive battery factory, producing lithium-ion batteries for hybrid and electric vehicles – and they are committed to investing an additional \$10 billion in American manufacturing over the next five years.

Volkswagen plans to continue developing hybrids of its bestselling U.S. vehicles, the Tiguan and Atlas, after huge demand from dealers and consumers.

Our automakers are doing their part and being America TOUGH... which is why making a massive *transition* like the one from cars with solely internal combustion engines to electric motors is exactly the time the U.S. government should jump in and help them survive the lean times – giving them time to position themselves to *compete*.

It makes perfect sense that hybrids are a gateway to EVs because, not only do hybrids get up to 50 percent better mileage than a standard gas-powered car, but they seem more practical to consumers who are still reluctant to commit to pure EVs because of price, battery range, and/or charging station concerns.

However, this extra step means it will likely take our automakers more time to scale. The federal government can stand in the gap for them as they work to scale up – allowing for expansion without a proportional rise in expenses while they enhance operational efficiency,

automate processes, and leverage technology to handle higher demand even as they maintain quality and profitability.

< The charging station chicken-and-egg challenge is another area where the federal government can help bridge the gap. Consumers will only be comfortable purchasing EVs if rapid charging is as easy as using a gas pump, but private businesses can't make money until more EVs are on the road. EV charging infrastructure is growing rapidly but remains concentrated on the coasts. In mid-2025, China had around 10 million charging stations (3 million public and 7 million private). America has around 235,000 individual charging ports, not counting those at private homes. >

We need to get this show on the road because, although Chinese automakers are effectively barred from the United States by tariffs for the time being, they won't be kept out of our market forever... and you can bet your bottom dollar they are already in their factories, wearing cowboy hats for inspiration as they take the bull by the horns to figure out what American pickup buyers want (and they'll figure it out faster than you can say Cowboy Up).

Some would argue that, if the Chinese are coming anyway, why should our carmakers even bother? After all, American oil and gas companies made the decision years ago that, even though a peak is inevitable, they wouldn't pivot to solar and wind investments because they simply didn't yield as high of returns.

Okay, I have thoughts on this but, before I go any further, I'd like to remind everyone that I'm from East Texas. I started my career in the oil and gas business. I have family, clients, and lots of friends whose livelihoods depend on the oil and gas business. Believe me, I get it. The oil patch is not just a job; it's a way of life.

I love all you guys, but I gotta say: What an insanely irresponsible, short-sighted approach. Sure, oil and gas executives have been able to generate tons of near-term cash for their investors for an extra year, or two or maybe even ten. But then what?

Unfortunately, I've seen this unwise attitude my entire career, which, because I'm old, has been a long time. Forget Economics 101 – which tells us that too much output (production/supply) pushes prices down (consumption/demand) – let's just drill, baby, drill...*right this*

*second*. With little regard for tomorrow. Just churn and burn until the next inevitable bust.

Wake-up fellas. Even Saudi Arabia doesn't see a conflict between oil and gas and renewable energy. They see dollar signs.

< Note to Self: You probably should start looking for new clients because several of your current ones will probably stop speaking to you after reading this. In fact, that ship probably sailed when you uttered the words "low-carbon energy system." Also, you may need to find somewhere else to go for Thanksgiving this year. >

Three Saudi companies – ACWA Power, the Water and Electricity Holding Company (Badeel), and Saudi Aramco Power Company (SAPCO) – have invested \$8.3 billion in 15 gigawatts of renewable-energy projects (mostly solar with a little wind). This reflects Saudi Arabia's goal of achieving 70 percent of its renewable energy target through public investment funds by 2030.

We need to get with the program. The good news is that this is not nearly as hard as people try to make it. Lobbyists, hard-core activists, and Democratic and Republican politicians like to portray our energy portfolio as a black and white issue: *fossil fuels v. renewable energy*. This is generally where the argument gets super heated and people on both sides get really ticked off. This is also where, as in most political arguments, everyone develops tunnel vision and stops listening.

We can avoid the drama if, from the jump, all sides understand that a successful outcome depends on cooperation, collaboration, and a little bit of patience. This is a *process*.

Fossil fuels and green energy sources *are not* mutually exclusive, at least at this point in the process. Picture a large brass scale like the scales of justice. The left side of the scale represents fossil fuels, and the right side represents renewable energy. Currently, the scale is tipped toward fossil fuels because renewable sources in the U.S. don't yet provide enough energy. But, as we begin to implement an intelligent energy shift, the scales will slowly begin to balance, then begin tipping toward renewable energy.

It really comes down to this: There are many different types of energy sources (like coal, oil, natural gas, wind, hydro, nuclear, solar,

geothermal, and hydrogen). Our simple goal can be to phase these out, dirtiest to cleanest. See? Simple.

The undeniable truth is that there are many reasons beyond environmental concerns that make this shift necessary, including the fact that our feverish oil and gas drilling often leads to massive gluts in the global energy markets and the fact that this nation is running out of water at an alarming pace. These reasons join geologic limits, maturing oil and gas fields and declining wells, increasingly difficult wastewater disposal, and the fact that there is far less access to unrestricted private equity cash to continue fracking. < Read more about all this on p. 71 of the *Policy Guide*. Also, another Note to Self: You should probably go ahead and make those Thanksgiving reservations at Cracker Barrel right away. >

The moral of the story is that, even though the Trump/Vance years may slow our roll a little, we must push through and *keep going*. This process takes time and we have a responsibility to set these things in motion to protect future generations of Americans.



So, that covers Phase One. Now we're on to Mao Zedong's Phase Two, known as the *strategic stalemate* phase. A hallmark of the *strategic stalemate* phase is building strength and recruiting allies while eroding the opposition's morale through propaganda and guerrilla attacks. Over time, Mao believed this erodes the enemy's will to fight and builds up the weaker force's strength.

This stage is tricky for China's "opposition" (the U.S) because it assumes our advance gets bogged down as we become overstretched (hmmm... bogged down? overstretched? seem familiar?). Meanwhile, all the underdog has to do is stay the course. Former U.S. secretary of state and national security advisor Henry Kissinger summed this phase up this way: "The conventional army loses if it does not win. The guerrilla wins if he does not lose."

THIS IS THE POINT WHERE THE FLAMING  
RED FLAGS BETTER START WAVING, AMERICA!

The days of inadequate leadership, gaslighting, and distraction ARE OVER. Since we are already in Phase Two, we have NO MORE time to waste. After tolerating incompetence and irresponsibility for decades, we have to take back the wheel, buckle down, and get serious about protecting our future.

We have no choice but to make a hard correction and right the ship – FAST – because we cannot under any circumstance let China achieve the third and final phase of Mao Zedong’s brainchild: the *strategic offensive* phase, where the balance of power shifts in favor of the weaker force. Now, the stronger enemy is weakened and demoralized, allowing the weaker force to transition to conventional warfare and launch a final counter-offensive to retake lost territory and win the war.

If China reaches the *strategic offensive* phase, they will have tilted the global balance of power in their favor – *literally reshaping the entire global international order away from the United States.*

WE HAVE TO WAKE-UP AMERICA. THIS CAN HAPPEN. THIS IS NOT A DRILL.

Listen up, my fellow Americans. I’m about to say something that Americans – including and especially myself – don’t like to hear. In fact, Americans are pretty much hardwired *not* to hear it, but it must be said: If we don’t wise up – AND FAST – we are going to lose. Yes, I said it. LOSE. We are going to LOSE to China.

... and I don’t know about you, but I love this country and the people in it way too much to let that happen.

The great news is that it’s not too late to correct our course. We are still THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. At this point, America has economic and military superiority. Our companies have the edge in science, technology, aerospace and defense, and we lead in banking and

capital markets, biotech and pharmaceuticals, media and entertainment, professional services and higher education.

Also, Xi Jinping faces some real domestic challenges. China has serious economic and social imbalances; growth remains uneven; returns on investment are diminishing; consumer demand is sluggish; wages are depressed; productivity growth is slowing; housing is in a slump; the working age population is declining; youth unemployment is sky high; college graduates can't find work; birthrates are plunging; mental health is deteriorating; poisonous pollution, while better, is severe; and the human rights atrocities are still next level.

When I say next level, I mean truly next level. In truth, China is just one big human rights catastrophe. The U.S. State Department reports that in China:

“Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: arbitrary or unlawful killings; disappearances; torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; involuntary or coercive medical or psychological practices; arbitrary arrest and detention by the government including, since 2017, of more than one million Uyghurs and members of other predominantly Muslim minority groups in extrajudicial internment camps, prisons, and an additional unknown number subjected to daytime-only “re-education” training; acts of transnational repression against individuals in other countries; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including unjustified arrests and criminal prosecution of journalists, lawyers, writers, bloggers, dissidents, petitioners, and others, and restrictions on internet freedom; restrictions of religious freedom; instances of coerced abortions and forced sterilization; trafficking in persons, including forced labor; prohibiting independent trade unions and systematic restrictions on workers’ freedom of association; and significant presence of some of the worst forms of child labor.”

As Chinese freelance writer Helen Gao wrote in a November 2025 New York Times guest essay, there is a “quiet desperation” among the Chinese people, captured in the Chinese phrase “wai qiang, zhong gan,” roughly translated as “outwardly strong, inwardly brittle.”

Many people in China feel their leaders are prioritizing world domination over their needs. While their leaders were throwing money at other countries in 2019, 40 percent of Chinese households – over 600 million people – were living on just \$1,621 (\$135/month). At the same time, many local governments piled up debt to pay for infrastructure projects, so they didn't have the money to pay the salaries of teachers and other local workers.

As a result, young people in China – who had been content to live with limited freedoms if there were jobs and a chance for upward mobility – were seemingly activated by the pandemic. They were particularly angry about the social and economic havoc Covid wreaked, made worse by Beijing's lack of transparency and efforts to conceal any culpability China may have had in the origins of the crisis. Public protests, once thought to be virtually impossible, erupted. This sparked larger conversations about censorship, the treatment of whistleblowers and opposition, and the need for financial accountability at the top – which is obviously a very dangerous can of worms for Beijing to be forced to open.

Also, President Xi Jinping seems to be on a major power trip (and maybe even a bit paranoid). In January 2026, he launched a purge of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) high command, including top generals Zhang Youxia, a childhood friend who he once called his "big brother," and Liu Zhenli – both of whom were considered among his closest allies. Xi has now removed all but one of the six generals he appointed to the Central Military Commission (CMC) in 2022, consolidating absolute power for himself. It seems like he plans to keep his grip on power through these periodic purges, which is yet another scheme straight from Mao Zedong's playbook.

< To be fair to Xi, Zhang was officially accused of leaking data regarding China's nuclear-weapons program to the United States; forming "political cliques;" and accepting bribes to promote officials – but God only knows whether this is true. >

Without question, we can solidify our lead while China is still in Phase Two. But for that to happen, from this point forward, every single policy decision we make – EVERY SINGLE ONE – must be made with tomorrow seared in our minds. We must keep our eyes

firmly on the horizon and visualize the future we want for our *shining city upon the hill*, not only in the 21st century, but far beyond.

THAT MEANS WE MUST REJECT PRACTICALLY EVERYTHING ABOUT  
THE TRUMP/VANCE ADMINISTRATION'S VISION FOR OUR FUTURE.

Everything these guys do is designed to move us backward. They are obsessed with the past.

Donald Trump and JD Vance long for the days when U.S. military bases were named after Confederate generals, women and black people were second-class citizens, and the Redskins and Indians took the field. They love the days when there were no emissions standards or wimpy toilets, and coal was king. They yearn for the time when Alcatraz was in full swing, police officers could beat people up, kids didn't have to be in stupid car seats, and there was a secretary of war. They pine for the days when Joseph McCarthy went after "communists," you could grab women by the p\$\$#, fly on a pedophile's jet without worry, and diversity wasn't yet a thing.

Their isolationist, imperialistic national security strategy prioritizes U.S. sovereignty over multilateral alliances and collective security, harkening back to the days when the world was carved up into spheres of influence. Taking the position of "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em," it seems they have no problem with China and Russia dictating the rules in their own backyards as long as the United States has the freedom to do whatever we want to have total dominion over the entire Western Hemisphere.

In this Cold War-inspired mindset, strategic interests are key, which explains the Venezuela invasion and The Donald's obsession with the U.S. "owning" Greenland. And don't be fooled, locking down strategic assets is exactly why President Trump is doing these things – using the same logic that Vladimir Putin used when he brutally invaded Ukraine in 2022 in the first major land offensive for territorial advantage in Europe since World War II.

Even though Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Senator Lindsey Graham, and other Trump enablers turned themselves into pretzels

trying to convince us that Venezuela was about “narcotrafficking,” President Trump toppled Nicolás Maduro while pardoning ex-Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández, who actually said – out loud – that he wanted to “stuff the drugs up the gringos’ noses.”

In his role as Lord over the Western Hemisphere, President Trump believes Canada should be our 51st state; the Gulf of Mexico should be the Gulf of America; and we should control the Panama Canal. He endorsed political candidates in elections in Honduras and Chile; gave his buddy President Javier Milei of Argentina a \$20 billion bailout; and, after his snatch and grab in Venezuela, turned his sites to U.S. intervention in Cuba, Colombia and even Mexico.

Then there’s Greenland. Always Greenland. Without question, the allure of this semiautonomous territory of the kingdom of Denmark is understandable at a time when there is a worldwide scramble for the Arctic, both economically and militarily. The world’s largest island, around three times the size of Texas, is located on the North American continent, to Canada’s northeast, and is situated between North America, Western Europe and Russia. It is positioned along what is known as the GIUK Gap, a Cold War term that indicates a critical point between Greenland, Iceland and Britain that can protect the North Atlantic from Russian ships and submarines.

China and Russia – who have agreed to work together to develop new Arctic shipping routes – are clamoring to take advantage of the island’s position as global warming opens more trade routes (an estimated 11,000 square miles of Greenland’s ice sheets and glaciers have melted over the past thirty years).

The location of Greenland is especially useful to China and its “Polar Silk Road,” as it creates shorter distances for China to ship goods via the Arctic and lets them avoid bottlenecks at the Suez Canal and the Malacca Strait. Melting ice will also bring more opportunities to drill for Greenland’s 17.5 billion untapped barrels of oil and 148.2 trillion cubic feet of natural gas and increase opportunities to mine its 1.5 million tons of reserves of rare-earth elements.

From a national security perspective, the U.S. military base located on Greenland, Pituffik Space Base, is strategically located for missile defense and space surveillance missions and includes a radar station

that is part of our ballistic missile early-warning system... but we are far from alone in the Arctic. Russia has already reopened dozens of old Soviet military bases; its Northern Fleet and its main submarine base are headquartered on the Barents Sea near Murmansk; and its vessels operate freely in the North Atlantic. Russia is also playing Arctic wargames that include amphibious assaults in the glacial seas.

So, okay, sure. It would be awesome to “own” Greenland. But they have made it very clear it’s not for sale. Either way, the bully posturing, tantrums and threats are unnecessary because, under a 1951 agreement, the U.S. maintains “the right of free access to and movement between the defense areas through Greenland” by land, air, and sea. Plus, we can send an unlimited number of troops to Pituffik.

Not to mention that carrying out Donald Trump’s Greenland “vision” would be illegal under U.S. law since the Senate has ratified numerous treaties codifying U.S. duties under the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which under the Supremacy Clause of the U.S. Constitution make them the “supreme law of the land” (and, shockingly, stealing allied countries is not one of those “duties”).

In case there was any doubt of their intentions, the Trump/Vance administration actually wrote their thoughts down in a November 2025 National Security Strategy document. In what they called the “Trump Corollary” to the Monroe Doctrine (named for President James Monroe’s 1823 imperialistic declaration that said the U.S. would not stand for outside powers interfering in the Western Hemisphere) they made it known that the United States will “reassert and enforce the Monroe Doctrine to restore American preeminence in the Western Hemisphere, and to protect our homeland and our access to key geographies throughout the region” and that they “will deny non-Hemispheric competitors the ability to position forces or other threatening capabilities, or to own or control strategically vital assets, in our Hemisphere.”

The “Trump Corollary” mirrors the “Roosevelt Corollary” to the Monroe Doctrine when, in 1904, President Theodore Roosevelt said the United States would not only block European meddling in the Hemisphere but act as an “international police power” to intervene in countries plagued by debt, instability, and incompetent governance.

Ultimately, in the early 20th century, the United States used the “Roosevelt Corollary” to justify U.S. military interventions and occupations in Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic.

The Monroe Doctrine – which was neither a treaty nor law but just a statement made by a U.S. president – came at a time when America was a small agricultural republic of around ten million people living in 24 states. Our GDP was roughly \$767 million; our share of global GDP was just 2.6 percent; and we had no military to speak of. Over two-hundred years later, the United States is now a global superpower. There simply is no parallel here.

*The national security approach Donald Trump, JD Vance & Marco Rubio have laid out is not what strong, strategic world powers do.  
It's what empires in decline do.*

There is no chance that a plan allowing China (in Asia) and Russia (in Europe/Eurasia) to operate unrestrained while the United States runs around the Western Hemisphere invading countries, overthrowing leaders, and just taking everyone else's stuff ends in anything but total disaster.

THAT'S NOT A STRATEGY, THAT'S SUPERPOWER SUICIDE.

An imperialistic, secluded approach to the world is not only perilous, but it's also a massive waste of time and global goodwill – because isolationism will never be a long-term option for the United States. Sure, there will be times when the United States should embrace sovereignty, but we must reject isolationism at all costs. Isolationist rants may make for a great show at campaign rallies but, in the real world, it is reckless and puts Americans in danger.

Like it or not, the world has become entangled in extraordinary ways. We live in an incomparable era of global interdependence, multilateralism and competition, and our success depends not only on our willingness to aggressively pursue economic, technological and military supremacy, but also on our ability to build coalitions that enhance and protect those efforts (more on this in a few minutes).

< Dr. Stacie Goddard from Wellesley College and Dr. Abraham Newman from Georgetown University suggest that the new world order being promoted by the Trump/Vance administration is more like something out of the 16th-century rather than the 19th. The “neoroyalist order,” as they call it, “centers on an international system structured by a small group of hyper elites (cliques). Such cliques seek to legitimize their authority through appeals to their exceptionalism in order to generate durable material and status hierarchies based on the extraction of financial and cultural tributes.”

They suggest other modern-day leaders have embraced elements of a neoroyalist order, including Recep Erdoğan (Turkey), Narendra Modi (India), Viktor Orbán (Hungary), Mohammed bin Salman (Saudi Arabia), Xi Jinping (China) and, naturally, Vladimir Putin – which should send a chill down all our spines.

In a guest essay in *The New York Times*, the two experts say that “America’s foreign policy establishment has morphed from a set of staid bureaucracies into a royal family, such as the Tudors or Hapsburgs. Foreign policy is molded in the hands of the court clique – a small, exclusive network. Some are in Mr. Trump’s cabinet, like Marco Rubio, who is simultaneously the secretary of state, interim national security adviser, acting chief archivist and perhaps viceroy of Venezuela.”

“Mr. Trump’s clique also centers on his family members and individuals who donated to his 2024 campaign (like Elon Musk and Paul Singer, the billionaire founder and co-chief executive of the hedge fund Elliott Investment Management). Ukraine peace negotiations continue to be led by Mr. Trump’s fellow real estate magnate Steve Witkoff and Mr. Trump’s son-in-law Jared Kushner.”

“While Mr. Trump boasts that the Venezuela intervention will increase American prosperity, there is actually little promise of national benefit. Instead, the gains appear to be flowing to Mr. Trump and his insiders. Amber Energy, an affiliate of Mr. Singer’s hedge-fund company, won an auction for Citgo, the U.S. subsidiary of the Venezuelan state-owned oil company, a few months ago and is now strategically positioned to play a key role in refining and distributing that oil. As a down payment, Mr. Trump announced that up to 50

million barrels would be sold and that “that money will be controlled by me.” The first sale was routed through the company of another megadonor... fifty million barrels is a mere two and a half days’ worth of domestic consumption, but it would be well more than what Mr. Trump spent on his 2024 election campaign – a pot of patronage rather than a national investment.”

“Mr. Trump’s trade policy follows a similar script. While not delivering a rebirth in U.S. manufacturing jobs, tariffs have served as a ready-made tool to get countries and companies to tithe. South Korea and Japan have collectively pledged hundreds of billions in investment funds operated under opaque governance rules. Vietnam fast-tracked the approval of a \$1.5 billion Trump family golf course at the same time that it sought to reduce its tariff rate.”

“Private companies, too, pay the king a benevolence. Apple’s chief executive, Tim Cook, delivered a gold-based plaque and a donation to Mr. Trump’s planned ballroom. And the spoils system has paid off for members of the Trump family, with their personal wealth reportedly increasing by at least \$4 billion since the election.” >

Whether it be by two, four or five centuries, the Trump/Vance administration’s foreign policy and national security strategy look backward. Full stop. But when it comes to Donald Trump’s economic heroes, his longings for the past get even more misguided – and are taking this country into very dangerous territory.

Since his second inauguration, Donald “Tariff Man” Trump has loved comparing himself to the 25th President of the United States William McKinley (1897-1901). He even celebrated McKinley in his inauguration address, saying McKinley “made our country very rich through tariffs and through talent.”

But Donald Trump is wrong about President McKinley. McKinley used tariffs to *invite* trade, not stop it. He understood that, as our output and productivity grew, the United States would need global markets and lower trade barriers to maximize our value. President Trump, on the other hand, uses tariffs as a blunt force coercive instrument to impact public policy that extends beyond trade (like immigration).

Donald Trump is also wrong when he claims that the United States was “probably the wealthiest it ever was” in the 1890s because of tariffs. In truth, the United States plowed into an almost four-year depression in 1893 that ended only by President McKinley endorsing the gold standard after gold was discovered in Alaska. There was also a significant increase in construction projects (i.e., infrastructure like railroads, etc.), plus the invention of the telephone, which was a huge factor in our economic growth in the 20th century.

Donald Trump is wrong yet again when he tries to convince the American people that turning the United States toward state capitalism is a good thing. IT IS NOT.

Moving miles away from free-market enterprise, the Trump/Vance administration is now demanding an actual stake in private companies (i.e., equity, warrants, licenses to intellectual property, royalties and/or revenue sharing, or other things that ensure a return on investment); significantly intervening in business transactions; and negotiating cuts of the revenue of the sales of American companies overseas.

First came the U.S. government’s 10 percent stake in Intel – which effectively made the United States a shareholder in a technology company – and the “golden share” arrangement in the Nippon Steel/U.S. Steel merger that gave President Trump the ability to appoint a member to the board of Nippon Steel. His approval is also needed for many of the strategic moves made by the company.

Lest you think these were one-off deals, they were not. They were precedents. By the end of 2025, the United States also had a stake in Atlantic Alumina, Korea Zinc, Lithium Americas, MP Materials, ReElement Technologies, Trilogy Metals, Vulcan Elements, xLight and Westinghouse.

Then there’s the Nvidia deal. In January 2026, the Trump/Vance administration reversed some export control restrictions imposed by the Biden administration, allowing Nvidia – the dominant American computational chip dealer for the AI boom – to sell advanced chips to China. They did this in exchange for a 25 percent cut of all those sales.

Five months earlier, the administration brokered a deal requiring Nvidia and Advanced Micro Devices (AMD) to pay a 15 percent fee on

revenue from the sales of their AI chips to China in exchange for export licenses.

This is quite possibly the most stupefying idea I have ever heard. Setting aside the national security concerns (which are huge) and the fact that the deal violates the Export Control Reform Act – which says no fee can be imposed in connection with license applications – and the U.S. Constitution – which prohibits the federal government from imposing taxes or duties on items exported from the United States – why in the name of all that is holy would our leaders give our biggest economic competitor the chance to catch up with us in artificial intelligence?

...especially when experts say that Huawei, China's closest competitor to Nvidia, is still at least two years behind them? Basically, we are gifting China our computing power so they can buy time while *their* companies improve *their* own supply and performance.

Donald Trump and JD Vance just handed Xi Jinping U.S. technological superiority on a silver platter... for what? 25 percent? I guarantee you, this type of ridiculousness is not anywhere in Mao's Phase Two plan. This is insanity. I mean, whose side are these guys on?

The Institute for Progress, a think tank, estimates the American advantage over China in AI compute will shrink from around ten times to five times within a year of the Chinese having H200 chips (the H200 – a high-speed graphics processing units (GPUs) used for AI applications and high-performance computing – is Nvidia's second-most-powerful chip). Well, that's just great, isn't it?

In a most ironic twist, literally hours before the Trump/Vance administration's announcement of their AI sabotage, the U.S. Justice Department announced that our federal government had "exposed a sophisticated smuggling network that threatens our nation's security by funneling cutting-edge AI technology to those who would use it against American interests." This "criminal network" – their words – tried to smuggle over \$160 million worth of Nvidia chips to China (irony is not a strong enough word for this).

The reasoning behind the bust, according to U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Texas Nicholas J. Ganjei, is that the H100 and H200 chips are "designed to process massive amounts of data,

advancing generative AI and large language models and accelerating scientific computing. These GPUs are used for both civilian and military applications.”

“These chips are the building blocks of AI superiority and are integral to modern military applications. *The country that controls these chips will control AI technology; the country that controls AI technology will control the future.*” Oh, for the love of %\$#%.

By the way, the Trump/Vance administration is trying to sabotage our technological superiority in other ways, like their wanting a piece of the patents owned by universities that result from new discoveries. At first glance, this may appear to make perfect sense. After all, as Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick said, “If we give them the money, don’t you think it’s fair the USA and taxpayers who funded it get a piece of that?” But I assure you, it makes no sense whatsoever. This is nothing more than a tax on innovation.

They can try to put lipstick on this pig all they want, but private-sector development featuring government ownership and control is state-controlled industry, pure and simple. I mean, come on! You know it’s not a very capitalist idea when Senator Bernie Sanders is all for it.

It’s no wonder that Donald Trump and JD Vance prefer this path because state capitalism is a means of not just economic, but political control. Blatantly exceeding authority; pressuring executives; singling out favored companies that kiss a\$\$ and pay to play; blurring the lines between public policy and personal business interests; arbitrarily picking “winners” and “losers;” and instilling fear and uncertainty into the entire process is what authoritarian governments do – and are now par for the course for these guys.

Trump & Co. want the United States to control things so they can control things – handing out favors like King Midas to those who kiss the ring... a ploy Apple CEO Tim Cook took advantage of brilliantly when he, as Dr. Goddard and Dr. Newman mentioned, entered the Oval Office bearing some sort of engraved glass sculpture with, of course, a 24-karat gold base, and left the Oval Office with tariff exemptions.

It’s no secret President Trump is using the office of the presidency to enrich himself and his family, administration officials, and business partners like no other president in history ever dreamed of – everything

from inaugural and White House ballroom fundraising bribes to pardon kickbacks to cryptocurrency to foreign partnerships to Middle Eastern-funded golf tournaments and luxury jets.

One must look no further than the highly corrupt United Arab Emirates chip deal that Steve Witkoff and David Sacks, key figures of the administration, negotiated, or the TikTok deal, which proved they aren't even trying to hide their blatant cronyism (read more on p.100).

This is gross. Please don't be fooled. None of this is the *Art of the Deal*. This is corporate statism and staying on its path would squash innovation and invention, distort markets, and fertilize and water unthinkable corruption. It's un-American and it would end in disaster.

Quite frankly, the American people should be insulted by the Trump/Vance administration's turn toward state capitalism, because it feels like a declaration of defeat more than anything else. It's as if they don't think Americans can cut it without the Fatherland.

They are dead wrong. *We can't beat Xi Jinping by becoming him.* At the end of the day – if we play our cards right and remember what makes America, well, America – there is NO WAY China beats us.

The way we win is to commit to smart, rigorous economic norms, stable and consistent rules, nonpolitical institutional integrity, and the rule of law. The way we win is by nurturing market-driven innovation, empowering entrepreneurs, ensuring that risks and rewards are shared fairly across society, and that opportunities are available to everyone.

It wasn't tariffs that made our country “very rich” in the 20th century. It was our unleashed ingenuity, entrepreneurial spirit, bold experimentation, economic freedom, smart foreign investment, and sensible immigration that propelled America forward – and allowed us to thrive. It will be these things – not oil in the ground or new territories on our map – that will help us do it again.



It's time for America and Americans to up our game. Our leaders have had us playing small for decades and that's just not going to cut it anymore. To begin, we need to develop a comprehensive long-term strategy to stop our slide and solidify our course.

There are two things I am certain of. The first is that the continued dominance and national security of the United States depend on four things. Not one of these, *all four*: the dollar, diplomacy, development, and defense. The second thing I am certain of is that, for the first time in decades, we face a rival that has reached dimensions of strength that we cannot entirely combat alone.

Let's take the first one first: The Dollar. America is not just a country; America is a brand. And not just any brand. The United States of America is still the mightiest, most trusted, most admired brand in the entire world.

A huge part of our brand is our economic dominance. For decades, regardless of who was in the White House or in the seats of Congress, countries around the world have had incomparable trust in the economic integrity of the United States of America. This has made America a magnet for long-term investment; led to the dollar being the global reserve currency; and inspired continued faith in U.S. Treasurys.

The recipe for the extraordinary economic position we hold in the world is simple: fidelity to smart, rigorous economic norms and structured international economic order; nonpolitical institutional integrity; and commitment to the rule of law.

Although our stellar credibility and the trust that other countries, investors, and citizens of the world have in our economic competence have taken decades to build, they are both rapidly collapsing under the Trump/Vance administration.

The irresponsibility and unseriousness of these people's actions is nothing short of breathtaking. In addition to the catastrophic mess they have made of our global alliances, they have done everything from relentlessly criticize and threaten the independence of the U.S. Federal Reserve – to the point that the U.S. Department of Justice opened a criminal investigation into its chairman – to brazenly undermine the credibility of independent, nonpolitical agencies like the Congressional Budget Office and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics – substantially

damaging the credibility of our official economic data and our accountability procedures.

*These are not things that dependable, established governments do.  
These are things that emerging, corrupt governments do.*

The Economist's adjectives for the Trump/Vance administration capture it perfectly: "shambolic, incoherent" and "a mockery of policymaking." They were speaking specifically about tariffs but could have easily been talking about almost every decision they make.

Already, global confidence in the American economy has been slowly eroding thanks to our rising national debt, increasing deficits, and worsening domestic political turmoil. As a result, many countries have taken actions to "de-risk" from America – including diversifying their investments and supply chains, reducing dependency on American technology, and strengthening their partnerships with other countries.

This comes at a time when China is pushing to globalize its own currency (the yuan) particularly for things like bank payments. It seems their main goal is to offer an alternative to the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications (SWIFT) system, a U.S.-dollar dominant network that facilitates secure money and securities transfers for over 11,500 financial institutions in 220 countries and territories.

While the U.S. dollar makes up over 50 percent of payments using the SWIFT network and 80 percent of trade finance (compared with 3-4 percent and 8 percent, respectively, for the yuan) countries are increasingly using the Cross-border Interbank Payment System (CIPS), China's settlement system. In fact, because sanctions have cut Russia off from the Western financial system, CIPS handles pretty much all the money flow between Beijing and Moscow. CIPS, which launched in 2015, now links over 5,000 banks across 190 countries.

China is also encouraging global firms to issue bonds in the yuan, creating a market of investible securities for the currency, and the yuan is already the transaction currency for around half of China's cross-border deals, up from practically zero fifteen years ago.

Make no mistake, every single thing mentioned in the last three paragraphs is bad. *Really* bad. But President Trump doesn't see it that way. He thinks it was "great" that the dollar fell to a four-year low in late January 2026 because, in his mind, a weaker dollar means the world isn't "looting," "pillaging," and "plundering" the United States anymore – proving yet again that he has zero understanding of how global trade works.

One of his favorite rally themes – and it really gets the MAGA crowd going – is that the entire world is out to get us, screwing us at every opportunity. But that's just not true. Guys, honestly, that's just not happening.

*Trade deficit* doesn't automatically mean *we're getting screwed*. Trade deficits are not scorecards that keep track of who is winning and who is losing, or if trade deals are "good" or "bad." Unlike what he seems to believe about *everything*, trade is not a zero-sum game.

It's very important to keep in mind that trade deficits are different for the United States than other countries because our currency is the dominant global reserve currency – meaning the U.S. dollar is used in many transactions that the United States has nothing to do with. Many countries trade with one another – and borrow and lend – using the U.S. dollar. This increases the demand for our dollar on foreign exchange markets which, in turn, makes our dollar stronger. A stronger U.S. dollar, in turn, makes our exports more expensive and imports less expensive – which ultimately leads to an overall trade deficit.

In fact, because of our currency's position in the world, the U.S. running a trade surplus would likely wreck the entire global market. That sounds dramatic but remember that, in the past four decades, the United States has had current-account surpluses in only three years – 1980, 1981 and 1991 – and each of those years was tied to a recession.

Far from being a burden, we as a country *want* this role. It gives us unparalleled power in global finance, not to mention lower interest rates and a strong stock market.

So, Mr. President, the lesson here is that, if the U.S. economy is growing faster than other economies around the world, our trade deficit will probably increase – because strong domestic growth increases

America's demand for imports while, at the same time, weaker foreign growth decreases the world's demand for America's exports.

But here's the bad news: If the world starts to question the United States as the leading global economic force – or continues to lose confidence in our direction – there could be a major sell-off of U.S. assets, particularly Treasury bonds and stocks. This would likely trigger a debt crisis and worldwide panic. Next comes major stock market volatility and a run on the dollar. Interest rates will spike, which will exponentially increase the pain of our massive indebtedness and make it more expensive, if not impossible, to raise capital, invest in innovation, and create jobs.

It will also be much harder for the United States to borrow money to respond to short-term financial emergencies such as wars, recessions, or economic calamities like the 2007-2009 Financial Crisis (when we desperately needed our public balance sheets to offset the enormous deleveraging of private ones) or things like the economic fallout caused by the Covid pandemic (when American families were in dire straits).

This will put us at the mercy of foreign countries, who already own 9 trillion – or 32 percent – of our public debt (Japan holds \$1.148 trillion, the United Kingdom \$858 billion, and China \$756 billion).

Inflation will come in even hotter which, as we already well know, causes serious pain for most American households. And this will do nothing but get more painful. Longer-term, high inflation strikes at the very heart of the financial security of the Middle Class, affecting savings accounts, pensions, and home ownership even more.

Okay, gosh, that's enough, Debbie Downer. Now you know how my Saturday night dates feel! :) )

Moving on... The second thing I am certain of is that, for the first time in decades, we face a rival that has reached dimensions of strength that we cannot entirely combat alone... which is why the way our friends around the world have been treated by the Trump/Vance administration is so utterly horrifying – and completely unacceptable.

Time after time, the boorish actions and behavior of Trump & Co. have made our nation look smaller and weaker, not bigger and stronger. They obviously don't get that it's unnecessary for America to be a bully. It's unnecessary for America to be threatening and hostile. It's

unnecessary for America to be arrogant and petty. America does not need to overtly flaunt our strength *because we are actually strong*.

There are many foolish assumptions that fuel the Trump/Vance administration's disastrous approach to the world, but one of the worst is their false belief that, if America disengages from the rest of the world, the rest of the world will just somehow disappear – leaving America in a gloriously isolated bubble of nothing but fabulous health and wealth.

Their thought process reminds me of the mythical ostrich that sticks his head in the sand to avoid danger. If we can't see them, they can't see us, right? Well, not exactly guys. < Honestly, they are getting so good at this trick that I have a mental image of hundreds of little ostrich butts sticking straight up in the air on the lawn of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. >

Clearly, these guys take American exceptionalism for granted, believing we are somehow owed this honorable distinction instead of understanding that we must continually earn it. They can't seem to grasp that, while being a world leader is an enormous responsibility and is at times costly, the bigger picture is that being one gives us tremendous advantages.

No more! Anyone who believes we can keep our superpower status without diplomacy, generosity, and *humility* needs to think again. That is exactly what the Greeks, Spanish and Romans thought, and they are now named in history books as failed empires. We better stop thinking their fate can't happen to us, because it absolutely can.

The strongest part of the American brand – even more impressive than our economic dominance – is our unprecedented and unparalleled time-honored reputation as a collaborative, compassionate, and supportive global leader and friend... yet another enormous advantage that has taken decades to build.

We are the people who initiated the Lend-Lease policy – which helped defeat Germany, Japan and Italy in World War II by providing weapons, food, oil, and other supplies to the United Kingdom, China, the Soviet Union and France – and enacted the Marshall Plan, enabling Europe to rebuild after years of devastating war.

Our security and support have provided countries the opportunity to foster democratic governments *and* strong economies. With our support, South Korea evolved from a poor, vulnerable autocracy to a vibrant, healthy democracy – as did Japan. We were instrumental in creating landmark global organizations like NATO, the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank.

We liberated concentration camps, greatly advanced human rights around the world, prevented a nuclear war, and stopped communism in its tracks. We steadfastly fought HIV/AIDS in developing countries, providing millions of people antiviral drugs and preventing hundreds of thousands of precious babies from being infected with HIV at birth.

Through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), support from the American people vastly increased access to education and healthcare for millions; helped achieve significant reductions in child and maternal mortality; was instrumental in eradicating smallpox and reducing malaria deaths; helped secure democracy for vulnerable nations; and is responsible for sparking economic development in regions throughout the world. We have provided critical assistance during natural disasters, famines, and other emergencies and provided access to clean drinking water for millions of desperate people.

There is a major misconception in our politics today that the United States did these things for other countries just to be nice. The story seems to be that the billions and billions we have given to people in other countries (which equals less than 1 percent of the annual federal budget, by the way) is nothing more than a wasted gift given to foreigners while the American people get nothing in return as we suffer through our own problems here at home.

This is 1000% false. Sure, helping people in need is a nice thing to do – and I do believe at our core Americans are super nice people – but we did many of these things in our own self-interest as much as anything else. After World War II, for example, we helped rebuild many economies from afar mainly to put us in a position to create a new world order... which we did.

We not only rebuilt this new international order to our advantage by making sure we would lead and operate it, but we also restored prosperity to a shattered world, repaired and strengthened our global

alliances, and put mechanisms in place to prevent future conflicts. These actions ensured we would enjoy political, economic and security cooperation around the world, plus created stability, predictability and financial gains not only for ourselves, but for many grateful nations.

The global rules, institutions, and alliances that emerged from this period – that WE wrote and formed – remain the foundation of our modern-day global structure. *A structure that still significantly benefits the United States.*

Our unprecedented and unparalleled reputation as a collaborative, compassionate, and supportive global leader and friend is also rapidly collapsing under the Trump/Vance administration. In fact, the words “rapidly collapsing” are hardly adequate to describe the absolute trainwreck that has happened here.

Results from the 2025 Democracy Perception Index – the world’s largest study on how people around the world perceive democracy – is heartbreaking. For the first time, more countries around the world have a positive view of China than of the United States. The perception of the United States declined noticeably in 2025, with our global net perception rating now similar to Russia’s. The proportion of countries where the United States held a net positive image decreased from 76 percent to 45 percent.

When it comes to the perception of political leaders, “Donald Trump has an almost universal negative perception rating: in 82 percent of countries around the world, Trump has a net negative rating, significantly worse than both Putin (61 percent) and Xi (44 percent).”

In June 2025, the Pew Research Center reported that, in Sweden, 79 percent of the people had a negative opinion of the United States, and over six-in-ten adults viewed America negatively in Canada, Mexico, Australia, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain and Turkey. U.S. ratings dropped significantly in 15 countries from the year before, the largest decrease being in Mexico, where only 29 percent had a favorable view of the U.S., compared with 61 percent in 2024. And this was *before* the Trump/Vance administration pulled their most vile global stunts. God only knows what these numbers are today.

People in most European and Latin American countries said China is now the global economic leader, including around six-in-ten in

Greece and Italy. The share of people who said the U.S. is the top global economic power decreased in eight countries since 2023 (Australia, France, Germany, Greece, Indonesia, Italy, Mexico and Spain). In these eight countries, with the exceptions of Australia and Italy, the number of people naming China as the number one economy increased. The number of people in Argentina, Brazil, Kenya and South Africa who view China as the world's leading economic power has also increased since 2023.

Half or more people in Australia, Canada, Mexico, and most European countries say American democracy is functioning poorly. In Australia, Canada, Mexico, Sweden and the Netherlands, around a third say our democracy is working very poorly. Many say U.S. democracy is no longer a good example for other countries to follow.

A 29-country Ipsos poll from April 2025 found that the number of people saying the United States would have an overall positive influence on global affairs had fallen in 26 out of 29 countries in just six months. On average, almost 46 percent across the 29 countries said the U.S. would have a positive influence, down from 59 percent who said the same in Sept/Oct 2024. While 52 percent of Canadians saw America as a positive influencer before the U.S. presidential election, only 19 percent felt the same way six months after. That's quite a fall from grace.

Without question, the Trump/Vance administration's isolationist, transactional, conditional and antagonistic approach to foreign policy has shaken the world's fundamental assumptions about American exceptionalism and called into question the special role we have been so fortunate to play.

It's not just the policies they initiate or fail to initiate – which are bad enough. It's also the insults, the tantrums, the mixed signals, the inconsistencies and contradictions, the reversals, the dismantling of key global agreements and institutions, and the outright lies that cause so much harm. It's the complete absence of risk versus reward analysis, serious deliberation with experts, or even the most rudimentary inquiry into potential consequences.

Instead of strengthening and solidifying our envied position on the world stage, Donald Trump, JD Vance and the rest of their crew have

done the opposite – hell-bent on tearing down eighty years of proven success and replacing it with an imperialistic, protectionist foreign policy that has zero chance of long-term success.

The National Security Strategy released by the White House in November 2025 reads like a declaration of surrender more than anything else. I'm not a conspiracy theorist, but if anything were going to convince me that Donald Trump is a Russian asset, this document – plus his 28-point “plan” to end the Russia/Ukraine war – would be it.

The Trump/Vance administration skewers our European allies, saying the European Union is not only “adverse” to American economic interests but is also facing “civilizational erasure.” They warn that “within a few decades at the latest, certain NATO members will become majority non-European,” meaning they are trying to export their vision of a white-preferred immigration system overseas. (I wonder how devastated these guys are going to be when they finally realize there are just not enough white people on planet earth to execute their grand plans?)

They condescendingly suggest that because the European Union is jeopardizing “political liberty,” repressing free speech, and “cratering birthrates,” the “goal” of the United States “should be to help Europe correct its current trajectory.” (For people who claim they value national sovereignty, they sure do like to get up in everyone's business. They're like the Gladys Kravitz-s of nations.)

Apparently, the U.S. can achieve this goal by elevating “patriotic European parties” (read: far-right populist parties). This reaffirms Vice President JD Vance's diatribe in Germany in February 2025, when he sneeringly lectured our allies about their retreat from “traditional values” – while, at the same time, meeting with and lavishing praise on the leader of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, who many accuse of aligning, at least on some level, with Nazism.

< Sidebar: The Trump/Vance administration's full-scale attack on our European allies – together with President Trump's threats against Greenland and his saying things like the continent is a “decaying” group of nations led by “weak” people and that European soldiers “stayed a little back, a little off the front lines” in Afghanistan – have been so disrespectful and misguided that even the far-right nationalist

leaders there, who once saw the administration as an ideological ally, are now distancing themselves from them. >

Most frightening, the administration says that European nations should take “primary responsibility” for their own defense, signaling that they believe the United States should no longer guarantee Europe’s security – taking direct aim at the U.S.-European military cooperation that is fundamental to the peace and security of the United States.

This is a continuation of the war Donald Trump has waged against NATO for years. On the 2016 campaign trail, candidate Trump made references to NATO’s waning effectiveness, even calling it “obsolete” at one point (he backtracked on this in 2019, saying NATO has “a great purpose, especially with the fact that NATO is becoming much more flexible, in terms of what it looks at,” whatever that means).

On the 2024 campaign trail, he said he wouldn’t defend NATO members if they didn’t meet their defense spending targets. This obviously alarmed many of our European allies, whose anxiety was also heightened by President Trump’s selection of Pete Hegseth as his second administration’s Defense Secretary.

In Hegseth’s book, *The War on Warriors: Behind the Betrayal of the Men Who Keep Us Free*, he wrote: “Why should America, the European ‘emergency contact number’ for the past century, listen to self-righteous and impotent nations asking us to honor outdated and one-sided defense arrangements they no longer live up to? Maybe if NATO countries actually ponied up for their own defense – but they don’t. They just yell about the rules while gutting their militaries and yelling at America for help.”

Donald Trump’s bombastic campaign rhetoric and Pete Hegseth’s insulting words highlight their belief that our European allies had been taking advantage of our military protection for decades without paying their fair share financially.

While it’s true there were many years that NATO members fell short of their financial obligations, those days are over. All 32 members of the alliance met or exceeded the two percent spending commitment in 2025 – the first time this has happened since the spending target was created in 2014. < During the 2025 NATO Summit, members made a

commitment to investing five percent of GDP annually on core defense requirements and defense and security-related spending by 2035. >

Although President Trump takes credit for this, naturally, I feel it's more a response to Vladimir Putin's unrelenting aggression, Europe's rising apprehension of Russia and China, and the Trump/Vance administration pulling the U.S. away from global alliances than it is a reaction to rants and threats made by the likes of Donald Trump, JD Vance, Marco Rubio and Pete Hegseth (meaning it could have been achieved without them being such jerks about it).

President Trump's ire at NATO went into overdrive after he chose to unilaterally go to war with Iran. He repeatedly lashed out at our NATO allies for not "helping" in the war effort – obviously forgetting that 1) he forgot to loop them in beforehand, and 2) that he had been a complete jackass to them for months.

This all came to a head at the White House on April 9, 2026. After a meeting between President Trump and Mark Rutte, the secretary general of the military alliance – where President Trump reportedly ranted and raved at the poor man – the U.S. president posted: "NATO WASN'T THERE WHEN WE NEEDED THEM, AND THEY WON'T BE THERE IF WE NEED THEM AGAIN. REMEMBER GREENLAND, THAT BIG, POORLY RUN, PIECE OF ICE!!!" – whatever in the world that non sequitur even means.

Please believe, the United States needs NATO now as much as we did in 1949, when the group was formed as a defense against Soviet aggression. NATO provides the U.S. valuable partnerships that fortify our national defense and security plus crisis-management capabilities around the world.

If nothing else, we benefit greatly from NATO's Principle of Collective Defense, which is the idea that an attack against one of its members is considered as an attack against all (this principle is commonly known as Article 5). Article 5 has been invoked only once, in response to the 9/11 U.S. terrorist attacks. On one of the worst days in our nation's history, our faithful allies didn't blink and had our back 100%. NATO troops then fought alongside us in Afghanistan for two decades – which is why Donald Trump saying that NATO soldiers

“stayed a little back, a little off the front lines” in Afghanistan is so incredibly offensive.

Denmark had more soldiers die per capita in Afghanistan than the United States did – which makes Donald Trump’s Greenland temper tantrums even more horrifying. Every single American should be beyond embarrassed that our leaders are acting like mob bosses overseas. It’s not only mortifying but, if we don’t stop this madness, it will come back to haunt us in ways we can’t even imagine.

The Trump/Vance administration obviously doesn’t get that concept yet because their solution to a “weak” Europe and “ineffective” NATO is to expand the “Board of Peace,” a scheme originally designed to supervise their plan to transform Gaza into the new Las Vegas. Now, however, the Board of Peace is marketing itself as a new international peacekeeping body. Kind of like a global Mar-a-Lago, countries can become permanent members if they pay over a billion dollars in cash. “This is not just a board of peace,” Secretary of State Marco Rubio declared. “This is a board of action.” (insert: eye-roll emoji)

Surprising no one, the Board of Peace will be permanently led by one Donald J. Trump, who posted on social media that the board is “the Greatest and Most Prestigious Board ever assembled at any time, any place.” The charter explains that the chairman has the “exclusive authority” to create other entities to carry out the board’s mission and has the power to invite states to join, adopt resolutions and directives, veto resolutions, dissolve the board, and to decide how the billions are spent. The chairman can only be removed by voluntary resignation or if he becomes incapacitated – meaning, he doesn’t have to leave when he is no longer the U.S. president. Plus, Donald Trump and only Donald Trump can designate his successor. (insert: facepalm emoji)

The Trump/Vance administration reportedly reached out to around 60 countries to join the board, but a full list was not made public. I’m not sure you could trust any list the White House released anyway, because at one point they said Belgium had joined the board but Maxime Prévot, the country’s deputy prime minister and minister of foreign affairs, was quick to deny that report, saying Belgium, like other European nations, had “reservations” about this new endeavor.

Not so with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who posted on X that, “We have, of course, accepted this honourable invitation” (insert: throw-up emoji).

Many bewildered countries are stalling, but others have officially joined, including Albania, Argentina, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Belarus, Bulgaria, Egypt, Hungary, Israel, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Mongolia, Morocco, Pakistan, Paraguay, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam.

Norway, Sweden, Slovenia, Spain and France have definitively said they would *not* join – France making Donald Trump so mad that he threatened to impose 200% tariffs on their wine (surprise, surprise). Canada’s invitation has been rescinded since Prime Minister Mark Carney upstaged President Trump at the World Economic Forum in Davos (surprise, surprise) – although I doubt Mr. Carney is losing much sleep over it.

In fact, it’s hard to imagine France – or China, Russia or the United Kingdom – joining, them not wanting to weaken the United Nations in any way since they serve permanently on its Security Council and have a veto over its actions – but good ‘ol Vladimir, ever crafty, said the Kremlin would consider joining and paying the \$1 billion initiation fee if he could get it from frozen Russian assets.

This, of course, was all playing out amid President Trump’s proclamation (yet again) that the U.S. would acquire Greenland “the easy way” or “the hard way” – a once unthinkable threat to take over the sovereign territory of a European Union member and NATO ally by the president of the United States.

....so unthinkable that Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said such an act would mark the end of NATO: “If the United States were to choose to attack another NATO country, then everything would come to an end. The international community as we know it, democratic rules of the game, NATO, the world’s strongest defensive alliance – all of that would collapse if one NATO country chose to attack another.”

Far from being chastened, President Trump, America’s very own Michael Corleone, took delight in rubbing Europe’s face in his threat, posting a map showing Greenland, Canada and Venezuela all as part of

the United States and putting a 10 percent tariff increase on imports from Britain, Denmark, France, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden – all of which had recently deployed troops to Greenland – until they helped the United States strike a deal to obtain the Danish territory.

A few months earlier, our allies may have just rolled their eyes and kept their mouths shut – even when the president of the United States (who is 79 years old, not 12) taunted them, saying things like, without America’s help in World War II, “you’d all be speaking German” and “the United States is keeping the whole world afloat” and their “countries are going to hell.”

But the Greenland episode made clear they have had enough of his foolishness. Whereas, before, they tried everything from capitulation and false flattery – sending him love letters, building custom-made McDonalds food trucks, draping banners of his face around their cities, nominating him for the Nobel Peace Prize, actually *giving* him their Nobel Peace Prize, *creating* peace prizes to give him, and calling him “daddy” at a NATO summit – this debacle seemed to be the last straw.

Miraculously, Donald Trump seemed to sense that the rest of the world had lost patience with his unquenchable ego and unpredictable hissy fits but, unfortunately, despite President TACO’s (*Trump Always Chickens Out*) whiplash reversal – where he pivoted from double-digit tariffs to settling for a “framework of a future deal” within literally an hour – the damage was done.

Belgium Prime Minister Bart De Wever: “Until now, we tried to appease the new president in the White House. We were very lenient, also with the tariffs, we were lenient, hoping to get his support for the Ukraine war. But now so many red lines are being crossed. Being a happy vassal is one thing, being a miserable slave is something else.”

Polish prime minister Donald Tusk: “Appeasement is always a sign of weakness. Europe cannot afford to be weak – neither against its enemies, nor ally. Appeasement means no results, only humiliation.”

In a brave speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos – where he received a standing ovation – Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney said that the United States had basically abdicated its once unassailable leadership role in NATO: “We are in the midst of a rupture, not a

transition.” The “middle powers must act together – because if we’re not at the table, we’re on the menu... When the rules no longer protect you, you must protect yourself.”

Make no mistake, the two people who benefit most – or perhaps the *only* people who benefit *at all* – from Trump & Co. blowing apart our relationships with our European allies are Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping. Hands down.

Since NATO was founded in 1949, Soviet, then Russian, leaders have tried to undermine the alliance. Vladimir Putin especially loathes the trans-Atlantic bond because, as NATO expands eastward, it’s the only thing that stands in the way of his imperial aspirations.

The more NATO membership extends to former Soviet states and their former communist allies, the harder it is for Putin to re-establish his own sphere of influence (already, Estonia, Lithuania and Poland are some of NATO’s most committed members). By creating such a deep rift between the United States and Europe, Donald Trump, JD Vance and Marco Rubio are doing the Kremlin’s dirty work for them, helping achieve what has alluded them for over 75 years.

So, of course the Russians were downright giddy over this turn of events. “Trans-Atlantic unity is over,” declared Russian presidential envoy Kirill Dmitriev. “Collapse of the transatlantic union.”

“It was hard to imagine before that such a thing could happen,” Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said, marveling over a scenario where “one NATO member is going to attack another NATO member.” He quickly likened President Trump’s strategy for Greenland with Russia’s annexation of the Ukrainian Black Sea peninsula of Crimea: “Crimea is no less important for the Russian Federation than Greenland is for the United States” – and just like that, the world understood that the United States of America was now operating from the same playbook as Russia.

Likewise, China is thrilled by the Trump/Vance administration’s National Security Strategy and foreign policy – particularly the military strike on Venezuela – because it gives Xi Jinping the perfect excuse to forcefully assert his ambitions in his own neighborhood, including his aggressive plans for the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait.

In a January 20, 2025 commentary, Xinhua, the Chinese state-news agency, said that the United States’ “true colors are revealed” and the U.S. is now a “purely extractive superpower” that is returning “the world to a barbaric colonial era of plunder.”

“The world map is no longer a political chart of alliances and sovereignties,” they said, “but a crude inventory of assets. A country’s status – ally, rival or neutral – is irrelevant beside the fundamental question of its utility.” Ouch.

Really think about the direction Donald Trump, JD Vance and Marco Rubio are taking us. The United States used to lead by example – and in many ways that was enough to keep China and others in line. Now, however, we have no right to say anything if Xi Jinping decides to overthrow Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te. Worse, now that Trump, Vance and Rubio have successfully ticked all our allies off, we may not be able to coordinate an international response if they do (which we have already seen happen in Iran).

Some Trump devotees have tried to spin the silver lining that the ousting of Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela in particular was a huge blow to China – since they have tried diligently to build close ties in Latin America for decades, only to have the playing field in the Western Hemisphere potentially shift toward America (these are probably the same people who have posters depicting Donald Trump as Rambo or riding a T-rex).

That’s likely overselling the reality. Venezuela is only China’s ninth-biggest nation in Latin America for investment. While China has been the largest buyer of Venezuelan oil, it amounted to less than 5 percent of its total crude imports in 2025. In fact, Venezuela’s share of total Chinese imports, exports, and direct investment is typically below 1 percent.

In truth, China could benefit greatly from America rebuilding the Venezuelan economy and energy sector because China is one of the country’s largest creditors (Venezuela has defaulted on almost all its debts to China). Analysts report that China has been super frustrated by the corruption and economic/resource mismanagement in Caracas – so much so that China stopped lending to them over eight years ago.



In a million years I will never understand what Donald Trump, JD Vance and Marco Rubio are thinking. Being a loyal ally and putting “America First” DO NOT have to be mutually exclusive endeavors. We can be faithful to our interests without insulting (and abandoning) the entire world. **America First doesn’t have to mean America Alone.**

As I said earlier, of course there will be times when we should embrace sovereignty, but we must reject isolationism at all costs. Isolationist rants may make for a great show at campaign rallies but, in the real world, it is reckless and puts Americans in danger.

It’s also just bad business. I know I sound like a broken record, but we don’t have such an embarrassment of riches in this country that we can just blow everyone else off.

Trump & Co. can rant and rave about Europe all they want, but American military manufacturers make a fortune from NATO members – building drones, Patriot missiles, helicopters, radar systems and our F-35 fighter jets that fifteen NATO countries either fly or plan to fly. In fact, European countries buy around 35 percent of our arms exports, making Europe our military industrial base’s largest customer.

Europe is our largest trade and investment partner, contributing to more than \$2 trillion in annual trade and over \$5 trillion in cross-border investment – which supports millions of jobs. The 450 million people who live in the European Union (EU) are responsible for over \$5.4 billion worth of goods and services traded between the U.S. and EU every day. In 2025, the EU bought more services from the United States (\$300 billion) than it exported (\$200 billion).

This means our European allies can hurt us economically – big time. Even before Donald Trump’s Greenland tirade, the EU had compiled a list of U.S. goods worth 93 billion euro – \$107 billion – that they can hit us with in retaliatory tariffs (the list was made in 2025 in response to President Trump’s Trade War 2.0).

Another thing the EU devised is the “Anti-Coercion Instrument” (ACI) – sometimes referred to as their trade “bazooka” – that allows

the European Commission to target almost any U.S. goods or services in Europe with an assortment of barriers and restrictions. These can include restrictions on investment, the lifting of intellectual property protections, the suspension of business licenses, and straight-up bans on market access to the Eurozone.

While Donald Trump remains convinced – despite mountains of evidence to the contrary – that his authoritarian, tough guy approach to trade will bring other countries – with their tails between their legs – to the table, that’s just not the world we live in anymore. All his clumsy attempts at hardball have managed to do is further alienate our allies, endanger our access to global markets, wreck our supply chains, and embolden our number one competitor.

So, now – huge surprise – it looks like our allies have decided to move on without us.... just like they did when, in the first week of his first presidency, President Trump withdrew the United States from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

TPP was an ambitious free trade agreement among twelve Asia-Pacific countries – Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, the United States and Vietnam – designed to eliminate trade barriers and establish new market-oriented trade rules.

At the time, these twelve countries made up around 40 percent of the global economy and American trade with them totaled over \$276 billion in services and over \$1.5 trillion in merchandise. U.S. foreign direct investment into these countries totaled \$61 billion, while they invested almost \$59 billion in the United States.

TPP was offering greater access to markets for service providers, and addressed tariffs on goods and services, discrimination protections, investor protections, e-commerce rules, intellectual property rights, worker’s rights, environmental safety and stewardship, dispute resolution mechanisms, and restrictions on state-owned enterprises. The agreement also significantly lowered tariffs and other trade barriers on a wide range of goods. America alone would have seen 18,000 individual tariffs be reduced to zero.

After grueling negotiations, TPP was signed by the member countries on February 4, 2016. But, because it got turned into a political

football in the 2016 presidential election between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, TPP was never ratified by the U.S. Congress.

At the time, the Peterson Institute for International Economics, a think tank, estimated that TPP would “increase annual real incomes in the U.S. by \$131 billion, or 0.5 percent of GDP, and annual exports by \$357 billion, or 9.1 percent of exports, over baseline projections by 2030, when the agreement is nearly fully implemented.”

So, after all that hard work, President Trump sure showed the world who was boss when he pulled us out of the deal on January 23, 2017, just three days after his first inauguration. Wow, what a gutsy move! “America First,” baby!

Surely there was loud weeping and gnashing of teeth by the other eleven countries when we left, right? All eleven probably went into a fetal position because they had nowhere else to turn!!

Ummm... nope. Not even close. The other countries just carried right on without us, signing a new deal called the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), an agreement that moved all of them toward expanded trade and investment, increased economic growth, lower consumer prices, and new domestic jobs. The United Kingdom joined in 2024, and China, Costa Rica, Ecuador, the Philippines, Taiwan, the United Arab Emirates, Uruguay, and Ukraine have all applied to be members (with Indonesia, South Korea and Thailand expressing interest in joining).

An additional bonus was that our exit from TPP gave China even more room to amplify what was already becoming a dominant presence in Asia, which is the last thing we needed to be doing at the time and a mistake we are paying for more and more by the day. We showed them all right!

President Trump made a huge mistake when he pulled us out of TPP, a fact he seemed to realize pretty quickly. One year after our withdrawal, he indicated during a television interview that he would be willing to get back in the deal and, in April 2018, he officially ordered his top administration officials to investigate rejoining the partnership.

Two years later, in a stunning lack of self-awareness, the U.S. Ambassador to Japan William Hagerty simply could not believe the *nerve* of Japan to forge an economic partnership agreement with the

European Union and their *nerve* to continue with the CPTPP, which by that time had taken effect.

“By implementing these agreements before addressing our bilateral trade relationship,” he said, “Japan is effectively redistributing market share away from its strongest ally, the United States... Given the strength of our security and diplomatic relationships, our view is that we should have an equally strong economic relationship.”

I’m sorry, *who* has *what* nerve? He had to be kidding. Sorry boys, that’s just not the way real life works. Has Mr. Hagerty never heard the phrase *what’s good for the goose is good for the gander*? My guess is that Japan decided that, since the United States decided to turn inward and not be a cooperative world player, they should just *Make Japan Great Again!* I bet that would look great on a red hat!

After that delightful experience, one would think that Donald Trump & Co. would have gained some much-needed wisdom and insight but ... nope... eight years later, it all started again.

But this time the world was ready. Immediately after President Trump announced 25 percent tariffs on all goods from Canada and Mexico on January 20, 2025 – his very first day back in office – then Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau revealed he and Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum had agreed to work together to fight back against his nonsense.

< Donald Trump has always had an inexplicable beef with Canada – which is strange because they are actually one of our best trading partners. Personally, I’m convinced that Donald’s main problem with Canada is that Justin Trudeau is younger, smarter, thinner and looks uber hot in a suit, but I can’t prove it. >

President Sheinbaum also weighed in, saying Mexico’s response would include both tariff and nontariff measures, including an import-substitution program called “Plan Mexico” as well as a potential “carousel retaliation,” which would regularly but randomly rotate the U.S. products that were subject to Trump’s tariffs with products from other countries. This savvy move injected uncertainty into many American export sectors like agriculture.

South Korea’s president dispatched special envoys to Australia and Germany to discuss defense and trade issues, with plans to send

delegations to several others. Brazil and India announced plans to increase their bilateral trade by 70 percent, to \$20 billion, and Brazil and Mexico began deepening their relationship.

In January 2025, Indonesia became the 10th nation to join BRICS, a group of major emerging economies established in 2009, that also includes Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates (Saudi Arabia was set to join but remains on the fence). This economic powerhouse now includes almost half the world's population and over 40 percent of its total economic output – and that's before Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Nigeria, Thailand, Uganda and Uzbekistan finalize their “partner country” status to full memberships.

In May 2025, the eleven members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) – Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam – met with the six Middle Eastern nations that make up the Gulf Cooperation Council – Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates – in Malaysia. India, who already has multiple agreements with the group, is expanding the relationship, and Canada is finalizing a multifaceted agreement embracing political, economic, and development cooperation with them. Also in May, the United Kingdom and India announced the completion of a trade agreement that had been stalled for several years.

Within weeks after Donald Trump's 2024 victory – well before he was even sworn in – the European Union reached a new political pact with Switzerland to deepen economic ties, update existing trade deals, and establish new cooperation agreements.

A couple of weeks after *that*, the EU struck a deal to increase trade with Mexico before finalizing an economic partnership with Indonesia. They then started negotiating trade deals with Philippines, Malaysia and Thailand and moved to build closer ties with India, South Africa, and other countries across South America and Asia. In May 2025, Britain and the EU announced a “reset” of post-Brexit relations and in June 2025, the EU and Canada struck a defense agreement, expanding their military cooperation.

On January 9, 2026, European Union countries approved a trade deal with the South American Mercosur nations, bringing together a market of more than 700 million consumers accounting for a quarter of global gross domestic product. Mercosur's full members are Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Bolivia, and the associated states are Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, and Suriname (Venezuela has been suspended).

At the signing, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said, "We choose fair trade over tariffs. We choose a productive long-term partnership over isolation. We will join forces like never before, because we believe that this is the best way to make our people and our countries prosper." Must be nice.

Two weeks later, India and the European Union finalized what Ursula von der Leyen called "the mother of all deals" – a free-trade agreement that is the largest such pact by population ever. The deal links almost two billion consumers and eliminates or reduces tariffs for over 90 percent of EU goods, potentially saving the EU around \$4.8 billion a year. The agreement is expected to double the total value of goods that the EU exports to India within the next six years.

Of the deal, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that this was "the biggest free-trade agreement by India so far" and that the deal demonstrated India's and Europe's "shared commitment to democracy and rule of law."

But once again, the biggest winner – by far – in Donald Trump's Trade War 2.0 is Xi Jinping, because when the United States acts crazy, all roads lead to China.

The first time around, China facilitated the signing of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), an agreement between them and 14 other nations (Australia, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, New Zealand, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand and Vietnam). The RCEP is the largest regional free trade agreement in the world, covering 30 percent of the global population – 2.2+ billion people – and 30 percent of global GDP.

Now, the haphazard, incompetent trade moves by the Trump/Vance administration have played right into Xi Jinping's hand for a

second time, helping him leverage the global goodwill he has cultivated for decades.

After President Trump's January 2026 broadside against Europe, Xi Jinping and Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney announced a new "strategic partnership" that will lead to "considerable" Chinese investment in Canada's auto sector within three years.

In a remarkable statement, Carney said, "In terms of the way that our relationship has progressed in recent months, with China, it is more predictable" – meaning, China is now more predictable than the United States of America. Wow.

Also in January, United Kingdom Prime Minister Keir Starmer headed to Beijing, the first visit by a U.K. prime minister in eight years, and South Korean President Lee Jae Myung said that he wants a "full-scale restoration" of ties with China. Finnish Prime Minister Petteri Orpo also traveled to Beijing and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz announced a trip there as well. French President Emmanuel Macron would have probably announced a trip, but he had already been there in December.

After President Trump insulted Colombia with his Trade War 2.0 threats – calling Colombian President Gustavo Petro a "lunatic who has many mental problems" and "an illegal drug leader" before hitting him with sanctions – China's ambassador to Colombia posted on X: "We are at the best moment in our relations between China and Colombia, which we've had for 45 years."

Thanks to both Trump administrations, China's trade with Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) has exploded. China is LAC's number two trading partner behind the U.S. – with bilateral trade worth more than \$500 billion in 2024 – but is the number one partner for several South American nations including Brazil, Chile and Peru.

In March 2026, President Trump met with leaders from across Latin America and the Caribbean for his inaugural *Shield of the Americas* Summit. The meeting was yet another attempt by the Trump/Vance administration to telegraph their supposed geopolitical primacy in the Western Hemisphere.

Although members of the Trump Bro-Club – like Argentina's Javier Milei and El Salvador's Nayib Bukele – showed up, leaders of

Brazil, Mexico and Colombia (which combined make-up over half of the region's GDP) were no-shows.

This could be that, since Chinese banks have given over \$120 billion in loans to LAC nations, they can keep their options open, or it could be because the Trump/Vance administration's heavy-handed economic coercion approach isn't sitting well with them.

Even those who showed up are playing both sides. Javier Milei – who gladly accepted \$20 billion from the Trump/Vance administration and who has done things his buddy Trump wants, like rejecting an invite to join BRICS and blocking Chinese projects – has increased his exports to China by 125 percent year on year, with China even overtaking Brazil as Argentina's biggest trading partner at one point.

Then there is China's blossoming relationship with Mexico. After investing \$140 million to build electric elevators in Nuevo Leon, Lingong Machinery Group, a top Chinese company in the heavy construction machinery industry, invested \$5 billion more there on projects focused on the local and North American market – an effort estimated to create 7,000 jobs. In 2024, BYD, China's top electric-vehicle manufacturer, sent a delegation to the Mexican State of Jalisco to discuss building an electric vehicle manufacturing plant there.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) – with a combined gross domestic product of \$3.8 trillion – is China's largest trading partner, with bilateral trade totaling \$982 billion in 2024, almost double their trade with the United States. On October 28, 2025, the ASEAN nations and China signed an upgraded free trade pact, known as ACFTA 3.0 (the original ACFTA was fully implemented in 2010). This landmark agreement expands their cooperation into digital and green economies and solidifies supply chain connectivity.

China is the largest trading partner with Japan and South Korea. Ninety percent (90%) of the electric vehicles sold in Indonesia are made in China and Chinese automakers are cutting into Japan's car market share in Thailand and Malaysia. Chinese smartphones now outsell iPhones in the region.

In April 2025, Xi Jinping embarked on a three-nation tour of Southeast Asia – to Cambodia, Malaysia and Vietnam – where he signed

over 100 agreements addressing infrastructure, technology, education and health.

Between 2018 and 2022, China invested \$147 billion in Vietnam and increased its exports to them by 75 percent. This relationship continues, with investors from China and Hong Kong registering \$8.14 billion in pledged foreign direct investment in the all-important southeast Asian country in 2025 alone. Meanwhile, U.S. registered investment in Vietnam fell to \$500 million in 2023 from \$700 million in 2022. By 2024, the United States registered only \$287 million in new investment in Vietnam, a 54 percent decrease from 2023. We have now dropped to be the 11th largest investor in Vietnam.

This is not good. It's impossible to overstate how critical the manufacturing hub along the South China Sea is to global supply chain.

< The importance of the U.S. maintaining a strong relationship with Vietnam goes way beyond trade. An October 2025 investigative report from The New York Times revealed that Vietnam and Russia have strengthened their military and political relationship. The report found that Vietnam is secretly buying arms from Russia in defiance of sanctions, using third-party intermediaries to hide payments.

The NYT also reports that Vietnamese officials are frustrated by the Trump/Vance administration's foreign aid cuts and unpredictable tariff games – developments that are pushing them farther away from Washington and even closer to Moscow. Plus, a \$1.5 billion golf complex outside Hanoi – as well as plans for a Trump skyscraper in Ho Chi Minh City – have infuriated Vietnamese residents because their leaders are granting the Trump family more generous concessions than anyone in Vietnam, however connected, receives. >

Then there is India. On January 20, 2025, India's foreign minister was seated in the front row for President Trump's second inauguration, a symbol of our special relationship with the world's most populous democratic country.

Eight months later, after the Trump/Vance administration slapped the highest tariff rate in the world on India, a photo emerged of Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The photo was taken in September 2025 at the Tianjin summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which was attended by 20

foreign leaders, including the leaders of Egypt, Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, Belarus and Central Asian and Caucasus states (although Kim Jong Un didn't attend the summit, he joined the group later for the infamous Chinese military parade, which we'll cover in few minutes).

In response to the alarming photo, President Trump posted: "Looks like we've lost India and Russia to deepest, darkest, China. May they have a long and prosperous future together!" – as if he had nothing to do with it.

Even though India and the United States finalized an interim trade agreement in February 2026 – committing to further negotiations toward a broader bilateral agreement – major damage has been done ... which is one of the most outrageously irresponsible things the Trump/Vance administration has managed to do yet.

For one, India is absolutely critical to our Indo-Pacific national security strategy. China's aggressive moves in the Indian Ocean make it imperative that the United States and India have even *more* bilateral defense cooperation, certainly not less (more on this in a few minutes).

India is also our best economic hedge against China. It is a vital geopolitical counterweight, offering supply chain diversification and a massive workforce with expanding manufacturing capabilities.

Before Donald Trump's reelection, many American companies had started to plan enormous investments in India as part of what is known as China Plus One, a business strategy where companies diversify their supply chains by adding manufacturing/sourcing from at least one other country besides China. But when the Trump/Vance administration hit India with 50 percent tariffs in September 2025, it undercut much of the progress that had been made.

What happened next was entirely predictable because the minute the United States turned into a bully and started acting shady and shifty, India had little choice but to turn to Beijing. Prime Minister Modi immediately booked passage to China, his first trip there in seven years.

China and India have an extremely complicated relationship, complete with soldiers facing off across their disputed borders in the Himalayas. That said, in classic Phase Two fashion, Xi Jinping is eager to cooperate with Prime Minister Modi, at least economically, because

once again he recognizes what Donald Trump and JD Vance obviously don't: India is a massive *market* with 1.47 *billion* customers.

India is currently the world's fifth largest economy, accounting for 9.7 percent of global GDP, and is on pace to overtake Japan soon. They have long aspired to be in the top three.

Think about it this way: Middle income countries are home to 75 percent of the world's population and represent around one third of global GDP. In Donald Trump's first term, the Brookings Institute reported that "just over 50 percent of the world's population, or some 3.8 billion people, lived in households with enough discretionary expenditure to be considered 'middle class' or 'rich'." Back then, "the middle class was already the largest segment of demand in the global economy." By their calculations, the middle-class market in India in 2030 will account for \$12.3 trillion, comparable in size to a U.S. middle-class market at that time of \$15.9 trillion."

But even more important, India is a perfect example of how, if we disengage from the world and forfeit our role as an international force, dictatorial leaders will race to fill the void.

In December 2025 – with perfect timing – Vladimir Putin followed up the September Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit with a two-day summit in New Delhi with Prime Minister Modi. After Modi greeted Putin at the airport with a big bear hug, the two leaders solidified the relationship between their countries by finalizing an economic plan to boost annual trade to \$100 billion by 2030 (their bilateral trade was \$68.7 billion in FY2025); reinforcing energy security (Putin promised Modi "uninterrupted shipments" of fuel); and signing multiple labor agreements.

Back over in China, Xi Jinping continues to execute Mao's Phase Two like a boss. Remember the *strategic stalemate* phase? Where the Chinese are supposed to be building strength and *recruiting allies* while eroding the opposition's morale through guerrilla attacks and propaganda?

We'll get to the last part of that – eroding the opposition's morale through guerrilla attacks and propaganda – in a second, but as for the recruiting allies part, hold on to your hats.

As the Trump/Vance administration withdraws from the world and does super shitty things like shutter the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) – – an agency that cost less than 1 percent of the U.S. federal budget but saved an estimated 5.6 million lives every year by providing interventions for HIV/AIDS, vaccine-preventable illnesses, and emergency/humanitarian relief alone (this number doesn't even include interventions for water and sanitation, family planning, and nutrition, which are significant in and of themselves) – – the Chinese continue on with the extensive global outreach they have nurtured for years.

“Gracias China!!!,” Mexico’s foreign minister posted to Twitter after China – now Mexico’s second-largest trading partner in Latin America – sent his country a planeload of masks, testing kits, vaccines and ventilators during the Covid crisis.

China began its global charm offensive in 2013, when Xi Jinping announced what would become the multibillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). One Belt, One Road extends low-cost loans and builds infrastructure for countries across the world – including roads, ports, railways, power plants, 5G networks and fiber-optic cables.

Since then, Xi Jinping has worked hard to convince the world that, even though China has a state-controlled, rabidly protected economy, *they* are actually the true champions of globalization and free trade – a narrative that the Trump/Vance administration is feeding into with their protectionist policies.

“Pursuing protectionism is just like locking oneself in a dark room. While wind and rain may be kept outside, that dark room will also block light and air. No one will emerge as a winner in a trade war,” Xi Jinping said at the World Economic Forum on January 17, 2017, just days before Donald Trump was inaugurated for his first term.

< If you remember a few pages back to the polls taken around the world – the ones where people in most European and Latin American countries now say China is the global economic leader – their strategy is clearly working. >

Most anyone who is paying attention considers One Belt, One Road to be the most aggressive worldwide outreach endeavor in recent history, if not ever – and for good reason.

Between 2013 and 2018 alone, China signed 173 cooperation documents with 125 countries and 29 international organizations. These countries included 18 of the European Union's 27 members. Pre-Covid, trade between China and the countries involved with the initiative had exceeded \$6 trillion, with an average annual growth of 4 percent. Even during the pandemic, Beijing continued to cut deals. At the end of 2020, for example, the European Union and China struck a deal that allows Beijing to make larger investments in E.U.-based companies.

Ten years after Xi Jinping announced his "Project of the Century," over 150 countries – representing almost 75 percent of the global population and over half the world's GDP – had signed up, and China had made hundreds of billions of dollars in loans and/or grants for critical infrastructure around the world.

These deals are alarmingly strategic. In September 2024, in the South American town of Guyana, the Chinese were busy building everything from hotels to bridges to a \$150 million international airport – while, offshore, ExxonMobil pumped thousands of barrels daily from a new oil discovery.

Just how deep into the global economy does China's reach extend thanks to One Belt, One Road? In 2019, the Kiel Institute for the World Economy – an independent, nonprofit economic research institute and think tank based in Kiel, Germany – analyzed "a total of 1,974 Chinese loans and 2,947 Chinese grants to 152 countries from 1949 to 2017."

The analysis revealed that "China's direct loans and trade credits had climbed from almost zero in 1998 to more than 1.6 trillion, or close to 2 percent of world GDP in 2018. These loans mostly went to low- and middle-income countries. In total, estimates suggest that the Chinese state now accounted for a quarter of total bank lending to emerging markets. This had transformed China into the largest official creditor, *easily surpassing the IMF or the World Bank.*"

Although these are huge numbers, they added, the actual numbers are much larger because "about one half of China's large-scale lending to developing countries is 'hidden' and not recorded in the main international databases used by researchers and practitioners alike."

Lest you think this may have slowed down, research by Christoph Nedopil – director of the Griffith Asia Institute in Brisbane, Australia

and visiting professor at Fanhai International School of Finance, Fudan University in Shanghai – found that the Belt and Road Initiative hit a record level of engagement in 2025 (over \$213 billion), driven by massive energy, mining, and technology investments, with significant increases in Central Asia and construction deals in Africa, Southeast Asia and Latin America.

Meanwhile, China has been wooing Russia for years, to the point where Presidents Putin and Xi Jinping made pancakes together at a joint military drill in 2018. Declaring their friendship had “no limits,” Putin and Xi Jinping signed an agreement during the Beijing Olympics (just weeks before Putin’s invasion of Ukraine) that rejected NATO expansion and framed Western democracy as some sort of evil plot.

Since then, China has been happily shoving drone parts and other war hardware to its new best friend Russia. In fact, Russia imported \$1.9 billion of “high-priority dual-use items” from China in the first half of 2025, including products that can help make armored vehicles, body armor, drones, military jets, and tanks (these are all subject to sanctions by the West). The Foundation for Defense of Democracies lists over 300 examples of Chinese parts in drones, missiles and other weaponry that are currently in Russian weapons factories.

China has also been Russia’s top purchaser of fossil fuels during the war in Ukraine, accounting for 48 percent of Russia’s export revenues in December 2025. This is a huge help since fossil fuels are essentially funding the entirety of Russia’s side of the war. < China relied on sanctioned crudes from Iran, Russia and Venezuela for a large share of its imports in 2025. >

China makes no secret of why they are doing this. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi has said openly that his country doesn’t want Russia to lose in Ukraine because it wants the attention of the United States divided between Europe and Asia.

The help between Russia and China goes both ways. Documents obtained by the hactivist group Black Moon – and reviewed by The Washington Post – revealed that Russia is helping prepare China to attack Taiwan, agreeing to provide equipment and training for a Chinese airborne battalion and sharing its knowledge in airdropping armored vehicles.

This is not a small development. In October 2024, Russia agreed to sell the People’s Liberation Army Air Force 37 BMD-4M light amphibious vehicles, 11 Sprut-SDM1 self-propelled anti-tank guns, and 11 BTR-MDM airborne armored personnel carriers, in addition to command and observation vehicles and special purpose parachute systems designed to airdrop heavy loads from high altitudes.

And now Russia and China are both helping Iran fight against *the United States*. Three U.S. officials told The Washington Post that Russia – who called for an end to the Iranian war the minute it started, saying it was an “unprovoked act of armed aggression” – has provided intelligence to Iran, including satellite imagery showing the locations of our warships and military personnel in the Middle East.

The Washington Post also reported that “two ships owned by an Iranian company that the United States has accused of supplying material to Tehran’s ballistic missile program departed a Chinese chemical-storage port this week laden with cargo and headed for Iran, according to a Washington Post analysis of ship-tracking data, satellite imagery and Treasury Department records.”

“The Shabdis and the Barzin – which can carry up to 6,500 and 14,500 20-foot-long containers, respectively – had docked at the Gaolan port in Zhuhai, a city on China’s southeastern coast. Experts told The Post that Gaolan is a loading port for chemicals including sodium perchlorate, a key precursor for solid rocket fuel that Iran desperately needs for its missile program.”

China too has been critical of the Iranian war from the beginning. The war “should never have happened,” China’s foreign minister Wang Yi said early on. He also warned that regime change “will find no popular support... a strong fist does not mean strong reason. The world cannot return to the law of the jungle.”

China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea are obviously doing anything and everything possible to solidify their “We Hate America” club, and we can’t allow this to get any worse than it already is. Individually, these countries pose constant challenges to our national security but, together, their collective capabilities improve their resilience against our efforts to constrain and/or deter their activities.

The disruptive and destructive collateral damage of tyranny knows no borders. Authoritarian powers will always try to expand their control by sabotaging the democratic sovereignty of other states. And they will zealously join together to do it. That's just a fact.

Can you imagine what would happen if Xi Jinping had a free pass at Taiwan, then decided he wanted to reshape the entire Indo-Pacific order, starting with the Philippines? Or if Putin had free reign to charge through the rest of Eastern Europe, and then through the Balkans?

I can imagine these things, which is one of many reasons why I'm completely bewildered by the thought process of Donald Trump, JD Vance, Marco Rubio, and many others in this administration. The new China, Russia, Iran, North Korea Fight Club makes it essential we have as many countries on our side as possible.

China's increasingly antagonistic military posture toward Taiwan and its aggressive, unlawful military buildup in the South China Sea – where the People's Liberation Army has built a \$50 billion+ military fortress – in and of themselves make having allies an urgent priority.

China has used the disputed waters of the South and East China Seas as its personal battlefield, building militarized artificial islands and occupying disputed reefs and shoals to keep U.S. naval forces out deep in the Pacific (think interlocking missiles and sensors).

This elaborate system is designed to allow China to restrict who has access to the Western Pacific – and it's working. For decades, analysts have worried that China would eventually be able to extend its reach to what is known as the “Second Island Chain,” a route that connects Japan, Guam, and Papua-New Guinea. This is a huge deal because this area is up to 3,000 kilometers away from China.

Well, I'm sorry to report we have now let this happen. While it's not evident China has built permanent bases there yet, China's People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) crossed into the Second Island Chain in June 2025.

Hainan, often referred to as China's Hawaii, doubles as China's launching pad into the South China Sea, complete with advanced military weapons and nuclear-armed submarines. Boats that China insists are just for “fishing” patrol the shores armed with machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades, and high-velocity water cannons. In recent

weeks, China quickly and quietly mobilized thousands of fishing boats two different times to form massive floating barriers at least 200 miles long, showing a new level of coordination that gives Beijing even more ways to exert control in disputed seas.

In late December 2025 – in what China called a “stern warning” against outside interference in Chinese affairs, after the Trump/Vance administration approved an \$11 billion U.S. arms sales package to Taiwan – the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) fired over two dozen long-range rockets into the waters around Taiwan and surrounded the island with bombers, fighter jets, and new amphibious assault ships, while its vessels and aircraft practiced repelling an approaching enemy force. These live-fire military exercises sure looked a lot like a practice run for an assault on the democratically governed island.

We cannot tolerate China invading Taiwan for multiple reasons, the least being that Taiwan sits at a crucial maritime crossroads that a huge portion of global trade passes through (with crucial chokepoints like the Bashi Channel sitting at Taiwan’s edges).

It’s impossible to overstate the importance of the South China Sea to worldwide commerce. Roughly 24 percent – \$5.3 trillion worth – of commercial goods transit it every single year. Not to mention that, if China cut off Taiwan’s chip exports to American companies, our tech industry – heck, the entire U.S. economy – would be paralyzed.

A 2022 confidential report commissioned by the Semiconductor Industry Association and reviewed by The New York Times revealed that America losing access to chips from Taiwan would lead to the largest economic crisis since the Great Depression. U.S. economic output would drop 11 percent, twice as much as the 2008 recession.

But more complicated is our responsibilities to Taiwan and Japan. The 1979 U.S.-People’s Republic of China (PRC) Joint Communique officially changed U.S. diplomatic recognition from Taipei to Beijing, meaning the United States recognizes the Government of the People’s Republic of China as the sole legal government of China and considers Taiwan a part of China.

That said, the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979 obligates the U.S. to assist Taiwan in maintaining its defensive capability, demands peaceful resolutions between Beijing and Taipei, and forbids unilateral changes

to the status quo by either side. While there is no formal defense pact, meaning the U.S. is not legally obligated to defend Taiwan through intervention, we have a responsibility to help the island defend itself.

So, here is where this stands: For years, China has used significant pressure to force Taiwan to accept its “One China” vision, which essentially gives China complete control of Taiwan. But either way, Beijing claims Taiwan as its territory, saying that roughly 90 percent of the South China Sea has belonged to them since “ancient times,” pointing to waters within a “nine-dash line” that, oddly enough, appears only on Chinese maps. Maybe Xi Jinping would like to borrow Donald Trump’s black Sharpie? : ) China has repeatedly pledged to take Taiwan “back,” by force if necessary. If that happens, Sanae Takaichi, Prime Minister of U.S. security partner Japan, has suggested that her country could mobilize a military response. If *that* happens, the U.S.-Japan security alliance could likely kick in, which *does* require the United States to defend Japan from attack.

So, as you can see, we need as many allies as we can get.

Yet, instead of building a global coalition to deal with these issues, Donald Trump, JD Vance and Marco Rubio not only pick petty fights with our best allies but also withdraw from global partnerships. In January 2026 alone, they pulled us out of 66 multilateral organizations, 31 of which are entities associated with the United Nations.

This last move *really* makes no sense. To win the global game, we must use every tool in our arsenal. This means we need to understand that, far from being a drag on us, multilateral international institutions – much like positive relationships with our allies – are, to use a military term, force multipliers – meaning, they magnify our strengths and allow us to leverage our investments, advancements, and safety.

*Of course* we need to put America first. Few people in this country would argue that. But, again, this can be achieved without retreating from global commerce and ticking off the entire world. It’s a stone-cold fact: There is strength in numbers, plain and simple.

If most of the world created a unified block under the *leadership* of *America*, China would have little choice but to come around because, if

they don't, they will be isolated and that simply does not work for their ambitious global plans. To be a legitimate, fully accepted international player, China must be held accountable and forced to be transparent, modernize its trading practices, protect intellectual property, and allow better access for foreign business. Ironically, if we play our cards right, China's thirst for world domination is the very thing that can help us ultimately keep them in line.

Take the World Trade Organization (WTO), for example. Even with all the trade chaos, the Trump/Vance administration's actions still don't remotely solve what many U.S. companies complain about in the first place: the fact that, thanks to China's largely state-run model, their Chinese counterparts get an unfair advantage.

When China joined the WTO in 2001, the expectation was that it would bend toward Western-style capitalism. In exchange for global access, China committed to being open and transparent. Unfortunately, that has rarely happened. Although originally there were high hopes, China remains an economy of state-subsidized enterprises and shady trade practices.

For years, China has heavily subsidized its steel makers which artificially lowers the price of imported steel to the U.S. and causes gluts in the steel supply. To leverage exports, they hold down the value of their currency, which hurts American consumers because most of our trade deficit with China is consumer goods – meaning most of the things that we buy at Walmart.

China's nontransparent government subsidies; its habit of dumping (where the price of a product when sold in the importing country is less than the price of that product in the market of the exporting country); and its outright theft of intellectual property have distorted markets and need to stop immediately.

Without question, the best way – actually, in my view, the only way – to handle these issues is through the WTO, which provides a multilateral rules-based system that governs global trade, including a process for resolving disputes. The WTO trading system applies in 166 countries and to 98 percent of worldwide trade.

You might be asking: Why would the Chinese come to the WTO negotiation table if the talks were geared toward curtailing the very

practices they benefit from exploiting? Answer: Because there is strength in numbers.

This is actually a perfect time for the U.S. to reengage with the WTO because Beijing's closest trading partners are also getting tired of their shenanigans. China's lopsided growth had already created a severe global imbalance, but when its trading relationship with the United States stalled, China boosted its exports to other markets around the world to make up for the difference instead of risking a slump in its own domestic growth.

This means that China has been relying on its trading partners to absorb its surplus output. On the surface, this may not sound like that big of a deal. After all, who doesn't like cheap Chinese goodies?!? But the real-world result is that these country's manufacturing sectors are being swamped by cheap Chinese exports, which drives down prices and hurts their own export opportunities.

France, Mexico, Germany, and the European Union have been particularly vocal about this – and have made their displeasure known to Xi Jinping. In February 2026, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz gave a speech in Beijing at a meeting of the Advisory Council of German-Chinese Business, calling on China to reduce subsidies for its domestic manufacturers; allow the value of its currency to rise; and ensure continued exports of raw materials and critical minerals.

So... doesn't it make sense for the United States to join with other WTO members to unite against China and collectively apply significant pressure – creating a unified block so forbidding that China has no choice but to behave?

For example, the WTO can set rules on how to detect market distortion, along with how to properly monitor and punish it. Same goes with state subsidies. The WTO can do this through “plurilateral” agreements which have a narrower group of signatories, in this case a group of the larger WTO economies.

It probably won't come as a galloping shock that Donald Trump doesn't care much for the WTO, saying it's “a disaster,” “rigged” against the United States, and that we must “do something about the WTO because they've let China get away with murder.”

But these claims make no sense because the *Economic Report of the President* for 2018, signed by none other than President Donald Trump himself, said that “the United States had won 85.7 percent of the cases it had initiated before the WTO since 1995, compared with a global average of 84.4 percent. In contrast, China’s success rate was just 66.7 percent.”

An analysis by the Peterson Institute the following year revealed that, “Contrary to President Trump’s assertion that ‘We lose the lawsuits, almost all the lawsuits in the WTO,’ U.S. officials have won 20 times in their challenges to Chinese trade practices since the first U.S. WTO case against China in 2004. None were lost, and three cases are still pending. Chinese officials have brought 16 complaints against the United States since 2002 and won five, lost one, and gotten a split decision on three, with seven cases pending.”

It also won’t come as a galloping shock that I believe President Trump is deeply misguided on this. To me, one of the most important functions of the WTO is the appellate body that essentially functions as the Supreme Court for international trade. As designed, this body hears appeals regarding decisions by lower WTO dispute settlement panels (which provides a mechanism to challenge unfair trade practices). Roughly two-thirds of all WTO disputes reach the appellate body, and its rulings are binding on WTO member states. There are seven seats on the appellate body, and the rules require at least three judges appear to form a panel to adjudicate a given dispute.

... and herein lies the problem. Since December 2020, all seven seats on the appellate body have been vacant. Beginning in the Obama administration, the United States started blocking all new appointments to the appellate body as the terms of its judges expired. Without a functioning appellate body to hear cases, the entire process has broken down. As of October 2025, the United States had blocked a motion to fill these vacancies 91 times in a row.

This is ridiculous. Do Presidents Obama, Biden and Trump not understand that, far from looking savvy, they look foolish because they did nothing more than allow China’s transgressions to go unchecked *for years*? How does that make any sense whatsoever?



Okay, so now we're back to our list of the four things the United States must have to ensure our continued dominance and formidable national security. We just covered the dollar, so now let's wrap it up with diplomacy, development and defense.

Donald Trump, JD Vance and Marco Rubio demolishing our relationships with our closest allies is just one way they have been obliterating U.S. soft power around the world.

"Soft power" is a concept coined in the late 1980s by my former graduate school dean Joseph Nye, his central theme being that the U.S. enhances its global authority by promoting values like human rights and democracy. Soft power allows us to cultivate goodwill, influence others, and impact global politics through attraction and persuasion (think culture, values and policies) rather than coercion, economic pressure, and/or military action (a.k.a., hard power).

Although people in the Trump/Vance administration clearly don't understand this concept AT ALL, can you guess who does understand it perfectly? Yep, you guessed it. Xi Jinping... which is why he is also laser-focused on obliterating U.S. soft power around the world. On this point, he has taken one of the tent poles of Mao Zedong's Phase Two *strategic stalemate* phase – "eroding the opposition's morale through propaganda" – next level.

A 2021 report from the RAND Corporation – a policy think tank that receives substantial funding from the U.S. government – estimated that China was spending at least \$10 billion a year on propaganda, bogus narratives, and fake news – and you can bet that number is way, *way* higher today. China has also been busy boosting its geopolitical standing by giving all-expenses-paid trips to American social-media influencers they hope will help promote a "cooler China."

Russia is also heavily into the propaganda game. The Kremlin's official declared expenditures report showed they spent 13 percent more on spreading propaganda in 2025 than the year before (around \$1.4 billion) and you can bet that's just the tip of the iceberg.

The way Russia significantly and systematically interfered in our 2016 elections is outrageous, and the fact that Vladimir Putin has never been held accountable is disgraceful (read more on p. 310).

But it's not just America; Putin pulls this mess across the board. The minute Russia brutally attacked Ukraine, Putin's propaganda went into overdrive. To justify the invasion, he told the Russian people that he started the war to "demilitarize and denazify" the Ukrainian government. He perpetuated the lie that Kyiv had been carrying out "genocide" against the Russian-speaking people who live in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine (known as the Donbas).

The New York Times reported that, after the war started, "the Kremlin cycled through a torrent of lies to explain why it had to wage a 'special military operation' against a sovereign neighbor. Drug-addled neo-Nazis. Genocide. American biological weapons factories. Birds and reptiles trained to carry pathogens into Russia. Ukrainian forces bombing their own cities, including theaters sheltering children."

The RAND Corporation "characterizes the contemporary Russian model for propaganda as 'the firehose of falsehood' because of two of its distinctive features: high numbers of channels and messages and a shameless willingness to disseminate partial truths or outright fictions. In the words of one observer, 'new Russian propaganda entertains, confuses and overwhelms the audience.'"

But nevertheless, from Day One the geniuses in the Trump/Vance administration tried to take away our very best way of combatting the propaganda nonsense spread by China and Russia by cutting funding for the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM) – which means they tried to silence the Voice of America, Radio Free Asia, and Middle East Broadcasting Networks, among others.

USAGM networks bring news and information to 427 million listeners around the world in 64 languages, producing more than 3,000 hours of original programming each week. < Following legal battles, federal courts ordered a temporary reinstatement of these funds, then Congress did the right thing and passed funding for them once again. >

I cannot overstate how stupid jeopardizing USAGM is (I don't like using that word, but I can't think of another one in this case). Just think about it in terms of our fight against global terrorism. For decades,

terrorist organizations have worked hard to distort America's image for a vulnerable portion of the Muslim world in hopes of enlisting new recruits to their cause.

These terrorists have done a masterful job of making sure their target audience knows all about the "evil" that is America: The brutal, wealthy bully that uses power and military strength to repress Muslims around the globe. Naturally, the terrorists are the good guys who fight bravely and unselfishly to protect Islam and its people.

Terrorists do this because they understand the alluring power of democratic values, and that those values are a potent antidote to their extremist actions.

So, without question, the best way to fight against the propagation of radical ideologies and false American narratives that help drive their recruitment in the Middle East is a massive, global counter-ideology campaign that reframes this highly damaging, globally destructive narrative – and USAGM is one of the only vehicles we can use for this.

The same goes for repressive regimes. The bottom line is this: The number one thing we have going for us in our competition with China is the fact that WE ARE US! We are the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. We're free! We're hip! We're cool! We're FUN!! We have great sports, great food, great clothes, great movies and great movie stars.

In 2025, the animated sequel Zootopia 2 made more money than the second Avatar thanks in large part to China, where it earned \$104 million *in its first day* (it's now grossed over \$625 million there).

The first Zootopia, which until its sequel was the highest-grossing American animated film in China, made over \$236 million in 2016. Disney opened a Zootopia-themed land at Shanghai Disneyland in 2023 (yes, although it's kind of surprising that Xi Jinping allows it, a Disney resort opened in China in 2016. It's a joint venture between The Walt Disney Company and the Shanghai government and features classic Disney elements with a Chinese twist).

There is no easier or more effective way to block China's global progress than to unleash American democracy and culture on them. As Judy Hopps, the Zootopia bunny rabbit police officer says, "Life's a little bit more complicated than a slogan on a bumper sticker. Real life

is messy. We all have limitations. We all make mistakes. Which means, hey, glass half full, we all have a lot in common. And the more we try to understand one another, the more exceptional each of us will be. But we have to try. So, no matter what kind of person you are, I implore you: Try. Try to make the world a better place.” : )

So that brings us to Mao Zedong’s Phase Two “eroding the opposition’s morale through guerrilla attacks” < See how deftly I’m transitioning us into Defense? Genius! >

China’s shrewd asymmetric-warfare strategies are game-changers (asymmetric-warfare is essentially a conflict between two countries that have uneven military capabilities). These hybrid warfare tactics are designed to significantly raise the cost and risk of retaliation by China’s potential adversaries, and to keep them guessing. This creates a kind of permanent gray zone between war and peace, where things don’t necessarily escalate into military conflict, but where potential rivals know the threats exist nonetheless.

Cyber warfare, for example, has created an entirely new battlefield for China to exploit. Between 2020 and 2024, a Chinese government-affiliated hacking group, Salt-Typhoon, launched an unprecedented espionage campaign compromising over a dozen telecommunications companies, including Lumen Technologies, AT&T, T-Mobile and Verizon. Targeting American wiretap systems, the hack gave the Chinese unparalleled access to our foreign-intelligence surveillance systems.

A statement from the U.S., Britain, Canada, Finland, Germany, Italy, Japan and Spain, among other countries, said the “unrestrained” and “indiscriminate” Salt Typhoon attack targeted over 80 countries and may have stolen information from almost every American.

Other Chinese “typhoon” threats include Volt Typhoon, which targeted U.S. infrastructure, and Flax Typhoon, which targeted routers, cameras and other internet-connected consumer devices (“typhoon” is the name used by Microsoft to differentiate between various Chinese-backed cyber campaigns/threats).

Unfortunately, China is not the only one following this playbook. Russia’s guerilla-style brand of cyber asymmetric-warfare has been targeting the United States for decades. Moonlight Maze, Russia’s

three-year covert operation to hack into U.S. governmental agencies, started in 1996 and penetrated both NASA and the Pentagon. In fact, Moonlight Maze is the reason the U.S. Cyber Command center was created in the first place.

Russia has just gotten better and better at hacking since Moonlight Maze, so much so that we now are engaged in an ongoing and unrelenting cyberconflict. This battle reached deep inside the good 'ol USA not only when the Russians significantly intervened in our 2016 elections, but also in 2020 when they unleashed the mother of all cyberattacks against us.

In early 2020, as Americans were settling into Covid lockdowns and the U.S. cyber-defense agencies were obsessively focused on protecting the upcoming presidential election, Russian hackers known as APT29 and Cozy Bear – the pride of the Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russia Federation (SVR) – launched a massive cyber hack against the United States. Thousands of people, both inside and outside of the U.S. government, downloaded corrupted software, giving the Russians a pathway to create hidden back doors to access each user's network.

This went way beyond spying, which most every country does to some degree. Instead, this was a global espionage supply chain attack that compromised U.S. intelligence agencies; nuclear laboratories; Fortune 500 companies; companies that monitor and protect critical domestic infrastructure; the National Institutes of Health; and the U.S. departments of State, Treasury, Commerce and Energy. The hack is believed to have reached at least 250 United States federal agencies and American corporations of all sizes, including Microsoft and Amazon.

The National Nuclear Security Administration, which oversees our nuclear stockpile, was also breached, as was the Los Alamos National Laboratory, where most of our nuclear weapons are designed. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) was compromised, which may not seem like a big deal until you find out that FERC is responsible for *Black Start*, the United States' strategy for restoring power if we ever experience a disastrous national blackout (which you can bet is already on Russia's attack checklist).

The Department of Homeland Security and Pentagon were also hit, which is ironic given they are the departments tasked with protecting our networks (read more on p. 267 of the *Policy Guide*).

Biological weapons are another hybrid warfare tactics and present an increasingly significant national security threat. We must look no further than the social disruption, economic devastation, and millions of deaths caused by the outbreak of Covid-19 to understand just how serious this is... and Covid19 is nothing compared to the microbes and pathogens Russia and China are actively exploring.

The Washington Post reported that satellite images reveal Russia has reopened Sergiev Posad-6, a center used for viral biological weapons research during the Cold War. Back then, Russians used the facility to conduct experiments using viruses that cause smallpox, Ebola and hemorrhagic fevers. They are now expanding the compound, building labs that appear consistent with top-secret, high-containment biological facilities designed to handle hazardous pathogens < Russia publicly confirmed the labs but says they will use them to study deadly microbes to prevent future pandemics and for national security purposes. Yeah, right. >

From all angles, it's clear China and Russia are testing the global order that America has ruled for decades. These countries are even more dangerous because they view pesky things like human rights and the rule of law as nothing more than nuisances.



The United States spends \$2.7 billion a day on defense.

Defense spending – which makes up around 3.4 percent of our GDP – is our largest category of discretionary spending, accounting for almost 14 percent of all federal spending in 2025.

We spend more on defense – by far – than anyone on the planet. In 2024, defense spending by the U.S. accounted for 37 percent of

military expenditures by countries around the world. In fact, we spend about as much on our defense as the next 11 countries combined.

Nevertheless, Donald Trump, JD Vance, Marco Rubio and many other Republicans think we need to spend even more: For “the Good of our Country, especially in these very troubled and dangerous times,” Donald Trump posted on Truth Social, “our Military Budget for the year 2027 should not be \$1 Trillion Dollars, but rather *\$1.5 Trillion* Dollars.”

... yet weirdly, somehow, as the U.S.-Israeli war with Iran uncovered, we barely have enough munitions for just that one fight. The claim about American munitions stockpiles that Donald Trump made in March 2026 – that they are “unlimited” and “higher or better than ever,” and enough to fight “forever” – are flat untrue.

In truth, the defense industry has struggled for years to produce enough defense interceptors to protect against incoming missiles because of their complexity and production time. Just days into the war, The Wall Street Journal reported that the U.S. was straining its stockpiles by rapidly expending air-defense interceptors and other munitions in strikes against Iran. The Pentagon was racing to replenish stocks of THAAD, Patriot, and Standard Missile interceptors that were being used faster than they could be replaced.

This shortage came as no surprise within the Pentagon. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Dan Caine and other military leaders had been sounding the alarm about the military’s shortage of air defense interceptors and other munition stockpiles for months – a concern obviously exacerbated by even the slightest possibility of an extended military campaign in the Middle East.

In December 2024 – before the Trump/Vance administration even took office, President Joe Biden’s national security advisor Jake Sullivan publicly warned the incoming administration that, as it stood, the United States would run out of munitions in a war with China and urged them to pursue more sustained defense production.

What in tarnation is going on here? Well, for one, it takes four times longer to complete the acquisition cycle today than it did in the 1970s. A report from the right-leaning Hudson Institute reveals that “decision time analysis for ships shows an increase from less than six

months in the 1950s to four years in 2020 when considering a decision start time as the approval of ship characteristics, or as many as eight years now when considering a start time as initial planning efforts. The weapon system time-to-market metric (from contract award to Initial Operational Capability) held constant from 1950 to 1975 at around five years, and has more than doubled since then, across multiple system types. Finally, the full acquisition cycle for new-start systems has increased by a factor of four from 1950 to 2020.”

In December 2025, The New York Times Editorial Board ran a series of articles called *Overmatched*. The series included a story that would be funny if it weren’t so terrifying: “In 2011, the Army decided to get its soldiers new pistols. The odyssey that followed included a 350-page list of technical specifications, years of testing and a protracted battle on Capitol Hill between competing gun makers. The Pentagon won’t complete delivery until 2027 at the earliest. The Army could have raised an infantryman from birth to within two years of enlistment age in the time it would have taken to get him a new handgun.”

It certainly doesn’t help that, since the 1990s, the defense sector has consolidated to the point the number of defense prime contractors has shrunk from 51 to fewer than 10, forcing the Department of Defense (DoD) to increasingly rely on a small number of contractors for critical defense capabilities. Aerospace and defense prime contractors declined from 51 to 5; tactical missile suppliers declined from 13 to 3; fixed-wing aircraft suppliers declined from 8 to 3; and satellite suppliers from 8 to 4. Today, 90 percent of missiles come from just three sources.

You can just imagine what this lack of competition does to costs. Speaking of, another major problem is DoD’s “cost-plus” contract, which reimburses expenses and just adds a negotiated profit. This not only removes any incentive to control expenses, but it also removes any pressure on these guys to deliver on time.

So, these types of issues – which need to be fixed immediately – explain some of the problem. But our severe lack of munitions still begs the question:

## *Where in the world does all the Pentagon money go?*

It's certainly not going toward protecting us from asymmetric warfare threats. Even though cyberattacks, cyber-terrorism and cyber-espionage pose an increasingly significant national security threat to America, the Trump/Vance administration has fired nearly 1,000 employees of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA); dismantled election security programs; retreated from supporting state and local governments in protecting against cyber threats; and cut funding for the Multi-State Information Sharing and Analysis Center, a core cyber threat sharing service that improves the overall cybersecurity posture of state, local, tribal, and territorial government organizations via coordination, collaboration, cooperation, and increased communication.

Although biological weapons also pose an increasingly significant national security threat, the Trump/Vance administration has fired dozens of analysts from the Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response, many of whom have top-secret clearance; worked with intelligence agencies on biodefense issues like weaponized pathogens; and were responsible for monitoring and protecting the U.S. from biological, chemical and nuclear threats.

So, *where does the money go?* Well, we know a lot of it is wasted. Seriously wasted. Like just flush-it-down-the-toilet wasted. Sadly, the Pentagon's wasteful spending and Congress' irresponsibility when it comes to funding our defense are legendary.

The proposed 2026 defense budget included over \$300 million to buy and upgrade Humvees – something the Defense Department didn't even ask for. There was also \$240 million for the Gray Eagle drone, a piece of equipment the Army has declared "obsolete." There was over \$360 million for an Apache helicopter, also money the Army didn't request, and \$52.2 billion for 1,403 "program increases" that members of Congress just randomly threw in. This was on top of the \$156 billion in Pentagon spending they had already added to the One Big Beautiful Bill Act in the summer of 2025.

Congress forcing the military to use equipment and weapons it doesn't want or need is nothing new. For years, the Army has tried to

make Congress understand that they don't want or need money to, for example, upgrade and/or purchase more tanks.

Way back in 2015, Army Chief of Staff General Raymond Odierno told the Senate Armed Services Committee, "We are still having to procure systems we don't need." (The Army) spends hundreds of millions of dollars on tanks that we simply don't have the structure for anymore."

Nevertheless, even though this four-star general told Congress point blank they were wasting millions and millions and millions of dollars and to please reallocate the funds, they appropriated \$120 million for Abrams tank upgrades anyway. And not for the first time. Three years earlier, General Odierno made the exact same plea to Congress, which resulted in \$183 million for tanks. In 2019, the Army announced that it would spend around \$714 million to upgrade M1A1 Abrams tanks at the Joint Systems Manufacturing Center (a.k.a. the Lima Army Tank Plant) in Lima, Ohio, and in 2025, the One Big Beautiful Bill included around \$724.5 million for Abrams tanks.

< Worse, the Department of Defense can't keep track of its money in the first place. Read more about the Pentagon's wasteful spending and lack of accountability on p. 460. >

John F. Sopko was the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) from 2012 to 2025 (he was appointed by President Obama and served under the Obama, Trump and Biden administrations before leaving at the beginning of Donald Trump's second term).

In a January 2025 guest essay for The New York Times, Mr. Sopko said that, in the absence of actual success on the ground, spending became the default measure of success in Afghanistan – which he acknowledges is true of most things in Washington, "where unspent allocations are tantamount to failure, leading to budget cuts."

He recounted a story where one general told him that he faced a challenge: "How to spend the remaining \$1 billion from his annual budget in just over a month. Returning the money was not an option." Another official his group spoke with said he "refused to cancel a multimillion-dollar building project that field commanders did not

want, because the funding had to be spent.” But “the building was never used.”

Mr. Sopko continued, “As one former U.S. military adviser told my office, the entire system became a self-licking ice cream cone: More money was always being spent to justify previous spending. Old staff departed, new staff arrived with ‘better’ ideas, and new iterations of the same old solutions were repeated, for years.”

As for the equipment and weapons the Pentagon says it does need? Well... there is really no other way to say this... it appears that, in many cases, they are the wrong ones.

The New York Times reports that the most recent Overmatch brief – a comprehensive, multiyear assessment of American military power prepared by the Pentagon’s Office of Net Assessment – not only warned about the risk of the U.S. continuing to rely on expensive weapons as our adversaries use cheap, technologically advanced ones, but also about China’s ability to destroy U.S. fighter planes and large ships and satellites.

The implications of these are colossal. Solar panels and electric vehicles and wind technology are one thing, but China is also quickly becoming the main supplier of things that the rest of the world – including the United States – must have on the modern battlefield... like the cheap, battery-powered drones that Ukraine used to obliterate part of Russia’s air fleet and that the Israelis deployed to destroy multimillion-dollar surface-to-air missiles and radars in Iran the first time around, ultimately allowing them to destroy billions of dollars’ worth of Iranian command and nuclear facilities.

While Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and President Trump were rambling disjointed and incoherent sermons to the 800+ senior U.S. military officers they summoned to Quantico from around the world – going on about fat generals, beardos, woke garbage, dudes in dresses, the enemy within, sleepy Joe Biden, stupid rules of engagement, the inferiority of women, and using American cities as military training grounds – the Chinese remained focused on investing in new strategies and technologies to exploit our weaknesses and vulnerabilities, which they have been doing now for decades.

Since the time China changed the game with their DF-21D “carrier killer” anti-ship ballistic missiles that threaten our naval forces in the Pacific, they have developed even longer-range versions like the DF-26 and DF-27. In what some referred to as a “sputnik moment,” in 2021 China tested a nuclear-capable hypersonic glide vehicle launched by a rocket into low-orbit that almost circled the earth before re-entering the atmosphere and hitting its intended target in China.

In December 2024, images of what seemed to be new Chinese military aircraft went viral on social media. Defense experts said these aircraft, though blurry on the video, appeared to be highly original advanced stealth designs – most likely part of China’s next-generation (sixth generation) fighter program.

In September 2025, China held a military parade celebrating the 80th anniversary of the role Communist soldiers played in fighting Japanese invaders in World War II. Xi Jinping held court, flanked by Kim Jong Un and Vladimir Putin – who attended the parade with leaders from 24 other countries, including Iran and Pakistan. At one point, Xi stood in the open sunroof of a Chinese-made Red Flag limousine while pigeons and balloons – supposedly numbering 80,000 each – were released into the air.

Xi’s intended message hit hard as the advanced weapons appeared one after the other: We, the Chinese, can stop American forces in the Asia-Pacific region by using every kind of weapon imaginable, and we can rapidly deploy to Taiwan or even far beyond China whenever we damn well please.

The parade extravaganza – which included thousands of troops goose-stepping in unison across a bright red carpet covering Tiananmen Square – showcased things like jet fighter-bombers, ship-sinking hypersonic missiles, unmanned combat platforms, a cyberspace combat force, remote-controlled armored buggies that can clear mines and pick up wounded soldiers, and armored ground vehicles that can be dropped from transport planes.

Four models of anti-ship missiles rolled through, three of which are hypersonic – meaning they travel at least five times the speed of sound and can maneuver to evade defenses. The new YJ-19 anti-ship

missile was there, which is a cruise missile that apparently uses a “scramjet” and burns its fuel in an airflow moving at supersonic speed.

The stars of the show were the nuclear-capable ballistic missiles that can already hit the continental United States – like one labeled “DF-31BJ,” indicating that the missile is likely a version of China’s road-mobile DF-31 intercontinental nuclear missile that has been adapted for silo launch.

Trucks carrying drones that look like small fighter jets drove past, as well as smaller ground, naval and aerial drones, including “loyal wingmen” that can fly alongside piloted jets for extra protection. Two submersible drones were unveiled, confirming that China has indeed been working on building extra-large uncrewed underwater vehicles (XLUUVs). It was thought they had been testing at least five XLUUV designs since 2022, which obviously they have been.

The drones were a particularly cruel slap in our face because, for some reason, we seem incapable of making progress on them – or on the batteries that power them (yet another area where China is leading in almost every industrial component). As it stands today, the Pentagon relies on China for around 6,000 individual battery components across its weapons programs, and there are zero U.S. weapon systems and/or military platforms that have no foreign parts.

... and this doesn’t seem to be changing any time soon. While it’s true Silicon Valley has been pouring money into this – looking for that sweet military-industrial complex cash – The Wall Street Journal reported in September 2025 that the Pentagon’s Replicator program, launched during the Biden administration, had fallen short of its goal of fielding thousands of cutting-edge air, land and sea-based drones by August 2025.

The reporting found that many Replicator systems were unreliable, expensive, and/or couldn’t be manufactured fast enough to be bought in the quantity we need. The Pentagon has also struggled to find software that can successfully control large numbers of drones. The program has now shifted to a new division under Special Operations Command known as the Defense Autonomous Warfare Group (DAWG).

Meanwhile, Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov says that the industrial capacity of Ukrainian companies has increased enough to

produce four million drones a year. These Linza drones are equipped with anti-jamming modules; utilize AI navigation; and can gather reconnaissance, deliver supplies, and even set land mines.

Even before that, Ukrainian soldiers were giving the Russians one hell of a fight by adding deadly modifications to the Mavic, a drone sold to ordinary people by a Chinese company called DJI. DJI, the world's largest drone manufacturer, sells 70 percent of all commercial drones sold for hobby and industrial use worldwide (you can get a version of the Mavic for as little as \$300). Experts say that DJI can make millions of drones per year, more than a hundred times more than anybody in the United States can make.

Ukraine has gotten so good at this that the Trump/Vance administration was forced to ask them for help within a week of its 2026 attack on Iran. As swarms of Iranian Shahed drones rained down over the middle East – breaching allied air defense systems and killing at least six U.S. soldiers – Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky posted on X: “We received a request from the United States for specific support in protection.”

< This is yet another reason that you should never invite your allies into the Oval Office, then start berating and insulting them. What goes around comes around, Donny Boy. >

Iran has been stockpiling Shahed drones – propellor-driven aircraft with eight-foot wingspans that carry 110-pound explosives in the nose of the fuselage – for years. They cost between \$30,000 to \$50,000 each to produce. Meanwhile, the Center for Strategic and International Studies estimates the total cost of the Patriot – still America's “workhorse” go-to for high-to-medium air defense, anti-ballistic missiles, and cruise missile defense – is likely around \$1.1 billion (\$400 million for the system and \$690 million for the missiles).

War is clearly evolving, big time. The smart play – in fact, the *only* play – is for our military and defense strategies to evolve as well, right? But our leaders don't seem to be making many adjustments at all. Decade after decade – – over and over and time and time again – – those in charge seem to take actions and repeat behaviors that didn't work the first, second or even the third time around.

Here's another tale from The New York Times' *Overmatched* series: "To see where American defense dollars go, consider the U.S.S. Gerald R. Ford, America's latest aircraft carrier, which deployed for the first time in 2022 after more than a decade of construction and delays. The ship incorporates new technologies, including advanced nuclear reactors and electromagnetic catapults for launching aircraft, which make it more efficient than the Nimitz-class aircraft carriers it is intended to replace. The price tag: an estimated \$13 billion. That figure is for a single ship. It does not include the billions of dollars-worth of military aircraft carried by the Ford and the escort ships needed to defend it."

"Such formidable firepower is effective if you want to go to war with a relatively poor, weak country like, say, Venezuela. Yet the Ford, is fatally vulnerable to new forms of attack. China in recent years has amassed an arsenal of around 600 hypersonic weapons, which can travel at five times the speed of sound and are difficult to intercept. Other countries possess quiet diesel-electric submarines capable of sinking American carriers. *In war games like those depicted in the Overmatch brief, ships like the Ford are often destroyed. Still, the Navy plans to build at least nine additional Ford-class carriers in the coming decades.* So far, the United States has yet to deploy a single hypersonic missile."

This is a perfect example of the status quo being so entrenched in the old-school, traditional way of doing things – clinging to antiquated philosophies, concepts, assumptions, and tactics – that they fail to anticipate and adapt to new realities.

It's abundantly clear that we must reevaluate practically everything about our defense strategy – from our overall philosophy to how we spend our money.

Let's start here: The United States should never be forced to sacrifice the military capabilities we need to protect ourselves. America must have a military that has the fortitude to fully protect this country, regardless of where the threat comes from or in what form it comes in – and have everything we need to operate successfully whether the theatre is land, sea, air, cyberspace or outer space.

The United States should also never be in a position where we are forced to pick and choose between the most dangerous regions of the world. We must be able to sustain security simultaneously in Russia, Africa, South and East Asia, the Middle East, and Europe.

Given all that's been said here about China, safeguarding stability in the Asia-Pacific region is increasingly important to our economic and national security. At the same time, we obviously can't fixate solely on that region of the world when Africa, the Middle East and Eastern Europe remain so unstable and unpredictable. Even before Donald Trump, JD Vance and Marco Rubio started a war with Iran, one had to look no further than Putin's invasion of Ukraine; Hamas' attack on Israel; Syria's new reality; the War on Terror increasingly moving to Africa; and the fact that Afghanistan is once again a refuge for jihadists to see how quickly things can escalate in those regions.

To achieve all this in the smartest, most effective way possible, we must start thinking about all this differently. The "my bomb is bigger than your bomb" strategy we have depended on for decades now seems lazy and terribly inadequate. Because of the sheer scope of operational and geographical realities – and the rapidly changing nature of weapons – U.S. national security must be forward-thinking, highly innovative, and cutting-edge to deter and counter our adversaries.

Beyond the risk and danger of it all, we simply can't afford to keep this up. Contrary to what some in Washington want to believe, we don't have a bottomless bank account for military spending and national security – and saying that does not make me soft on defense, disloyal to the military, or unpatriotic in any way. What it makes me is a responsible realist.

For decades, the only winners have been U.S. defense contractors, who spent a whopping \$190,998,142 to lobby Congress in 2025. Fifty-three percent of registered defense lobbyists were former government employees. The Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft reports that over 80 percent of four-star generals and admirals who retired between 2018 and 2023 went on to work in the defense industry as executives, board members, advisors, consultants, lobbyists, or members of financial institutions that invest in the defense sector.

Department of Defense contracts for FY2025 – which equaled 842,550 transactions – total \$72.41 billion. In 2023, defense technology supplier Lockheed Martin made \$49.2 billion worth of net sales to the U.S. government, the highest ever (incidentally, Lockheed Martin has spent \$352,563,602 to lobby Congress since 1998).

*Does this sound like a good idea to you?*

It’s pretty obvious who writes our national security strategy, and it ain’t the people we elect. Now, more than ever, we need to heed the brilliant piece of advice from five-star Army general and former President of the United States Dwight D. Eisenhower: “In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.”

Allowing defense lobbyists to write our national security strategy guarantees our approach will be all about bombers, helicopters, Super Hornets, Growlers, HIJENKS, B-21 Raiders, F-35 Lightning IIs, LRHW Dark Eagles, PAC-3, F-15EX Eagle II, ICBMs, B-52s, MHTKs, M7 and M250 rifles – and a lot of other cool weapons that ensure the United States’ arsenal has all the latest, greatest hardware.

But it also guarantees that creative, forward-thinking strategic planning will be discouraged. After all, *if all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail, right?*

The most dangerous part of punting our national security strategy to the defense lobby is that it lets members of Congress – who, through Article I powers, hold extensive constitutional oversight of the military – off the hook from asking the truly critical questions.

Questions like: Can our military handle simultaneous, competing threats around the world? Are our munition stockpiles sufficient? Given the changing nature of war, how many armored brigade combat teams do we need to keep active and what exactly will their role be going forward? What should our troop structure be in this age of modern warfare? How will the military handle adversaries in the “gray zone?”

How best can we capitalize on AI, robotics, directed-energy weapons, and space-based systems?

What types of missions will hypersonic weapons be used for, and are they really necessary for deterrence ... and, while we're at it, what exactly is up with the Conventional Prompt Strike program and why in the heck does it cost so much money?

The Congressional Research Service (CRS) explains that the Conventional Prompt Strike (CPS) program “allows the U.S. to strike targets anywhere on Earth in as little as an hour. This capability may bolster U.S. efforts to deter and defeat adversaries by allowing the U.S. to attack high-value targets or ‘fleeting targets’ at the start of or during a conflict. These weapons would not substitute for nuclear weapons but would supplement U.S. conventional capabilities. They would provide a ‘niche’ capability, with a small number of weapons directed against select, critical targets.”

Okay, that sounds pretty good, but in 2021 the CRS reported that the “Pentagon’s FY2021 budget request continues to show significant increases in funding for the Navy’s CPS program. In FY2019, this program received \$278 million. The Navy received \$512 million for this program in FY2020 and requested \$1.008 billion for FY2021. The budget request shows continuing increases in funding over the next five years, with \$5.3 billion allocated to the program between FY2021 through FY2025.”

Cut to February 2025, when the CRS reported that “the Pentagon’s FY2025 budget request for hypersonic research < maneuvering weapons that fly at speeds of at least Mach 5 and are part of the CPS program > was \$6.9 billion – up from \$4.7 billion in the FY2023 request. The Pentagon declined to provide a breakout of funding for hypersonic-related research in FY2024 but requested \$11 billion for long-range fires – a category that includes hypersonic weapons. The Missile Defense Agency additionally requested \$182.3 million for hypersonic defense in FY2025.”

This is an obscene amount of money. What due diligence is being done to justify this program? What are the accountability procedures? What is the end game, or do we even have one? Who are the players

involved in making these decisions? Are strategies like these even the best way forward? Does anyone even know?

The questions about our national defense just keep coming: Do we need the New START Treaty limit of 700 deployed intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), deployed submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and deployed heavy bombers equipped for nuclear armaments – especially since there isn't even a New START Treaty anymore?

Or, for that matter, do we even really need the treaty limit of 1,550 nuclear warheads on deployed ICBMs, deployed SLBMs, and deployed heavy bombers equipped for nuclear armaments, or 800 deployed and non-deployed ICBM launchers, SLBM launchers, and heavy bombers equipped for nuclear armaments – when it takes only a fraction of that to blow any country off the face of the earth?

Really think about that last sentence for a second. There are 195 sovereign countries in the world. The number of nuclear warheads in our arsenal is 5,225.

If you take only our 1,419 deployed warheads on strategic delivery systems – which include intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and heavy bombers – we could literally blow up every single country in the world 7 times!

In 2025, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimated that, based on the Department of Defense's and the Department of Energy's FY2025 budget requests, operating, sustaining, and modernizing our current nuclear forces and purchasing new forces would cost a total of \$946 billion over the next ten years, or an average of about \$95 billion a year. This is 25 percent (or \$190 billion) larger than the CBO 10-year estimate just two years before.

And remember, that's just the money it takes *going forward...* but this outrageous spending has now been going on for well over eight decades. The Brookings Institution found that: "From 1940 through 1996, we spent nearly \$5.5 trillion on nuclear weapons and weapons-related programs, in constant 1996 dollars." In today's dollars, that's \$11.2 trillion. "If we could represent \$5.5 trillion as a stack of dollar bills, it would reach from the Earth to the Moon and nearly back again, a distance of more than 459,000 miles."

*Does this make sense to you?*

I gotta be honest, it makes no sense to me. *Why in the world are we still spending so much money on nuclear weapons?* To me, spending money on a ridiculously gigantic arsenal of big, scary bombs – again, *when it takes only a fraction of what we already have to blow any country off the face of the earth* – to prove nothing more than we have as many bombs as other people feels like the dumbest penis measuring contest of all time.

Look, I get the concept of deterrence and the value of signaling to potential adversaries that an attack on America is too costly to launch. But do you really think it deters anyone *less* if the U.S. just had 1,417 deployed warheads on strategic delivery systems rather than 1,419? ... which is a difference of *billions* of dollars in our bank account?

We already know this is a zero-sum game... the ultimate prisoner's dilemma, where two countries assume they have only two choices: to increase military spending for more weapons or to make an agreement with the opposing side whereby everyone reduces their total number of weapons. The dilemma is that neither side can be sure the other side will follow through with the agreement to reduce weapons; therefore, both sides increase their military spending to lead the race. The moral of the story is that, even though both sides are acting rationally, the result is irrational.

Worse, this misdirected spending leaves us extremely vulnerable in other areas. In a 2024 essay for The Wall Street Journal, Glen VanHerck, a retired U.S. Air Force general who served as commander of U.S. Northern Command and the North American Aerospace Defense command, and Pete Fesler, a retired Air Force major general who served as deputy director of operations for the North American Aerospace Defense Command warned:

“The services are investing heavily in modernizing the nation’s nuclear deterrent... these systems were designed to deter a nuclear attack by promising devastating retaliation. They were never intended to deter more limited non-nuclear strikes, cyberattacks or attacks by small, unmanned drones on infrastructure. Adversaries are unlikely to

believe the U.S. will respond with nukes to a non-nuclear attack. *Nuclear deterrence isn't enough to defend against new weapons.*

“Despite the National Defense Strategy’s declaration that homeland defense is the Pentagon’s top priority, almost no additional resources have been allocated, and none are forthcoming. The focus is on offense and the fight around the world. Today the nation is defended by a small number of professionals equipped with systems largely designed and bought in the 1970s and ’80s, with no defined path to modernization. Today, as Russian ultraquiet submarines prowl off American shores and Chinese and Russian bombers and warships conduct joint operations near Alaska, our military is focused elsewhere. *Fortress America stands largely unguarded.*”

And please let’s not forget that there are many ways to skin the deterrence cat (I think I need to take a coffee break because my East Texas is starting to come out strong). In my mind – yes – the United States needs a strong military to deter future wars, but it’s better not to be that close to war in the first place. As Sun Tzu said, “The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting.”

... but here is yet another example of how Donald Trump has made the world far less safe. In August 2019, during his first administration, he formally withdrew the United States from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty. Then came February 2023, when Vladimir Putin announced the suspension of Russia’s participation in the New START Treaty, the last remaining nuclear arms control pact between the United States and Russia.

Even though Putin offered to uphold the treaty’s central limits for one year following its expiration, Donald Trump allowed the New START Treaty to officially expire on February 5, 2026 – ending a half-century of collaboration between the world’s two largest nuclear powers. We have now returned to a world that has no limits on the size or structure of nuclear arsenals and where nuclear weapons can reach unconstrained levels – entering a dangerous new nuclear age.

This is a huge bummer because the world has made remarkable progress in reducing its total nuclear arsenal. There has been an 80 percent reduction since the Nuclear Non-Proliferation (NPT) Treaty entered into force in 1970, and of the over fifty nation states that could

have worked toward a nuclear option, only 9 have them today – Russia, the United States, China, France, the United Kingdom, Pakistan, India, Israel and North Korea. < Note: The U.S., Russia, China, France and the UK are the only recognized “nuclear-weapon states” under the NPT. They are also the P5 (Permanent 5) members of the UN Security Council >.

The NPT (1970) was followed by the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty (1987), which was signed by President Ronald Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in 1987 to eliminate intermediate- and shorter-range missiles (those with ranges between 300 to 3,400 miles); the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, signed in 1991 by George H.W. Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev; and the New START Treaty, signed in 2010, again by the presidents of the United States and Russia, Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev. On January 26, 2021, Presidents Biden and Putin agreed to extend the New START Treaty through February 4, 2026.

Now, not only is the Trump/Vance administration threatening the deployment of even more nuclear weapons, but also the resumption of underground nuclear testing. < The last nuclear weapon test in the United States was in 1992, before President George H.W. Bush halted such exercises at the conclusion of the Cold War. >

“Because of other countries testing programs,” President Trump posted on October 29, 2025, “I have instructed the Department of War to start testing our Nuclear Weapons on an equal basis. That process will begin immediately.”

What I’m sure he considered a flex was actually a really dangerous and wildly irresponsible thing for him to say. Setting aside the fact that the Energy Department would test nuclear weapons, not the Defense Department – plus the fact that underground nuclear testing is no longer necessary since we can now maintain our arsenal through computer modeling – his flippant statement was likely taken very seriously by our adversaries – potentially publicly greenlighting a practice that has been a global taboo for three decades.

< Sidebar: There is evidence that Russia and China have conducted super-critical nuclear weapons tests. Technical data suggests that China, for one, carried out a clandestine test of a very-low-yield nuclear

weapon and, after making a herculean effort to hide it, is now lying about it. While this should deeply concern us regarding China's intentions, we need to demonstrate leadership and not immediately sink to their level. President Trump's response is just an extensive of the "my bomb is bigger than your bomb" tit-for-tat strategy that we need to move away from. >

Donald Trump is the last person on earth to care about the environmental destruction explosive testing causes, but does he care (or even know about) the human toll it takes? The radioactive fallout from our 20th-century nuclear testing programs created devastating generational health crises for populations in the Marshall Islands and the American West (known as "Downwinders"). The people alive then suffered acute radiation sickness, and subsequent generations have endured high rates of cancer (specifically thyroid, leukemia, and breast cancer); birth defects (like "jellyfish babies" born with no bones); and miscarriages.

The Trump/Vance administration reversing the world's incredible progress could not have come at a worse time. In 2024, the Annual Threat Assessment from the U.S. Director of National Intelligence warned that "the expansion of nuclear weapons stockpiles and their delivery systems, coupled with increasing regional conflict involving nuclear weapons states, pose a significant challenge to global efforts to prevent the spread and use of nuclear weapons."

"China and Russia are seeking to ensure strategic stability with the United States through the growth and development of a range of weapons capabilities, including nontraditional weapons intended to defeat or evade U.S. missile defenses. Consequently, these new technologies probably will challenge the way states think about arms control, and we expect it will be difficult to achieve agreement on new weapon definitions or verification measures, particularly at the multilateral level. North Korea continues to threaten to conduct a seventh nuclear test and the potential for heightened tension between Pakistan and India could increase the risk of nuclear escalation."

Seventh nuclear test, huh? Seems like the June 12, 2018 "summit" (read: photo op) between Kim Jong-un and Donald Trump didn't go quite as planned.

You know the one, where an American president met with a brutal dictator and relentlessly praised him as being just another “very, very talented leader” who “wants to do the right thing” while being “very open, very honorable,” and very “worthy.” Donald even complimented the “respect” Little Rocket Man receives from his people: “His country does love him. His people, you see the fervor.” < You better believe they show fervor. You don’t show fervor in North Korea you get your head chopped off. What is it with this man’s fascination with tyrants? >

After the June 2018 spectacle, a second summit in February 2019 ended early with no deal on nukes and, four months later, Donald Trump swung by North Korea on his way home from the Group of 20 summit in Japan and stepped across the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea, becoming the first sitting U.S. president to step foot in North Korea... yet another visit that ended in no deal.

However, it seems President Trump didn’t get the memo that the visits with his new buddy were a total bust because on his way home, he tweeted: “There is no longer a Nuclear Threat from North Korea.” ...which was a completely delusional thing to say, even for him.

Right after Trump’s love fest, North Korea repeatedly fired short-range ballistic missiles and rockets, conducted two ground tests at one of its nuclear test sites, and increased production of long-range missiles and the fissile material used in nuclear weapons.

One year after the summit, The Wall Street Journal reported that “Siegfried Hecker, a Stanford University nuclear scientist who has visited North Korea’s nuclear facilities, has estimated that North Korea might be capable of producing six or seven nuclear bombs a year.”

In May 2020, Kim Jong-un made it clear he was evoking “new policies for further increasing” North Korea’s nuclear capabilities. That October, he threw a huge military parade to introduce his humongous new intercontinental ballistic missile... a missile that military experts said, if truly operational, was one of the largest road-mobile ICBMs in the entire world.

Fast-forward to January 2021, when he made clear where North Korea stands with the U.S.: “Our external political activities must focus on controlling and subjugating the United States, our archenemy and

the biggest stumbling block to the development of our revolution” – then launched another ballistic missile, this time off its east coast.

... and Little Rocket Man hasn't slowed down one bit since then. The 2025 Annual Threat Assessment confirms that he “remains committed to increasing the number of North Korea’s nuclear warheads and improving its missile capabilities to threaten the Homeland and U.S. forces, citizens, and allies, and to weaken U.S. power in the AsiaPacific region, as evidenced by the pace of the North’s missile flight tests and the regime’s public touting of its uranium enrichment capabilities... North Korea is probably prepared to conduct a nuclear test and continues to flight test ICBMs so Kim can threaten the Homeland. Russia is increasingly supporting North Korea’s nuclear status in exchange for Pyongyang’s support to Moscow’s war against Ukraine.”

A June 2025 report from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) – the United Nation’s nuclear watchdog – revealed that North Korea’s nuclear test site at Punggye-ri can now support a nuclear test on short notice. The country has increased its missile testing; is working to build a new nuclear-powered submarine; and, on January 4, 2026, test fired hypersonic missiles.

Pyongyang now has around 50 assembled nuclear warheads in its stockpile and enough fissile material to produce 40 more. In October 2025, Kim Jong Un hosted yet another military parade – with Chinese, Vietnamese and Russian guests of honor – where he unveiled a new intercontinental ballistic missile, which he called his “most powerful” nuclear weapon yet.

< Interesting fact: Although North Korea remains one of the most dangerous and unpredictable threats to the U.S., it was not mentioned even once in the Trump/Vance administration’s new National Security Strategy. My thought is that Donald Trump didn’t include it because doing so would be an omission of his complete failure to sway his boyfriend during his first term, but whatever. >

In October 2025, President Trump practically begged Kim Jong Un to meet with him on his swing through Asia. The answer was no.

Meanwhile, China is expanding its nuclear stockpile and weapons-production facilities faster than any other country on earth. When Xi

Jinping came to power in 2012, the country had around 240 nuclear warheads. Now, the Federation of American Scientists (FAS) estimates that China has about 600 warheads and is on track to reach 1,000 by 2030 (they believe the majority of these are in storage, with around 24 being deployed).

We already covered the disturbing display of nuclear-capable missiles for submarines and aircraft Xi Jinping unveiled in his military parade spectacle in September 2025, but China has also increased its number of road-mobile ICBM bases and has finished construction of three new ICBM silo fields. FAS estimates that roughly 30 silos have been loaded. They possess a fully operational nuclear triad – land-launched nuclear missiles, nuclear-missile-armed submarines, and strategic aircraft – and are developing a “launch on warning” posture (i.e., launching a retaliatory nuclear-weapons strike while an adversary’s missiles are still in the air).

With all this going on, maybe – just maybe – it would make more sense for Donald Trump, JD Vance and Marco Rubio to spend more time, as President Dwight Eisenhower advised back in 1961, “learning how to compose differences not with arms, but with *intellect* and *decent purpose*.”



This is the perfect time to talk about the foundational philosophy and moral compass we want our military to be led by.

Two days after the February 28, 2026 launch of Operation Epic Fury in Iran, Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth described the Trump/Vance administration’s version of what this philosophy and compass should look like (I’m paraphrasing here, using his own words): The warrior ethos. Lethality. U.S. soldiers are not defenders, they are warriors... trained to kill the enemy and break their will. Regardless of what so-called international institutions and our traditional allies – who wring their hands and clutch their pearls, hemming and hawing about the use of force – say, we wage war on our terms with maximum

authorities. No stupid rules of engagement, no nation building quagmire, no democracy building exercise, no politically correct wars.

I could not disagree more with this ridiculous man.

His words bring to mind a prescient quote from President Ronald Reagan: “There are some who’ve forgotten why we have a military. It’s not to promote war. It’s to be prepared for peace.”

But it was President Franklin Roosevelt who really hit the nail on the head: “A nation that cannot resist aggression is inviting it.”

Less than 14 months into President Trump’s second term, he had authorized military operations in seven nations – Iran, Iraq, Somalia, Syria, Yemen, Nigeria and Venezuela, where he captured and removed its leader from power. He had threatened to use military force against NATO allies to take control of Greenland; pressured Mexico to allow U.S. troops in the country to bomb fentanyl labs; and directed an air campaign to kill suspected drug smugglers (without solid proof) at sea.

No president in the modern era has ordered more military strikes against as many different countries as he has, even though he explicitly ran as the anti-war candidate: “Globalists want to squander all of America’s strength, blood and treasure, chasing monsters and phantoms overseas while keeping us distracted from the havoc they’re creating here at home,” he said on the 2024 campaign trail.

Even after moving back into the Oval Office, President Trump was still hawking that message around the world: “In the end, the so-called nation builders wrecked far more nations than they built,” then going on to ridicule the “Western interventionists giving you lectures on how to live and how to govern your own affairs” – before, just nine months later, launching the largest U.S. military operation the Middle East has seen in two decades.

One of the smartest things President Theodore Roosevelt ever said was that foreign policy should be an “exercise of intelligent forethought and of decisive action *sufficiently far in advance of any likely crisis* to make it improbable that we would run into serious trouble.” This approach won him the 1906 Nobel Peace Prize for negotiating a peace treaty that ultimately ended the Russo-Japanese War.

If only President Trump had heeded this advice back in 2018.

As we can see even more clearly now, pulling out of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in May 2018 was without a doubt one of the most irresponsible things Donald Trump did during his first time in office. The JCPOA was a landmark deal among Iran and Britain, China, the European Union, France, Germany, Russia and the U.S. that placed significant restrictions on Iran's nuclear program < Note: China, Russia, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom all remained in the JCPOA. >

For one, leaving the deal made the United States look completely unreliable and put us at odds, yet again, with our European allies. In truth, we looked like total amateurs. But, far worse, it made the entire world much more vulnerable and unstable.

Donald Trump had a huge problem with the deal from the jump, saying things like (this is a direct quote hence the discombobulated wording), “We gave them \$150 billion and \$1.8 billion and we got nothing... look at what they did to John Kerry and to President Obama. Look what happened, where they're bringing planeloads of cash, planeloads, big planes, 757s, Boeing 757s coming in loaded up with cash. What kind of a deal is that?”

This is a total distortion of what happened. When the JCPOA was signed, Iran regained access to its own assets that had been frozen. It's true that around \$1.7 billion was paid to Iran from the U.S. Treasury's Judgement Fund (the payment was made in foreign currency because of active sanctions) – and did arrive in Tehran on a cargo plane, in cash – but that was money that the United States already owed Iran (Iran had paid us for military equipment in the 1970s that was never delivered).

Either way, even if you disagree with the deal or the way the Obama administration handled it, it had already happened. The money had already been paid, so why in the world would you blow everything up after the most controversial, hard-to-swallow part of the deal was already in our rearview?

The JCPOA was far from perfect but the agreement achieved a major goal: The Iranian government agreed to cut its stockpile to no more than 300kg of low-enriched uranium; promised that it would not

enrich any uranium beyond 4 percent and that it would have only one enrichment facility; and, most importantly, agreed to allow access to its nuclear facilities so the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) could verify Iran's compliance.

... and make no mistake. Contrary to what the first Trump administration falsely claimed, Iran WAS complying with the deal. In May 2018, the very month President Trump pulled us out, the IAEA confirmed that "Iran was subject to the world's most robust nuclear verification regime under the JCPOA, which is a significant verification gain. As of today, the IAEA can confirm that the nuclear-related commitments are being implemented by Iran."

Surprising nobody but Donald Trump, not long after our exit, what had become a relatively stable situation devolved into a complete mess – a Trump specialty. The U.S. imposed "maximum pressure" sanctions against Iran. Both Iran and the U.S. seized oil tankers. The United States shot down Iranian drones and sent additional troops to Saudi Arabia. The Strait of Hormuz, the only sea passage from the Persian Gulf to the rest of the world, got increasingly confrontational.

But the worst part was that Iran immediately got back into the nuclear bomb-making business with gusto. Right away, they started digging a massive tunnel network south of their Natanz nuclear production site, an indication they were again constructing very deep nuclear facilities designed to survive foreign attacks, including bombs and cyberattacks.

At the same time, Iran quickly increased the number of its centrifuges enriching uranium and its stockpile of low-enriched uranium. < Note: Although low-enriched uranium is used in nuclear power plants, it can also be processed into highly enriched uranium which is used for nuclear weapons. > Not long after, Iran breached the limit on uranium enrichment agreed to under the JCPOA. These actions helped Iran significantly reduce its "breakout time," or the time it takes for them to have a nuclear weapon.

This all escalated even further with the January 2020 U.S. drone assassination of Maj. Gen. Qassim Suleimani, a senior official of the Islamic Republic of Iran who was close to its then supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Suleimani was also the commander of the

Quds Force, an agency that is part of Iran's formal military structure and responsible for Iran's covert military operations.

Then came the assassination of Iran's top nuclear scientist, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, which Iran responded to with a new law that ramped up its enrichment of uranium to a level much closer to weapons-grade fuel. The entire thing just turned into total chaos.

Now operating completely alone, the first Trump administration tried to unilaterally impose "maximum pressure" against Iran, a plan that included crippling economic sanctions against the country, individuals, companies, and financial institutions that do business with Iran. The U.S. also designated the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist organization and seized even more cargo from tankers carrying Iranian petroleum.

While the U.S. sanctions did have a devastating effect on Iran, they did not deliver the knockout blow Donald Trump envisioned. At least fourteen banks continued to do business with Tehran.

Another thing the first Trump administration naïvely envisioned was being able to control issues within the JCPOA without being a part of it. This led to some embarrassing moments, like in August 2020 when the U.S. notified the UN Security Council that it would invoke a "snapback," whereby the United Nations sanctions on Iran that were suspended with the signing of the JCPOA would be reinstated.

However, the UK, France and Germany refused to join the United States in reinstating these sanctions, adding that the United States had no standing to invoke this rule because it was no longer in the JCPOA, a position shared by China and Russia.

Earlier that same month, the UN Security Council had rejected a U.S. proposal to extend a five-year ban on the sale of conventional weapons to Iran, highlighting once again how isolated the United States has become on the topic of the country.

Cut to June 22, 2025, when, in an attack known as Operation Midnight Hammer, the United States joined Israel's assault on Iran's nuclear program, launching a U.S. military strike using B-2 bombers carrying bunker-busting bombs, plus ships launching Tomahawk missiles. The U.S. strikes were the grand finale in Israel's 12-day war, an attack that included the targeting of Iran's leading nuclear scientists.

Next, of course, came Operation Epic Fury.

Knowing what we know now – regardless of what happens with the ongoing “peace” talks – it would be hard for a reasonable person to disagree that President Trump’s decision to launch a war of choice – as opposed to one of necessity – was a mistake of epic proportions (at least they got one of the words in the name of the operation right!).

For one, it’s another example of unchecked executive overreach. The U.S. Constitution entrusts Congress with the power to “declare war,” not the president. I’m not saying that this means Congress must authorize every single use of American power, specifically when he or she is responding to attacks on our nation or forces, but when a president launches a war of choice – especially when a substantial portion of America’s military is involved and American lives are on the line – the president must go to Congress and Congress must authorize it. < It’s also not smart for a U.S. president to proceed in these circumstances without the by-in of the American people, but Republicans will have to answer for that in the next election. >

Even if you discard what the U.S. Constitution clearly states, the War Powers Resolution of 1973 only allows the president to initiate hostilities when there has been a declaration of war or a specific authorization from Congress, or a national emergency created by an attack on the U.S., its territories or possessions, or its armed forces.

... and don’t even get me started on international law, which the Trump/Vance administration has repeatedly blown right through. It was bad enough in Venezuela, when they conducted lethal and illegal boat strikes and, in the grand finale, illegally abducted its leader, but Operation Epic Fury is another ballgame altogether.

Regardless of what you think of Iran, the United Nations Charter – which was passed by the United States Senate and signed by President Truman in 1945 – prohibits the use of force “against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state.” Forcible regime changes and attacking heads of state are also violations of the foundational principles of state sovereignty, use of force, and non-intervention under the UN Charter.

Worse, President Trump has repeatedly threatened what are – by *any* measure – war crimes. The most wicked example of this started in his expletive-filled message on Easter Sunday 2026 that managed to offend pretty much every country and every religion: “Tuesday will be Power Plant Day, and Bridge Day, all wrapped up in one, in Iran. There will be nothing like it!!! Open the Fuckin’ Strait, you crazy bastards, or you’ll be living in Hell – JUST WATCH! Praise be to Allah.”

This gem was followed two days later with: “A whole civilization will die tonight, never to be brought back again.”

This is beyond disgraceful.

... and quite possibly one of the worst things a U.S. president has *ever* threatened. I was so saddened by this – and wanted to express my heartbreak for the people of Iran and America eloquently – but couldn’t find the right words.

But, as usual, Peggy Noonan could, God bless her: “I want to talk about why (Trump’s posts) were so horrifying. They constituted hitting a new bottom, a new and infernal, face-lit-by-flames bottom, in world communications. The posts weren’t showbiz, they were sinister. You destabilize the world when, as the American president, you say such things. You make all the babies in this delicately poised, always knock-down-able world less safe. You rob your own nation of a claim to moral seriousness in the military action in which it’s engaged: You are saying we’re not trying to protect life but plan to attack, and in the attacking kill noncombatants who are members of the targeted civilization.”

“The moral high ground is relinquished. You lower the bar for all potential response. You encourage violent action by trumpeting your readiness for it. It bolsters the position of your enemies – their animus is justified, their commitment deepened. It allows them to pretend they’re fighting for the continuation of their people and not only the continuation of their regime... It is not sentimental to care about this; it is babyish to think it means nothing.”

Without question, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was a bad man. His regime inflicted systemic human rights abuses against its own people

and, just this year, massacred thousands of protesters. Iran's leaders imprison, torture, and execute political dissidents, and severely oppress women, LGBTQ people, and religious and ethnic minorities. They thrive on terror and repeatedly vow death to America and Israel. Iran has caused trouble for decades, sponsoring Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis and other proxies as they wreaked havoc and killed Americans.

But let's be clear on two things: One, the Iranian people should never be punished for the sins of their leaders (it's shocking this even must be said). They have suffered enough, to say the least.

And two, there was absolutely ZERO reason we had to attack Iran right now, *right this second*.

There was no imminent threat; no involvement from Congress; no support from allies; no coherent justification for the American people; no tangible goals; no clear objectives; no plan for helping Americans safely leave the region; no coherent strategy to help the Iranian people build a legitimate state; no discernable endgame; and little regional American expertise, thanks to the fact that the administration has fired dozens of career diplomats – leaving several strategic posts in the Middle East vacant for over a year – plus, U.S. State Department and FBI employees, many of whom were Middle Eastern, counterterrorism, and counter-intelligence experts.

And now we are stuck in another costly quagmire in the Middle East.

Despite President Trump's absurd claim that there has been regime change in Iran – – “We're dealing with a much different regime than before; we're dealing with different people. They're smarter, they're sharper, far less radical. We have regime change.” – – the Iranian regime is not only unchanged but more hard-lined and emboldened.

The new leaders – including the newly appointed supreme leader, Mojtaba Khamenei, son of Ali – are considered by experts to be even more closely aligned with a powerful arm of the Iranian military called the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) – and unsurprisingly, they are even angrier than they were before we, in the case of Mojtaba Khamenei, killed his father, mother, wife, at least one child, and his sister, her husband, and their child.

The fact that the Iranian government is still in place and that Iran's chain of command is still functioning should be no surprise to anyone who bothered to study Iran before bombing them, because Iran's leadership apparatus – which has layered and overlapping centers of political and military power – is designed to outlive individual leaders.

This tracks with a classified report by the National Intelligence Council – completed about a week before the U.S. and Israel launched their attacks and was reported on by multiple news outlets – which concluded that even a large-scale military assault on the country would be unlikely to topple its theocratic government, even if Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was killed in a U.S.-led military operation.

The Strait of Hormuz – where 20 percent of the world's oil and one-fifth of its liquid natural gas passes through – was choked off for weeks. As a result, the Gulf, home to about half of the world's proven reserves of oil, is still in disarray and energy markets are still spooked. The International Energy Agency has already called this the largest energy shock *in history*.

The price of gas in the U.S. has blown through \$4 a gallon for the first time since 2022 and is now around 25 percent higher since the war started. This probably isn't going to get much better any time soon, especially now that the Trump/Vance administration has set a naval blockade on ships entering or exiting Iranian ports – blocking more oil from an already tight market.

Although the early days of the U.S. blockade look promising – and is *by far* the best strategic move the administration has made in this fiasco, given the economic pressure it puts on Iran... I mean, better late than never – – this is not a feasible long-term option for America.

For one, enforcing the blockade requires a hefty commitment of U.S. Navy ships and personnel – plus it's very, very dangerous. In addition to capitalizing on inhospitable and foreboding terrain, to control the Strait, the Iranians use sea mines – self-contained, explosive devices put in water to damage or destroy surface ships and submarines – which are simple but dangerous asymmetric warfare weapons that can be set by small boats that look like ordinary fishing vessels.

... which all means we can't possibly be the Strait of Hormuz's police force forever.

Energy prices will also likely remain high because missile and drone strikes have damaged over 40 crucial energy assets, including a third of the Gulf region's oil refineries. Repairing damaged facilities, including Qatar's Ras Laffan LNG plant, could take years and cost billions (the research firm Rystad Energy estimates energy infrastructure repair costs in the region to be over \$25 billion).

As a result, the U.S. stock market has been on a roller coaster ride, and the American consumer is frazzled. U.S. consumer prices were up 3.3 percent in March 2026 from a year earlier – coming in hotter than February's gain of 2.4 percent – and by April, consumer sentiment had fallen to the lowest level recorded in the 70-plus-year history of the University of Michigan's Surveys of Consumers.

Globally, the war metastasized into an all-out crisis with over a dozen countries directly affected and several more reluctantly dragged into supporting roles. The U.S. torpedoed an Iranian warship off the coast of Sri Lanka, *more than 2,000 miles from Tehran*. NATO forces shot down a missile headed into Turkey's airspace and multiple drones even crossed over into Azerbaijan.

Over 1,000,000 people have been driven from their homes in Lebanon. The U.S. military targeted Iranian-backed militias so – just like that – we were back in combat in Iraq. An Iranian drone assault hit the Baghdad Diplomatic Support Center, a large logistical hub for U.S. diplomats near Iraqi military bases and the Baghdad airport, and a U.S. Air Force refueling aircraft crashed after an apparent accident involving two KC-135 tankers, killing six American service members.

Our interests in other parts of the world are now precariously exposed as the war is 1) distracting us from what China is doing in the Indo-Pacific, which includes building a military base on Antelope Reef in the Paracel Islands and imposing widespread airspace restrictions covering waters facing Japan and South Korea, and 2) draining our missile stockpiles and stretching our forces, threatening our readiness for what may happen in the Yellow, East and South China seas.

Our munition supplies have dropped so fast that European and Asian allies are worried (and angry) that the Pentagon won't have enough to send them the stuff they have already bought.

We have reportedly used at least a thousand of our 2,300 stealthy, long-range cruise JASSM-ER missiles – missiles that are crucial if China ever invades Taiwan. These missiles cost \$1.5 million *each*. We have even fewer Tomahawk missiles and Patriot interceptors left.

The Iranian war has pulled in around 40 percent of our active U.S. Navy ships and shifted more than 300 aircraft to bases in the Middle East, which represents around 50 percent of the deployable U.S. air power in the world. By the fourth week, the Pentagon was sending thousands of soldiers from our Army’s elite 82nd Airborne Division to join the 50,000 U.S. troops already in the region.

The costs – including the 13 American lives lost and over 300 U.S. troops who have been wounded (at least 10 severely), and the 1,700+ Iranian civilians killed – are astronomical. Less than six weeks in, the U.S. had spent a reported \$28 billion on the war, and the Pentagon had already asked Congress for over \$200 billion more.

Three American F-15 fighter jets were downed in a friendly-fire incident with Kuwait, a loss of \$100 million *per plane*. In early April, Iranian air defenses shot down a U.S. military F-15E Strike Eagle and a A-10 Warthog attack plane. Two UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters and two transport planes were also reportedly damaged or destroyed.

At least 17 U.S. sites and other installations have been damaged by drones and missiles, including U.S. embassies, military bases, and air defense infrastructure. On the very first day, Iran targeted several U.S. military facilities, including Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia; Ali Al Salem Air Base and Camp Buehring Base in Kuwait; and Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, our largest base in the Middle East.

All these harsh realities seemed to finally hit the Trump/Vance administration. On April 7th, President Trump announced a two-week “ceasefire,” pulling the entire world back from the brink less than 90 minutes before his 8 p.m. deadline to make good on his “a whole civilization will die tonight” declaration.

In his social media post announcing the “ceasefire,” our president said that we had “met and exceeded all military objectives.” The next day, Defense Secretary Hegseth said we had achieved a “historic and overwhelming victory,” achieving “every single objective.”

It soon became clear that most everyone in the entire world saw right through their manufactured victory lap. Most could plainly see that this was an unpredictable, unhinged, panicked, war-weary president who was searching for yet another off-ramp that, since it didn't exist, had to be clumsily created. A man trying desperately to get people to believe that his bloodcurdling and immoral threats had coerced Iran into just throwing in the towel, when, in fact, he was just trying to find a way to pull up stakes in the face of humiliating defeat.

Americans especially were in no mood to fall for another b.s. "Mission Accomplished" moment. Declaring "victory" after doing little more than creating massive chaos; destroying not only military but civilian infrastructure; and replacing a Khamenei with a Khamenei is just not going to cut it this time.

Worse, Americans and American allies were outraged by President Trump's claim in his "ceasefire" announcement that Iran had proposed a "workable" 10-point peace plan that included what he described as "points of past contention" that had "been agreed to between the United States and Iran."

It was hard to imagine which of the ten points he was referring to because most of us didn't see *any* that could possibly work – especially since the demands included the lifting of all sanctions and UN resolutions against Iran, including the release of Iranian assets held overseas; an end to attacks against the "Axis of Resistance," as Iran calls its proxy groups in the region; the "withdrawal of U.S. combat forces from all bases and military deployment points in the region;" full compensation for any destruction caused by the war; the establishment of a formal protocol for passage through the Strait of Hormuz "that ensures an oversight role for Iran;" and the "acceptance of [uranium] enrichment," as the version released in Farsi put it.

Iranian leaders certainly saw President Trump's "workable" 10-point peace plan comments as a major victory, spending the day saying the "criminal U.S." had agreed to "the general framework" of Iran's proposal: "Good news to the dear nation of Iran! Nearly all the objectives of the war have been achieved," said the Supreme National Security Council. Iran's first vice president Mohammad Reza Aref

wrote on social media: “Good morning to victory! Today, history has turned a new page. The era of Iran has begun.”

After this massive embarrassment, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt tried to, as usual, rewrite history, saying Iran’s ten-point plan was “fundamentally unserious, unacceptable and completely discarded. It was literally thrown in the garbage by President Trump and his negotiating team. The idea that President Trump would ever accept an Iranian wish list as a deal is completely absurd.” – even though the entire world knew exactly what he had said.

On April 12th – after his guys spent 21 hours negotiating with the Iranians while he attended an Ultimate Fighting Championship match – President Trump’s crack negotiation team, led by Vice President JD Vance, left Islamabad, Pakistan without a deal to end the war.

Afterward, Iran’s top negotiator and the speaker of its Parliament Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf said that the U.S. team had failed to “gain the trust of the Iranian delegation” – which is no surprise given that the Trump/Vance administration had acted like they were negotiating with Iran in good faith only to suddenly bomb them during the ongoing negotiations *twice* before this round.

It’s also no surprise that the Iranians went into those initial talks emboldened because, as hard as it is to stomach or believe, at that point they held more cards than we did... giving them little reason to simply “capitulate,” as U.S. special envoy Steve Witkoff naïvely put it.

To the contrary, they seemed determined to stay the course. As the U.S. delegation headed to the airfield to leave Islamabad, the Iranian foreign ministry said in a statement: “The heavy loss of our great elders, dear ones, and fellow countrymen has made our response to pursue the Iranian nation’s interests and rights firmer than ever before.”

*Why in the world did Donald Trump drag us into this?* Even though the objectives for why we went to war have been a constant moving target (they at times have included destroying Iran’s military capability; preventing Iran from getting a nuclear weapon; breaking its regional proxies; protecting the Strait of Hormuz; creating an opening for regime change; and even “getting back” at them for trying to “kill” Donald Trump), after almost six weeks of bombastic threats, scorched-

earth bombing, whipsawed markets, panicked allies, and widespread civilian terror, none of these goals have been clearly accomplished.

It's true that by operational standards, the Operation Epic Fury military strikes have been successful. The initial blasts killed Ali Khamenei and dozens of senior Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) leaders, including the defense minister and chief of staff.

< That said, the strikes also killed a group of Iranian officials that the White House had identified as potentially more cooperative than others, which they had hoped might help bring a swift end to the conflict. Commenting on this, Donald Trump, in his always classy and empathetic manner, said: "The attack was so successful it knocked out most of the candidates" to lead Iran. "They're all dead. Second or third place is dead." Then, "Most of the people we had in mind are dead. ... Pretty soon, we're not going to know anybody." Good Lord. >

A long list of Iranian military assets was decimated and will take many years and billions of dollars to replace; 90 percent of Iran's regular navy has been destroyed; and immense damage has been done to its industrial base. On April 8th, Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, reported that military strikes had destroyed roughly 80 percent of Iran's air defenses; over 1,500 targets and over 450 ballistic missile storage facilities; 800 one-way attack drone storage facilities; and more than 80 percent of its missile factories.

However, even though over half of Iran's missile launchers were destroyed, a substantial number remain buried underground. The Wall Street Journal reports that Iran still has thousands of ballistic missiles that it can use by retrieving launchers from underground storage areas.

"The Iranians have shown a remarkable ability to innovate and reconstitute their forces quickly," Kenneth Pollack, a former CIA analyst who is vice president for policy at the Middle East Institute, told the WSJ. "They are a much more formidable opponent than most Middle East militaries other than the Israelis."

At the same time, this war has also revealed that the U.S. military is largely unprepared for modern-day warfare. The U.S. was forced to use billions of dollars' worth of high-tech munitions to fight against Iran's cheap drones. Essentially, Iran proved that a country that spends

one-hundredth of what the United States does on its military can keep up with it in a conflict.

But what the U.S. has or has not blown up and with what is beside the point. *Of course* a withering air campaign of cruise and supersonic ballistic missiles carried out by the best military in the world has had successes. *But the least important part of war is blowing things up.*

Operational success doesn't necessarily equal victory. It reminds me of a story U.S. Army Colonel Harry G. Summers Jr. once told about a conversation between him and North Vietnamese Colonel Tu.

Colonel Summers: "You know, you never defeated us on the battlefield." Colonel Tu: "That may be so, but it is also irrelevant."

... meaning that, while the American military won virtually every major tactical battle against the North Vietnamese Army and Viet Cong, those victories meant little because the North Vietnamese faithfully pursued a strategic goal of just surviving the war until – after spending roughly \$168 billion (over \$1 trillion in today's dollars) and losing 58,220 American lives – the United States finally just left.

Donald Trump, JD Vance, Marco Rubio, Pete Hegseth, Lindsey Graham, etc. can't seem to grasp that the Islamic Republic wins this war by doing nothing more than *surviving*. Their ability to withstand an onslaught from two of the world's most powerful militaries is the greatest victory they have had since taking power in 1979.

In truth, by the time of the "ceasefire," Iran had way (way) more advantages than it had before the conflict started. Two months before, the leaders of Iran – headed by an 86-year-old leader with major health issues – were struggling to contain one of the most perilous moments of their 47-year rule as their economy tanked and citizens rebelled.

Two months later, they had learned they had the power to inflict substantial global economic pain (which is more of a leverage than their nuclear program ever was), and the same people who had been rising against them were forming human chains around infrastructure that support civilian life, waving Iranian flags and holding up banners.

It's hard to overstate the significance of the new Strait of Hormuz reality, regardless of what happens in the negotiations between Iran and the U.S. The Strait – which was acting as a free-flowing international waterway before the Trump/Vance administration started this war –

will forever be a chess piece that Iran can play, now that they fully understand the power weaponizing it gives them over the global economy. < It's important to remember that, although it seems like the U.S. naval blockade has brought this under control, that's a temporary fix. Again, we can't possibly police the Strait forever. >

As an example, after the initial "ceasefire," Iran announced it would open the Strait but limit daily ship crossings (which turned out to be only for ships from countries that either trade directly with Iran and/or are not viewed as hostile to the Iranians). Iran's justification for maintaining a chokehold on the Strait after the "ceasefire" was that Israel continued to bomb the Iran-backed militant group Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Also before the "ceasefire" and U.S. blockade, Iran announced its intention to charge tolls on maritime traffic, to the tune of \$2 million per passage, which would heavily burden our Gulf allies, plus deliver tens of billions of dollars in revenue to Iran's coffers to rebuild its weapons industry. Perhaps the most terrifying part is that they demanded the tolls be paid in cryptocurrency or Chinese yuan – putting additional pressure on the U.S. petrodollar.

That's one problem. Then there is the nearly 1,000 pounds of near-weapons-grade uranium still in Iran's possession at its Isfahan nuclear site. And Pickaxe Mountain, where Iran has allegedly been working on a nuclear-weapons component and where they could possibly build a uranium-enrichment plant, is reportedly still intact. HOW'S THE JCPOA LOOKING ABOUT NOW, AMERICA?

< Sidebar: Although it's impossible to know with certainty the extent of the damage done to Iran's nuclear program during Operation Midnight Hammer – the first assault by the U.S and Israel in 2025 – the general consensus seems to be that the military strikes destroyed only one of Iran's three principal nuclear facilities, the Fordow site, where B-2 stealth bombers dropped twelve GBU-57 ground-penetrating bombs through ventilation shafts. Evidently, the intelligence suggests that the attack destroyed thousands of nuclear centrifuges at the deepest levels of Fordow (estimated to be over 250 feet under a mountain),

although it's unclear whether the centrifuges were destroyed or just rendered inoperable.

The extent of the damage at the other two nuclear enrichment facilities, Natanz and Isfahan, is harder to determine, but the general assumption seems to be that neither were taken out completely – even though Natanz had been targeted by Israel for days and was finally hit with two Massive Ordnance Penetrator bombs.

Of course, Iran's nuclear capabilities reached much further than Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan and, even though it appears Iran lost a lot of their nuclear scientists in the Israeli 12-day war, they still likely had the knowledge and sophistication to rebuild. To that end, by September 2025, satellite imagery was picking up images of new construction underway at Pickaxe Mountain, a mile from the bombed Natanz site.

The problem with Pickaxe Mountain is that its buried 80 to 100 meters below ground – even deeper than the Fordow facility – and even the Massive Ordnance Penetrators may not be able to get to it.

Another major issue: In March 2026, it was reported that American intelligence agencies had determined that Iran or others could now get to Iran's primary store of highly enriched uranium that had been buried under Iran's nuclear site at Isfahan through a very narrow access point (the uranium is in gas form and stored in canisters). >

From the beginning, Donald Trump, JD Vance, Marco Rubio, Pete Hegseth and Steve Witkoff all claimed that Iran had restarted its nuclear program and was developing long-range missiles that would soon be able to *hit the United States*. Steve Witkoff even said on Fox News that Iran was “*probably a week away* from having industrial-grade bomb making material.” ... just a downright, flat-out lie.

Three U.S. officials with access to current intelligence about Iran's missile program told The New York Times that the Trump/Vance administration “exaggerated the immediacy of the threat posed to the United States. One official said some intelligence analysts were concerned that top aides have inflated the threats or that intelligence was being selectively presented or distorted as it was sent upward.”

While Iran's current missile arsenal can reach parts of Europe and U.S. military bases in the Middle East, a 2025 report by the Defense

Intelligence Agency concluded that Iran did not have ballistic missiles capable of hitting the United States, and that it might take as long as 10 years for them to develop 60 intercontinental ballistic missiles. To even do that, Iran would have to first develop the technology, the report says.

Days before the war started, the executive director of the Arms Control Association Daryl G. Kimball, wrote, “It is clear that it would take Iran years to fully rebuild its enrichment plants and months to enrich small amounts of uranium to bomb-grade and to process it into metal for a weapon. There is no imminent threat; Iran is not close to ‘weaponizing’ its nuclear material so as to justify another U.S. attack.”

< Another Sidebar: I was going to just move past this, but I simply cannot let the firehose of lies that spew from Donald Trump go. After Operation Midnight Hammer targeted Iranian nuclear facilities on June 22, 2025, President Trump swore to the American people that Tehran’s nuclear program had been “totally obliterated.” He also claimed that, because of his big beautiful strikes, Iran had given up its nuclear ambitions. Was he lying then or is he lying now – because both things can’t be true. There’s also the fact that he started this war in the first place. I can’t imagine how betrayed MAGA feels, after he promised them in three straight presidential campaigns that he wouldn’t be a war president. “I’m not going to start wars,” he vowed on election night in 2024. “I’m going to stop wars.” In his second inaugural address, he said his “proudest legacy will be that of a peacemaker.” How can anyone still believe anything that comes out of this man’s mouth? >

There are a few other problems with declaring “victory” at this point. One is that there is still no agreement on Iran’s part to end its support for regional proxies (a.k.a. the Houthis, Hamas and Hezbollah). Another is that it would totally screw our Gulf allies, who will be understandably furious if we leave them with a wounded, resentful, defiant, and extremely ticked-off Iran that has nothing to lose. They simply cannot afford an inconclusive outcome.

Our friends didn’t want this war but, now that the United States has started it, they desperately need the United States to finish it. Already, they have every right to be incredibly frustrated and angry by

this whole thing. Even though they tried hard for months to get the Trump/Vance administration to understand the dire consequences of an attack on Iran, they now face major oil market disruptions and massive regional instability, not to mention bombed out energy infrastructure that will take years and billions *of their own money* to rebuild.

There is also understandable infuriation among them that the war has unraveled their reputation as regional safe havens for business and tourism – a huge blow for nations that have tried hard to transform the region into a center of finance, aviation, technology and tourism.

Their airports, five-star hotels, and data centers have been bombarded; expats are rethinking their futures; real-estate deals are on hold; and economists have started to downgrade forecasts as they reprice risk across the region.

Dubai billionaire Khalaf Al Habtoor, who runs the Al Habtoor Group, likely spoke for many of them when he asked Donald in a post on X, “Who gave you the authority to drag our region into a war?” The president, he said, placed the Gulf states “at the heart of a danger they did not choose.”

The fact that Israel is involved makes it even more complicated for our Gulf allies, because some of them increasingly view Israel as an aggressive state that seeks to dominate the Middle East.

Some of them believe that a weakened Iran could potentially translate into the hegemony of Israel, which they unsurprisingly believe wouldn’t serve their interests (The “hegemony of Israel” refers to the concept that Israel is trying to establish itself as the dominant military, technological and political power in the Middle East. It suggests Israel would have a position of superiority, allowing them to influence regional security, project power beyond its borders, and operate with significant freedom of action.)

These Gulf nations’ fears were evident in the swift condemnation and fury from across the region that U.S. Ambassador to Israel Mike Huckabee received after he suggested that Israel has a biblical right to take over large swaths of the Middle East.

As Mr. Huckabee explained to Tucker Carlson, his interpretation of the Old Testament regarding land promised to Abraham’s

descendants, he said, “It would be fine if they (Israel) took it all, but I don’t think that’s what we’re talking about here today.”

Mr. Carlson then asked Mr. Huckabee about a Bible verse in which God promises Abraham that his descendants would receive land “from the Wadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates.” Carlson clarified that this area would be “basically the entire Middle East,” including parts of Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Iraq.

“I’m not sure it would go that far,” Huckabee said, “but it would be a big piece of land.”

Unsurprisingly, the rest of the Middle East went nuts. A joint statement from the foreign ministries of over a dozen Arab and Muslim nations, including U.S. allies Qatar and Saudi Arabia, expressed their “strong condemnation and profound concern” regarding Huckabee’s comments, affirming their “categorical rejection of such dangerous and inflammatory remarks.”

It probably also didn’t help matters when former Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett described Turkey as the “new Iran,” framing Ankara not simply as a critic of Israeli policy, but as a growing strategic threat. This comes at a time when Ankara is still one of Israel’s most vocal critics over Gaza, and Israel’s expanding military operations into Syria are increasingly raising alarms there.

Honestly, it doesn’t give *me* the warm and fuzzies that President Trump’s partner in all this from the jump was Benjamin Netanyahu, who told the United States Congress way back in 2002: “If you take out Saddam, Saddam’s regime, I guarantee you that it will have enormous positive reverberations on the region. And I think that people sitting right next door in Iran, young people and many others, will say the time of such regimes, of such despots, is gone.”

... staggeringly bad advice that ended up costing \$6 trillion and hundreds of thousands of lives over twenty years. In the end, we had nothing more to show for our blood and treasure than replacing the Taliban with the Taliban (sound familiar?).

< Netanyahu is also the man who has been saying Iran was “six months away” from having a nuclear bomb for literally 30 years. So unsurprisingly, there he was in our Situation Room on February 11, 2026 – the UNITED STATES SITUATION ROOM – hard-selling

President Trump on a U.S.-led war against Iran. His optimistic pitch led Gen. Dan Caine, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to reportedly tell the president: “Sir, this is, in my experience, standard operating procedure for the Israelis. They oversell, and their plans are not always well-developed. They know they need us, and that’s why they’re hard selling.” I encourage you to read the New York Times article *How Trump Took the U.S. to War With Iran* by Maggie Haberman and Jonathan Swan to learn more about the days leading to the war. >

Despite Netanyahu’s prediction in the Situation Room that Iran was “ripe for regime change,” a popular uprising was never a real possibility because the Iranian people had already been screwed over by Donald Trump at least once.

On January 2, 2026 – as large-scale demonstrations, triggered by dire economic issues, raged in the streets of Iran – Donald Trump said the United States was “locked and loaded” to come to the “rescue” if the Iranian regime responded to widespread protests lethally.

Iran security services answered by slaughtering their own citizens. < The Human Rights Activists News Agency, a U.S.-based advocacy organization for rights in Iran, reports that Iran’s sweeping crackdown on anti-government demonstrations caused around 53,777 people to be arrested; over 25,000 to be injured; and left 7,007 people dead, with over 11,000 deaths still under investigation. >

On January 10th, President Trump warned the Iranian government it “better not start shooting” at protesters because “we’ll start shooting, too.” He continued: “If they start killing people like they have in the past, we’ll be hitting them very hard where it hurts.”

Three days later, he made a direct appeal to the protesters, calling on them to defy efforts to stop their demonstrations and encouraging them to take over state institutions. “HELP IS ON ITS WAY,” he posted on his Truth Social platform.

But help wasn’t on its way.

Now he expected them to just trust him. In the 8-minute video posted on his Truth Social that declared the United States had begun “major combat operations in Iran,” Donald Trump told the 92 million

people in the world's most combustible region that the future is "yours to take": "To the great proud people of Iran, I say tonight that the hour of your freedom is at hand. ... Now is the time to seize control of your destiny, and to unleash the prosperous and glorious future that is close within your reach. This is the moment for action. Do not let it pass."

Yes, Iranians! All you have to do is emerge from your homes – dodging bombs and missiles, of course – be brave, rise up, and overthrow your government! Simple!

Never mind that you don't have arms, you live in a police state, and you've heard all this from this American president before. I'm sure they seriously questioned – as I did – what would honestly happen if security forces started slaughtering people in the streets again. What would Donald J. Trump *really* do about it? Ground troops?

This is not theoretical; this is stone-cold reality. After the first attack, the intelligence branch of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) immediately started sending text messages to millions of Iranians, warning that street protests "will be considered an example of direct cooperation with the enemy." An IRGC commander warned parents not to let their kids take to the streets: "If they show sympathy for the enemy, there is a shoot-to-kill order."

Although they live under a brutally oppressive and mismanaged government, Iranians have witnessed the consequences of Western intervention, where the promise of freedom rang loudly, but where many descended into chaos, civil war, or foreign occupation – even resulting in the rise of the Taliban, the radicalization of mujahedeen like Osama bin Laden, and ultimately, two decades of American war.

Then there is what happened in their own country in 1953, when the U.S. led a coup to overthrow Iran's democratically elected leader and returned the shah to power. This led to over seven decades of bad blood: the U.S. funding the brutal dictatorship of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who was overthrown by the Iranian people in 1979; Iranians seizing the U.S. Embassy and holding 66 American hostages for 444 days; America providing arms to Iraq in its destructive war against Iran in the 1980s; Hezbollah militants bombing the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut in 1983, killing 307 people, including 241 American troops; Iran-backed militants targeting the U.S. Embassy in Beirut in

1983 and in 1984, killing dozens; the U.S. Navy taking down an Iranian commercial airplane, killing 288 civilians in 1988 (the plane was mistaken for an Iranian F-14 fighter jet during high tensions in the Iran-Iraq War); and multiple and repeated attacks on U.S. troops carried out by Iran-funded terrorist organizations in the War on Terror.

Not to mention their country has now been blown to smithereens by the very people claiming they want to help. At the time of the ceasefire, The New York Times had verified damage to 22 schools and 17 health care facilities – and the reporters stressed that the scale of devastation to civilian infrastructure was likely far greater.

Military strikes have also damaged many of their most cherished cultural heritage sites... which must be absolutely devastating for them.

This includes the Ali Qapu Palace and the Chehel Sotoun palace and garden, dating to the 17th-century Safavid dynasty. The iconic Jameh Mosque and an ancient hilltop castle and military barracks dating to Persia's Sasanian era, from the 220s to 650s A.D. were hit, as was the Golestan Palace – which dates to the 14th century and was the seat of the Qajar dynasty.

< Iran's Ministry of Culture and Heritage confirmed it installed blue flags on all its cultural and heritage sites to signal to Israeli and U.S. jets that they were protected – which is international wartime protocol – but it didn't seem to matter. >

The iconic Azadi sports complex in Tehran – home of the national soccer team and the site of the 2025 match that clinched Iran's trip to the World Cup – is just one of the sports and youth centers that have been decimated since the U.S.-Israeli assault began. This was where a young woman, Sahar Khodayari – who, as a female, was barred from attending most sports events – was arrested in 2019 after sneaking into a soccer match. Ms. Khodayari, who came to be known as “Blue Girl” because of the color of her jersey, set herself on fire in front of the courthouse after being sentenced to six months in prison. Her death sparked protests in Iran.

All this destruction, on top of truly heartbreaking mistakes that have been made, including a strike at the Shajarah Tayyebah Girls' School in Minab. The town's mayor says that at least 175 people were killed, many of them children.

The pain this caused in Iran was already unbearable, but the American president blatantly lying about it made it so much worse – for all of us. An initial in-depth investigation by The New York Times – including analysis using both old and new satellite imagery and verified videos – found that the school appeared to have been damaged by a precision strike that occurred at the same time as attacks on an adjacent naval base operated by the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps. A video released after the Times initial investigation actually shows a Tomahawk cruise missile striking a naval base beside the school (the U.S. military is the only force involved in the conflict that uses Tomahawk missiles), and additional photos after all *that* reporting show mangled missile fragments that have the markings of a cruise missile made by American manufacturers.

Reuters reported on March 5th that U.S. military investigators believed American forces were likely responsible for the strike. And Gen. Dan Caine confirmed in a news conference that U.S. forces were indeed carrying out strikes at that time in southern Iran. A map he referenced indicating the targeted strikes in the first 100 hours of the operation included Minab.

Nevertheless – huge surprise – both President Trump and Pete Hegseth quickly denied U.S. involvement before any investigation had even started, claiming that the tragedy was caused by a misfired Iranian missile – a claim that made no sense because a single errant missile wouldn't have caused such precise and targeted damage to not only the school, but also other multiple buildings in the area.

President Trump even kept saying things like Iran “also has some Tomahawks” – which was just another a bald-faced lie.

Finally, on March 11th, it was reported that a military investigation determined that the United States was indeed responsible for the deadly Tomahawk missile strike on the elementary school. Evidently, the tragedy was the result of a targeting mistake by the U.S. military, which created the target coordinates for the strike using outdated data provided by the Defense Intelligence Agency.



Regardless of what happens in the ongoing “peace” talks, the war in Iran has been a disaster – and our leaders look like complete amateurs. You can’t improvise war plans as you go along, which is exactly what happened. A war room is not a fake boardroom filled with D-level celebrities who all read from a pre-written script. This is the real world, where real people can get really hurt... and where real people are the ones who pay for ignorance and incompetence.

The reputational damage this has caused us is immeasurable. The haphazard and irresponsible way this war has been executed has only accelerated the new worries many around the world already had about America’s reliability. Even more people around the world now view the United States as untrustworthy, unpredictable and undependable. Our influence and legitimacy continue to rapidly erode.

When Winston Churchill was young – way before he became Britain’s prime minister – he wrote these brilliant words: “Never, never, never believe any war will be smooth and easy, or that anyone who embarks on the strange voyage can measure the tides and hurricanes he will encounter. The statesman who yields to war fever must realize that once the signal is given, he is no longer the master of policy but the slave of unforeseeable and uncontrollable events.”

Even if we left Iran today, the Trump/Vance administration has unleashed forces that will continue to spill across borders, disrupt energy markets and global trade, and could lead to asymmetric terrorist attack retaliations.

On March 9th, ABC News reported that U.S. law enforcement agencies received a federal alert warning the U.S. government had intercepted an encrypted transmission believed to have originated in Iran that may serve as an “operational trigger” for “sleeper assets” around the world. The alert referenced “preliminary signals analysis” of a transmission that was relayed across multiple countries not long after the death of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The intercepted message was encoded and appeared to be sent to “clandestine recipients” who possess

the encryption key – the kind of message “intended to activate or provide instructions” to prepositioned “covert operatives or sleeper assets.”

If history tells us anything, it’s that authoritarian regimes rarely just collapse and disappear. Most often, they fight back – more brutally than ever before. Hatred intensifies, resentment solidifies – and the cycle starts all over again. Some of us are old enough to remember when Saddam Hussein’s army seemed to disappear only to regroup as an insurgency. In Libya, more than 14 years after Moammar Gaddafi fell, there is *still* no one group that controls the country.

Although battered, Iran still has dedicated soldiers who, if it came down to it, would likely fight hard against any new government or group. Plus, as the Houthis proved with their attacks in the Red Sea during the war in Gaza – which brought maritime commerce to a halt, costing the global economy billions of dollars – it doesn’t take much military sophistication to persistently close major international shipping lanes (remember, the U.S. can’t stay forever!). And if I recall, the Houthis were only able to be in the fight in the first place because, even though the Biden and Trump administrations together spent over \$7 billion bombing Yemen, they were never able to get rid of them.

To complicate matters even more, Iran – a country of 93 million and more than twice the geographic size of Texas – is filled with ethnic groups (Kurds, Armenians, Azerbaijanis), who all have deep ties to other countries in the region. While they have lived peaceably together, history tells us that when order collapses, it leaves a power vacuum. At that point, people retreat to their tribal groups and lose trust in everyone else. And just that quickly, you have a destabilizing civil war... which is obviously the last thing America and our Arab allies need or want.

But sadly, my guess is that most of the decision-makers in the Trump/Vance administration understand very little of this, if they even know it at all. The lack of seriousness of these people is really just hard to believe.

Just hours after greenlighting Operation Epic Fury – as he used Mar-a-Lago as a home base for monitoring the unfolding attack on Iran between greeting guests at a charity event – President Trump was also posting updates on social media. These updates, posted on the White House’s official social media accounts, included videos combining real

footage from the Iran war intermingled with scenes from the Call of Duty video game and clips from superhero and anime films, as well as movies like Top Gun and Braveheart.

Phrases like “wasted,” “Courtesy of the Red, White & Blue,” and “JUSTICE THE AMERICAN WAY” were shown over images of explosives, along with plenty of American flags and fire emojis. Audio clips from the video game Mortal Kombat – saying things like “flawless victory” – and song lyrics including “kaboom, kabloo” played in the background. One video showed footage of a real missile strike, before cutting to a scene from SpongeBob SquarePants, where SpongeBob asks, “Do you want to see me do it again?” – before cutting to a clip of another strike. Another showed a scene from the video game Grand Theft Auto with the caption: “Ah shit, here we go again.”



Donald Trump’s foreign policy instincts are atrocious.

It’s mindboggling that every single person in this country did not learn this lesson the first time around. The “peace deal” the first Trump administration signed with the Taliban may be the worst agreement in the history of agreements. He can blame President Biden all he wants – and without question Biden played a disastrous role in this story later on – but President Trump and President Trump alone capitulated to every single one of the Taliban’s outrageous demands ... to the point where, by the end of the “negotiations,” the *Taliban* were giving us – the *United States of America* – orders, like we were their bitch.

In Donald Trump’s illustrious tenure of being the president of the United States – somehow twice now – he has sold out our intelligence agencies in front of the entire world by siding with Vladimir Putin in Helsinki, Finland, and then compared them to Nazis; shared highly classified information with the Russian foreign minister and Russian ambassador in the White House; told the entire U.N. assembly that their

countries were “going to hell;” and berated world leaders like Volodymyr Zelensky and Cyril Ramaphosa right in the Oval Office.

In addition to all the asinine things already mentioned in this chapter – from destructive trade wars to taking a wrecking ball to the European alliance and USAID to lording over the Western Hemisphere like mob bosses – the Trump/Vance administration’s authoritarian, tough guy routine has done nothing more than alienate our allies and embolden our potential adversaries, handing authoritarians around the world – whether Iranian, Chinese, Turkish, Saudi, Russian, or North Korean – almost all of America’s leverage without getting anything of consequence in return. The president himself has heaped praise on autocrats from Egypt, the Philippines, Turkey and Kazakhstan, and had full-on bromances with Viktor Orbán, Rodrigo Duterte, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and, depending on his time of the month, Putin.

On that note, he has flipped and flopped several times between embracing/rebuking Russia and/or Ukraine at any given time – at one point even falsely accusing Ukraine of starting the war when the whole world knows it was Putin who ruthlessly and illegally sent his troops into sovereign territory on a murderous rampage.

As president of the United States, Donald Trump has abandoned both the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and the incredibly brave men and women who risked their lives to serve alongside us in Afghanistan and has withdrawn from major international agreements like the Iranian nuclear deal, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, the Open Skies Treaty, the Paris Climate Accord, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, World Health Organization, and organizations within the United Nations system including its Human Rights Council, its Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, and its Relief and Works Agency.

People in the Trump/Vance administration would argue they have scored some foreign policy victories, but I disagree.

For example, President Trump claims that he has “ended” multiple long-running regional conflicts – or in his exact words, he has “won eight wars” – but the facts tell a different story. This is mainly because ending conflicts that have roots going back decades requires patient diplomacy, follow-through, and long-term commitment, not just flashy headlines and shameless self-congratulation.

Although he says he “ended” the “war” between Egypt and Ethiopia, the two countries were never at war. Plus, the mediation talks between these two, which have never directly involved the United States, have stalled. Serbia and Kosovo were also never at war, and there has been practically zero effort on President Trump’s part since his return to the White House to improve relations between the two. In his first term, his administration did help negotiate a deal between the two countries, but very little – if anything – in that agreement has been carried out.

In May 2025, President Trump stuck his nose into the long-standing conflict between India and Pakistan after hostilities broke out following an attack in Indian-administered Kashmir. Although Pakistan acted grateful to him publicly, Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India was very obviously annoyed that Donald acted like he was involved in the subsequent ceasefire in any way (in fact, this episode is one of the main reasons trade negotiations between India and the U.S. blew up so spectacularly).

In June 2025, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo signed a peace agreement at the White House with the goal of ending decades of conflict, but this was a reiteration of a ceasefire they had agreed to in August 2024, and – given that hundreds of people were killed the very next month – the ceasefire obviously didn’t even hold for weeks, let alone years. In December, both leaders were back to sign yet another peace deal, but days later, the M23 rebel group, backed by Rwanda, seized yet another eastern Congo city.

Even though President Trump said in his February 24, 2026 State of the Union address that he “ended” the war between “the Congo and Rwanda,” his administration acknowledged it was still going on when, just days later, they imposed sanctions on the Rwandan military and four senior officers for supporting militants in eastern Congo who resumed fighting within days of the December pact.

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan of Armenia and President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan initialed a peace treaty at the White House on August 8, 2025, indicating preliminary approval, but they had been moving steadily in that direction since 2023. The leaders have yet to sign the treaty and parliaments have yet to ratify it.

On July 28, 2025, after five days of conflict at their border, Thailand and Cambodia agreed to an unconditional ceasefire, but the talks were held in Malaysia and the only contribution Donald Trump made was threatening – through a post on Truth Social, naturally – to stop tariff negotiations with both countries if they didn't deescalate the conflict (not to mention that, in November 2025, Thailand suspended parts of the agreement after its soldiers were injured by a landmine).

President Trump once again claimed he had helped Thailand and Cambodia reach a new ceasefire on December 13, 2025, but Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul quickly rejected that, saying, "Thailand will continue to perform military actions until we feel no more harm and threats to our land and people. I want to make it clear." Two weeks later, a new agreement was signed by the two countries at a border checkpoint, but tensions remain high.

One very positive thing the Trump/Vance administration had a hand in was helping broker an exchange of Israeli hostages for Palestinian prisoners in October 2025. The Israeli hostages coming home was amazing. But should Donald Trump and Jared Kushner – Donald's son-in-law, informal advisor and key negotiator on Middle East policy – be hailed as heroes of the Israeli Palestinian conflict? Not so much.

In fact, the war in Gaza between the State of Israel and Hamas is another example of something these guys could have possibly helped ward off years before (much like how the Iranian nuclear deal could have possibly prevented the current war).

The first Trump administration – mainly Jared – led an effort to establish formal diplomatic relations among Israel and several Arab countries. The Abraham Accords, signed at the White House on September 15, 2020, led to peace agreements between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Morocco. Israel also initiated a normalization process with Sudan, but this did not lead to the normalization of relations because of Sudan's domestic turmoil.

The idea behind the Abraham Accords is that geoeconomics can help defuse geopolitical tensions by providing financial and economic incentives to circumvent persistent conflicts. The Abraham Accords

were also meant to extend beyond economic issues and intelligence sharing and hopefully produce cultural exchanges as well.

On paper, the concept behind this endeavor is commendable, but the first Trump administration's blind spot was Palestine. The strategy behind the Abraham Accords seemed to be built around three thoughts: 1) the notion that Palestine was so weakened and marginalized that Israel could just bypass the conflict altogether, 2) the United States could weaken Palestine even further by withdrawing its humanitarian funding, which Donald Trump did in 2018 when he cut over \$200 million in direct aid to Palestine as well as funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), a UN body that supported over 5 million Palestinian refugees, and 3) the Sunni Arab leaders in the region were sick of Palestinian leadership and, despite the suffering of the Palestinian people, were ready to do things differently.

In fact, Jared Kushner said as much in a 2021 Wall Street Journal article when he wrote, "One of the reasons the Arab-Israeli conflict persisted for so long was the myth that it could be solved only after Israel and the Palestinians resolved their differences. That was never true. The Abraham Accords exposed the conflict as nothing more than a real-estate dispute between Israelis and Palestinians that need not hold up Israel's relations with the broader Arab world."

Good Lord. A real-estate dispute? He cannot be serious with this. Does he not know *anything* about the centuries of complicated and heart-wrenching history that governs the Middle East?

The regional reaction to Israel's airstrikes in Gaza between May 11-15, 2021 – two months after Jared wrote those words – demonstrate perfectly how authentic, long-term normalization between these nations is virtually impossible without a credible Israeli commitment toward Palestinian statehood.

Not long after Israeli bombs, shells and missiles started raining down, many Arab countries quickly condemned Israel's role in the attacks. It probably didn't help that these Arab governments witnessed the Israelis' attack on the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, one of Islam's most sacred sites, during their holy month of Ramadan, no less.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) Foreign Ministry issued a statement criticizing "acts of violence committed by right-wing

extremist groups in the occupied East Jerusalem” and called on Israeli leadership to “assume responsibility toward de-escalation and putting an end to all aggressions and practices that perpetuate tension and hostility.” The statement ended with the UAE urging “maximum self-restraint to avoid the region slipping into new levels of instability in a way that threatens peace.”

Bahrain and others shared similar concerns, with the Saudi Arabia Foreign Ministry condemning “in the strongest terms the Israeli occupation’s blatant assaults on the sanctity of the holy Aqsa Mosque, and on the security and safety of worshipers.” They also called on leaders around the world to “hold the Israeli occupation responsible for this escalation, and to immediately stop its escalatory actions, which violate all international norms and laws.”

An opinion piece by political science lecturer Talal Bannan, published in the Saudi newspaper Okaz, went further, calling Israel a “racist, hateful entity” that exists only “through aggression, racism and raping of land.” Bannan went on to say that any Arab country that enters into an agreement with Israel “acquiesces to Israel’s aggressive behavior.”

This wouldn’t seem like that big of a deal except that nothing gets printed in Saudi Arabia without the approval of the highest leaders in the kingdom.

Then came October 7, 2023.

On this day – the day of Shemini Atzeret, a Jewish holiday that closes the autumn thanksgiving festival of Sukkot – the militant Palestinian nationalist and Islamist movement Hamas led a coordinated attack on Israel by land, sea, and air from the Gaza Strip. The attack killed around 1,200 people, primarily Israeli citizens, making it the deadliest day for Israel since its independence. More than 240 people were taken hostage during the attack.

The aftermath of the October 7th attacks shows how the naïve decision to take Palestine off the table during the Abraham Accord negotiations came back to haunt *everyone*.

For the most part, the Abraham Accords continued on a state-to-state, business-to-business level, but tensions elevated quickly when the leaders of Arab countries saw the way Israel was conducting its side of the war.

The heartbreaking images cascading out of Gaza certainly didn't help.... Palestinian mothers and fathers in unbearable pain, grieving over the bodies of their dead children. Children frantically crying and running aimlessly against the backdrop of bombed out, crumbling buildings. Nor did it help that Israel blatantly blocked humanitarian aid as Palestinians starved to death. (more on all this in a minute)

On September 19, 2024, in his version of a State of the Union, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said, "The kingdom will not cease its tireless efforts to establish an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, and we affirm that the kingdom will not establish diplomatic relations with Israel without one. We thank all the countries that recognized the Palestinian state as an embodiment of international legitimacy, and we urge other countries to take similar steps."

Likewise, the UAE foreign minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed said his country would not support Israel in its "day after" plan in Gaza unless a Palestinian state is established: "The United Arab Emirates is not ready to support the day after the war in Gaza without the establishment of a Palestinian state."

Nevertheless, after President Trump greeted the Israeli hostages freed from Hamas captivity on October 13, 2025, he took a whirlwind victory lap – naturally – basking in applause at the dais of the Knesset, Israel's parliament, for his support of Israel.

**\*\*\* Important Note \*\*\***

*Although this next section is at times critical of the country of Israel's current politics and leadership, I am wholeheartedly a supporter of the soul of Israel and its wonderful people. I have many Israeli friends and understand that the history of Israel is exceedingly complex. This section brings me no joy. In fact, it's difficult for me to include.*

On January 19, 2025 – the day before Donald Trump was sworn in for a second term as president – a ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas went into effect. However, on March 18th, Israel broke the ceasefire by launching a torrent of deadly airstrikes, killing hundreds of Palestinians across the Gaza Strip – with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu threatening that this was “just the beginning.”

< Netanyahu claimed the “pre-emptive” strikes were necessary because Hamas refused to release hostages and rejected new ceasefire proposals, while Hamas accused Israel of deliberately breaking the ceasefire and attempting to “overturn” the agreement. Either way, the truce had been strained from the beginning. >

At that point, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) began executing a plan – codenamed Operation Gideon’s Chariots – to control 75 percent of Gaza within two months, forcing the entire Gazan population into three zones (Gaza City, the central refugee camps, and the southwestern Mawasi coastline) by using U.S.-provided aerial bombs and bulldozers. *It’s important to note that this was an offensive combat operation, not a security or defensive one.*

Israel then executed a total siege on Gaza, halting all food, fuel, medicine, and other humanitarian aid, essentially using starvation as warfare – which is a war crime, plain and simple.

Listen up everyone: War is awful and people die. That’s just the nature and reality of war. Combatants die and, sadly, innocent civilians sometimes get caught in the crossfire. The United States has certainly been involved in our share of these tragedies, including the one recently at the Shajarah Tayyebah Girls’ School in Iran. Is it heartbreaking? Absolutely. That’s why most of us hate war.

However, deliberately targeting innocent civilians is an entirely different matter. The Hamas attacks against Israel on October 7, 2023 were brutal and unacceptable and Israel has every right to defend itself against savage terrorism. But NO country, group or government – whether it be Hamas, Israel or the United States – has a right to disregard the laws of war without severe consequences. The 1949 Geneva Conventions and their additional Protocols exist for a reason and they must be followed, regardless of how ruthless the enemy is.

Hamas fights dirty, no question. Hamas fighters use schools as shields; private homes to imprison hostages; and human beings as barricades to protect their underground military infrastructure. But they are far from the only terrorists who conduct business this way.

During the War on Terror, the United States had to deal with this reality constantly thanks to the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Why do you think we were in the Middle East for two decades? Why do you think our Special Forces had to practically go door-to-door, “kicking doors” in? Iraq is roughly the size of California and Afghanistan is smaller than Texas. Does anyone really believe we couldn’t carpet bomb both in two days and be back home within the week? Why didn’t we?

Answer: Civilians. Around 3.3 million people lived in the West Bank and 2.1 million lived in the Gaza strip after October 7th. For the Israeli government to claim – which they have – that they are justified in killing any Palestinian they come across because “there are no innocent Palestinians” – basically saying that every single Palestinian, young or old, is an enemy combatant – is outrageous.

Most of the current leaders of Israel cannot deny this is their fundamental belief because they have made multiple public statements to this effect, including one made by President Isaac Herzog, who said that there is an “entire nation out there that is responsible. It is not true, this rhetoric about civilians who were not aware and not involved. It is absolutely not true.” Tell us, President Herzog, how exactly were 6-month-old babies involved?

As Operation Gideon’s Chariots escalated, the people of Gaza were starving to death – literally. Under the international rules of war, it was/is Israel’s responsibility as the occupying power to properly coordinate food and medical distribution and protect food convoys at all costs. Period. End of story.

The exact opposite of this went on for over two months, until images of chaos, violence and mass starvation flooded the Internet and the world collectively put its foot down against the atrocities happening in Gaza.

In many respects, it was too little, too late. After resuming humanitarian aid shipments they had halted for eleven weeks, the food-distribution system Israel finally established was wholly inadequate –

which, to many, looked like was done on purpose. There were only four sites staffed by U.S.-supported security contractors that were not even in places where the people needed them to be. Hundreds of people died and hundreds more were wounded as armed gangs violently looted trucks carrying food and other humanitarian supplies and the Israeli military opened fire on innocent civilians desperate to get food.

By August 2025, it was official: Israel's actions had triggered a famine in the Gaza City region. Calling the famine "entirely man-made," the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) – the UN-backed initiative aimed at enhancing food security and nutrition analysis – issued a report confirming this fact: "The time for debate and hesitation has passed, starvation is present and is rapidly spreading. There should be no doubt in anyone's mind that an immediate, at-scale response is needed." Without swift action, they concluded, "avoidable deaths will increase exponentially."

At this point, the Trump/Vance administration had been in power seven months. By the time the Gaza "peace plan" was signed on October 9, 2025 – almost nine months after President Trump had been sworn in – Israel's two-year ground and air campaign in the Gaza Strip had killed 71,174 people, with Palestinian children accounting for at least 30 percent of that number... and those were just the bodies that could be identified.

Those numbers don't include unidentified bodies or the thousands of bodies that hadn't been extracted from the extensive rubble (by some estimations, including all these numbers would push the number of dead civilians and combatants to more like 100,000). Those numbers also don't include the hundreds of malnutrition-related deaths caused by the Israeli-orchestrated famine in Gaza.

< Another claim made by the Israeli government is that the death toll in Gaza has been exaggerated by the Hamas-run Palestinian Ministry of Health. But international experts say the numbers are all backed by specific identifying information, including names, ages, the person's sex, and verifiable identification numbers. In fact, researchers from the University of London conducted a 2,000-household survey in Gaza that found the official figures are likely lower than the true number of those killed in the war by up to 39 percent. Although their

numbers don't differentiate between combatants and civilians, they found that the majority of those killed (56 percent) were women, children and the elderly. >

None of this should have come as a shock to anyone. Almost a year before, the International Criminal Court (ICC) had issued arrest warrants for Prime Minister Netanyahu and Israeli former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Gaza Strip. The ICC charges include claims of purposefully targeting medical facilities; deliberately restricting medical and humanitarian supplies; the alleged use of "starvation as a method of warfare;" and "intentionally directing an attack against the civilian population."

At the same time, the ICC also issued a warrant for the arrest of Muhammad Deif, Hamas' military chief, for war crimes and crimes against humanity that include murder; cruel treatment; extermination; taking hostages; torture; outrages upon personal dignity; and rape. The ICC had already issued arrest warrants for Yahya Sinwar and Ismail Haniyeh, two other Hamas leaders, but both men have been confirmed dead.

By June 2025, in an article he wrote for the Israeli daily newspaper Haaretz, former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert was referring to the Netanyahu government as a "criminal gang," saying that what Israel was doing in Gaza was "a war of devastation: indiscriminate, limitless, cruel and criminal killing of civilians." He didn't stop there: "We're not doing this due to loss of control in any specific sector, not due to some disproportionate outburst by some soldiers in some unit. Rather, it's the result of government policy – knowingly, evilly, maliciously, irresponsibly dictated. Yes, Israel is committing war crimes."

< Olmert, who served as Prime Minister between 2006 and 2009, was a member of the conservative Likud Party (Netanyahu's party) before joining then leading the more centrist Kadima Party. >

Also in June, UN Humanitarian Chief Tom Fletcher said in an interview that he had started therapy after being in Gaza: "I've been to Darfur, I've been to Kupiansk on the Ukraine frontlines. I've driven up through Syria just after the fall of the Assad regime. I've just been in Kandahar, Kabul, Kunduz in Afghanistan. I was in Mandalay just after

the earthquake. Nothing was as bad as going to Gaza... It is that smell and sound of death on this scale, and trauma on this scale... you do carry that with you. I think about it every single day.”

Although in that interview, Mr. Fletcher stopped short of calling what was happening in Gaza *genocide*, many experts had already determined that Israel’s actions had gone beyond war crimes and crimes against humanity and had risen to that level (genocide was defined in 1948 by the United Nations as the “intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group”).

The International Court of Justice (ICJ), the world’s highest court, has been weighing a case brought against Israel by South Africa since December 2023. South Africa’s main allegation is that Israel’s actions in Gaza were “genocidal in character” and aimed to destroy a substantial part of the Palestinian group, citing mass killings, causing serious harm, forced displacement, destruction of homes, imposing life-threatening conditions through blockade, systematic destruction of healthcare, and measures to prevent births.

On January 26, 2024, the ICJ said that it was plausible Israel’s actions could violate the Genocide Convention and ordered Israel to take all measures to prevent genocidal acts and improve the humanitarian situation. It also put the states offering support to Israel on notice. However, the Court declined to order Israel to immediately suspend its military operations in Gaza while also rejecting Israel’s request to throw the case out, meaning the case may continue for years.

As early as March 2024, Francesca Albanese, the United Nations special rapporteur for the West Bank and Gaza, concluded that there were reasonable grounds to believe Israel had committed acts of genocide in Gaza.

Amnesty International issued a report in December 2024 that concluded Israel was committing genocide against Palestinians, documenting the killing of civilians; damage to and destruction of civilian infrastructure; forcible displacement; the obstruction or denial of life-saving goods and humanitarian aid; and the restriction of power supplies. It also assessed Israel’s intent – an element that must be proven to establish genocide – by examining patterns of conduct and

multiple statements made by Israeli leaders that appear to call for, or justify, genocidal acts.

Also in December, Moshe Ya'alon – Netanyahu's former defense minister and a highly decorated former Israeli officer and military Chief of Staff who served for three decades in the Israel Defense Forces, including in the elite Sayeret Matkal commando unit – accused Israel of “conquering,” “annexing,” and carrying out “ethnic cleansing” of Palestinians in northern Gaza, “basically cleaning the territory of Arabs.” He warned that Israel was losing its way as a liberal democracy and was becoming a “corrupt and leprous fascist Messianic state.”

By July 2025, two of the best-known Israeli human rights groups – B'Tselem and Physicians for Human Rights – were both saying Israel was committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza. In its report, B'Tselem cited the killing of tens of thousands of Palestinians in Gaza; the razing of huge areas of Palestinian cities; the forced displacement of nearly all of Gaza's people; and the restriction of food and other vital supplies. In their view, these actions amounted to “coordinated action to intentionally destroy Palestinian society in the Gaza Strip... in other words: Israel is committing genocide against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.”

That same month, Dr. Omer Bartov – a professor of Holocaust and genocide studies at Brown University and a man who lived the first half of his life in a Zionist home in Israel before later serving in the Israel Defense Forces as a soldier and officer – had come to the “inescapable conclusion” that Israel was “committing genocide against the Palestinian people,” an admission that was a “painful conclusion to reach” and, in his words, “one that I resisted as long as I could.”

Although a United Nations panel known as the *Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel* had previously found Israel had committed war crimes and crimes against humanity in its war with Hamas militants, in September 2025 the panel issued a report saying that Israel's actions in Gaza constituted genocide under the 1948 Genocide Convention.

The report cited killing and causing bodily or mental harm; forced displacement; the destruction of cultural, religious and educational

structures and facilities; siege, starvation and the blocking of humanitarian aid; targeting of the healthcare system; sexual and gender-based violence; and the direct targeting of children. The goal, the report concluded, was “to erase the Palestinian identity.”

Like the Amnesty International report, the Commission assessed Israel’s intent, referring to statements made by members of the Israeli government as well as the pattern of conduct of the Israeli authorities and security forces that were consistent with those statements. They found that “as early as October 7, 2023, Israeli officials made statements that indicated their intention to destroy Palestinians in Gaza as a group. Palestinians were consistently dehumanized by Israeli officials. Furthermore, Israeli authorities made many statements that explicitly called for vengeance, destruction and annihilation.”

Among many examples, Israel’s Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said that Israel was fighting “human animals” and Israel must “act accordingly.” A recording of the former head of Israel’s Military Intelligence, published by Israeli media, caught him saying that “the fact that 50,000 have already been killed in Gaza is necessary and required for future generations,” adding that for every Israeli killed on October 7th, fifty Palestinians should die – and it makes no difference if they are children because “they need a Nakba < i.e., the Israeli ethnic cleansing of Palestinian Arabs > from time to time to feel the price.”

Prime Minister Netanyahu made his intentions clear many times, including once when he urged Israelis to remember “what Amalek did to you,” a phrase many people took as a reference to a biblical passage that demands Israelites “kill alike men and women, infants and sucklings” of their enemy.

Speaking as an American, one of the most concerning indictments of Israel’s behavior came in October 2025, when two U.S. officials told The Washington Post that “the U.S. State Department’s Office of Inspector General found that Israeli military units committed ‘many hundreds’ of potential violations of U.S. human rights law in the Gaza Strip that would take the State Department ‘multiple years’ to review.”

This is the first time a U.S. government report acknowledged that Israeli actions in Gaza may run afoul of our Leahy Laws, legislation

that prohibits U.S. security assistance to foreign military units credibly accused of gross human rights abuses.

Months before, ProPublica reported that, in 2024, then Secretary of State Antony Blinken and the Joe Biden administration delivered an explicit ultimatum to Israel, demanding the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) allow food and medicine into Gaza every day, giving them 30 days to comply. Although Netanyahu defied the demand – as he had multiple times in the months prior – the Biden administration just let it go and continued enabling him, vetoing United Nations Security Council resolutions calling for a cease-fire; attacking the International Criminal Court for not dropping its charges against Mr. Netanyahu; blaming Hamas for not accepting certain cease-fire terms that the Israelis were also rejecting; and continuing to send Israel a ton of weapons, ignoring U.S. policy and its own policies about supporting militaries credibly accused of human rights abuses.

This also should not come as a shock to anyone. It's no secret that Israel gets special treatment under U.S. law. This is not my opinion; it's a fact. For example, Israel enjoys a far different vetting process under the Leahy Laws than countries accused of similar allegations. The Israel Leahy Vetting Forum, as it is called, is a more personalized process than reviews for other countries and involves representatives of the U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem and the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, the U.S. secretary of state, and even the Israeli government itself.

For decades, Israel has gotten special treatment in just about every way possible when it comes to the United States government.

There seem to be two main reasons for this. The first is that many Christians believe that supporting Israel is a biblical responsibility that aligns believers with God's eternal purposes. This belief stems from God's covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12:3 that says, "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" – which many Christians take to mean that those who bless Abraham's descendants invite God's blessing into their own lives.

The second – and much more consequential – reason for the special treatment is money. The pro-Israel lobby is the most powerful issue lobby in U.S. foreign affairs. Since 1998, the pro-Israel lobby has

spent 90 MILLION DOLLARS lobbying Congress, spending almost \$6 million in 2025 alone.

But that's child's play compared to the amount of money that goes directly to the political parties and candidates. Pro-Israel contributions totaled 142 MILLION DOLLARS in the 2024 election cycle *alone*. This may come as a surprise, but Democrats received more money from pro-Israel sources than Republicans did. In fact, the top five pro-Israel recipients were Democrats.

For millions of reasons, lobbying and unlimited money in politics have become so detrimental to this nation that the way they currently function can no longer be tolerated (read more on p. 581). But...

*Here is the Moment of Truth:*

*Israel could not have inflicted this level of pain and destruction on the Palestinian people without American money, weapons and political support.*

Israel is by far the largest cumulative recipient of U.S. aid in the world. According to a study by Brown University's Costs of War Project and the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, by the time the Gaza "peace plan" was signed, the Biden and Trump/Vance administrations had provided at least \$21.7 billion in military aid to Israel since the start of the war.

This doesn't include the additional tens of billions of dollars in arms sales that have been committed to for years to come, including the nearly \$6.67 billion in weapons sales to Israel the Trump/Vance administration approved in late August 2025; the \$740 million armored vehicles sale in January 2026; and the \$650 million worth of bombs the Trump/Vance administration sold them in March without congressional approval.

The Trump/Vance administration's support of the government of Israel and Prime Minister Netanyahu doesn't stop at just handing over tons of money. Since inauguration day, the administration has imposed new sanctions against members of the International Criminal Court (ICC) – targeting nine top prosecutors and judges, including Karim

Khan, the ICC's chief prosecutor and his two deputies – over the ICC's investigation into alleged Israeli war crimes in Gaza.

< It's important to note that President Trump's beef with the ICC extends beyond Israel. It started during his first term, when the ICC appeals chamber unanimously voted to authorize an investigation into alleged crimes committed in Afghanistan by the Taliban, Afghan government forces and U.S. troops since May 2003. The Trump/Vance administration claims the ICC has no jurisdiction over American or Israeli officials because neither country is party to the Rome Statute (the 2002 treaty that established the ICC), but the ICC maintains that they are authorized to investigate alleged crimes committed in Afghanistan and the Palestinian territories because both of *those countries* have ratified the treaty. This matters because, although major countries like the United States, China and India have neither signed nor ratified the Rome Statute, 125 countries are parties to it and those countries are obliged to act on ICC arrest warrants. >

Donald Trump's defense and support of Netanyahu extend well beyond that. Despite the mounds of evidence suggesting Netanyahu violated the Geneva Convention, the laws of armed conflict, and the laws of humanitarian law by, at the least, authorizing war crimes in Gaza and, at worst, sanctioning genocide, in his speech at Israel's parliament on October 13th, the U.S. president praised Netanyahu as "a man of exceptional courage and hailing the "victory" he had "won." He also recommended that Netanyahu be pardoned over criminal charges he faces in Israel before sending an official request to Israeli President Isaac Herzog in a formal letter.

< Sidebar: Benjamin Netanyahu has been on trial in Israel since 2020 on counts of fraud, bribery and breach of trust by a public official in three separate but related cases. He and his wife Sara are accused in one case of accepting over \$260,000 worth of luxury goods including cigars, Champagne, jewelry and luxury clothes in exchange for political favors. The proceedings have been repeatedly delayed by the ongoing conflict in Gaza and now the war in Iran. What a crazy coincidence!

Mr. Netanyahu is also accused of disrupting investigative and judicial proceedings and interfering in the democratic principle of an independent, free press. In that case, he was recorded negotiating with

the publisher of Yediot Aharonot, who had long criticized him, for more positive press coverage in exchange for Netanyahu reigning in its main competition, Israel Hayom, a publication financially supported by one of Netanyahu's main patrons, the U.S. billionaire and Republican Party donor Sheldon Adelson. The Netanyahu's deny all charges, calling them... wait for it... politically motivated "witch hunts." >

That Donald would defend Benjamin is unsurprising because these two operate from the same playbook – and the similarities go beyond calling everything a "witch hunt." For one, they do whatever they want, regardless of what anyone – including their citizens and the entire world – think about it. Then, if you dare to disagree with them, you are labeled unpatriotic, woke, communist, Marxist, fascist, vermin, or, of course, antisemitic.

After President Trump's speech at the Knesset, he continued his victory lap in the Egyptian seaside resort of Sharm el-Sheikh, where he met with other strongmen for "a very important signing," portraying the "Trump Declaration for Enduring Peace and Prosperity" as a major breakthrough in the decades-long search for peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

Although he said, "We're going to be signing a document that's going to spell out a lot of rules and regulations and lots of other things. It's very comprehensive," the document itself had very little substance. And, although they were the reason for the summit in the first place, neither Israel nor Hamas were represented.

In Egypt, Donald Trump joined Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, the President of Egypt, who is currently detaining over 60,000 political prisoners, including women, children, journalists, and human rights defenders; Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who has methodically shifted his country away from the traditions of liberal democracy by embracing far-right, nativist politics, spying on journalists and dissidents, bribing and threatening the media, stacking the judiciary with close allies, sabotaging free and fair elections, and centralizing power for himself and his Fidesz party by placing Hungary's three branches of government firmly under Fidesz's control; and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the president of Turkey, who has successfully led his country straight into authoritarianism.

Also in attendance were Gulf Arab leaders who have invested heavily in the Trump family's business interests, including the Emir of Qatar, who gave Donald Trump the \$400 million super jet Boeing 747-8 "palace in the sky."

I'm sure Donald Trump was super excited to have them there so he could pitch his business partners on the new business opportunity he had announced eight months earlier.

In February, as he stood next to Benjamin Netanyahu in the White House for a joint news conference, the U.S. president proposed that the United States take over the Gaza Strip and turn it into the "Riviera of the Middle East" because it could be "so magnificent!"

To facilitate his plan, the Palestinians there – two million people – would be forced to leave, never to return. He claimed his idea to seize and develop Gaza had gotten "tremendous" support from the "highest of leadership" as a viable plan to bring peace to the Middle East, and described a permanent relocation to sites funded by "countries of interest with humanitarian hearts" – which, after President Trump threatened to cut off their U.S. aid if they refused to take Palestinians, we later learned were Egypt and Jordan (who both said no, by the way).

Even though countries in the Middle East – including key allies – overwhelmingly rejected President Trump's idea to forcibly displace Palestinians, I imagine he was certain he could convince them because, after all, look what he had convinced them to do before!

For example, the New York Times reported that, after meeting with Steve Witkoff – a billionaire real estate investor and President Trump's special envoy to the Middle East – in Sardinia, Sheikh Tahnoon bin Zayed Al Nahyan, "a trim figure in dark glasses who controls \$1.5 trillion of the Emiratis' sovereign wealth," agreed to "deposit \$2 billion into World Liberty Financial, a crypto-currency start-up founded by the Witkoffs and Trumps."

"Two weeks later, the White House agreed to allow the UAE access to hundreds of thousands of the world's most advanced and scarce computer chips, a crucial tool in the high-stakes race to dominate artificial intelligence. Many of the chips would go to G42, a sprawling technology firm controlled by Sheikh Tahnoon, despite national security concerns that the chips could be shared with China."

\*\* To really understand how this unfolded, I encourage you to read The New York Time's September 15, 2025 article *Anatomy of Two Giant Deals: The UAE Got Chips. The Trump Team Got Crypto Riches*. The NYT article is careful to include that "no evidence that one deal was explicitly offered in return for the other" regarding the two deals described above, but I don't feel that generous. This is about as shady as shady gets. I simply cannot imagine a more startling example of people jeopardizing American exceptionalism for personal greed. \*\*

The Trump family's business with the United Arab Emirates doesn't stop there. The UAE is a key partner for their international real estate business expansion, and Emirati billionaire Hussain Sajwani, chairman of DAMAC Properties, has been a close business partner of Donald Trump for over a decade.

In the first months of the second Trump presidency, the Trump Organization and its partners announced 12 global projects, including ones in Serbia, Oman and Vietnam. Trump-branded residential towers and at least one luxury golf resort were green-lit in Dubai and Saudi Arabia, as well as Qatar (who has agreed to finance a Trump-branded beachside golf and luxury villa project there worth \$5.5 billion).

In April/May alone, Donald Trump Jr. visited Hungary, Romania, Serbia and Bulgaria on a paid tour he called "Trump Business Vision 2025," while Eric Trump visited Qatar, the UAE, and other Middle Eastern countries to market the family's business ventures.

Saudi Arabia is just a whole other level. The Trumps and their Saudi-based development partner, Dar Al Arkan, one of Saudi Arabia's largest private real-estate developers, have at least eight Trump Organization projects in the works.

In November 2025, President Trump welcomed Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia to the White House, giving him a red-carpet arrival and military honors, plus a lavish dinner attended by American business, finance, and tech leaders.

During the trip, the United States formally designated Saudi Arabia a major non-NATO ally and announced deals on arms sales, nuclear energy, and bilateral investments – but President Trump and Prince Mohammed had lots of other things to talk about, including their joint cryptocurrency trading enterprise and their real estate development

deals. One of those deals involves a \$63 billion project in Diriyah, one of Saudi Arabia's largest government-owned real estate developments, where there will eventually be a Trump-branded 18-hole golf course, luxury hotel and exclusive mansions.

When President Trump visited Saudi Arabia in May 2025, he and Prince Mohammed visited Diriyah's revitalized historical center. In an interview, Jerry Inzerillo, chief executive of the Diriyah development, said – clearly not understanding U.S. ethic rules – that the two leaders talked “not just as heads of state,” but as “visionaries and developers.”

When Saudi officials questioned whether it would be appropriate to present architectural models at the state dinner, Inzerillo – again, not understanding U.S. ethic rules – said, “You're right, you normally wouldn't do that in a state dinner. It's not really the normal protocol. But that's because you're looking at the president of the United States as the president of the United States. You're not looking at him as a developer.” Good Lord.

The Saudi Arabian Public Investment Fund invested \$2 billion in Jared Kushner's private equity firm, Affinity Partners, along with the sovereign wealth funds of the UAE (\$300-500 million) and Qatar (\$200 million+). In September 2025, Jared's firm and the Saudi sovereign fund joined together to take the video game publisher Electronic Arts private, a deal valued at roughly \$55 billion. If closed, the deal would be the largest leveraged buyout ever.

So, maybe they would all be willing to partner up once again for an exciting new, once-in-a-lifetime business venture! Following up on President Trump's February “the U.S. should own Gaza” proclamation, Jared Kushner unveiled their vision for postwar Gaza in front of an audience of the World Economic Forum at Davos. “We have a masterplan... there is no Plan B.”

Gaza would now be a “futuristic” high-tech metropolis with an airport, a port, and a “coastal tourism” zone that would run along the seafront – long enough for up to 180 skyscrapers, many likely hotels. “New Rafah” would have more than 100,000 permanent housing units, along with over 200 schools and more than 75 medical facilities. “New Gaza” would be the center of industry, looking an awful lot like Doha and Dubai, with gleaming waterside apartments and office locations.

In December 2025, Kushner and Witkoff took their show on the road, pitching “Project Sunrise” to U.S.-allied nations in the Arab and Muslim world in a 32-page PowerPoint presentation. < The Wall Street Journal reports that Jared was pulling double duty on his trips as one of the U.S. government’s chief negotiators in the Middle East, also trying to raise more money for his private equity firm from governments in the region. >

If anyone is worried about the cost of Gaza’s awesome make-over, they shouldn’t be! This project would cost a total of \$112.1 billion over ten years, and the United States will commit to being an “anchor,” supporting almost \$60 billion in grants and guarantees on debt, as well as commit to roughly 20 percent of reconstruction costs over ten years.

For his part, Benjamin Netanyahu has recently done even more to help lay the groundwork for this “magnificent” deal, taking unilateral steps to give Israel greater control over the occupied West Bank. In a move widely considered a violation of the Oslo peace process Israel signed decades ago, his measure makes it easier for Jewish settlers to buy land and undercut the Palestinian Authority in parts of the West Bank that it administers.

Meanwhile, as the eyes of the world turn to the war in Iran, Israeli strikes and raids in Gaza and settler attacks and military operations in the occupied West Bank continue. On March 1st, Israel closed Gaza’s Rafah border crossing with Egypt, a crossing that is considered vital for the delivery of humanitarian aid and the evacuation of critically ill patients from Gaza.

The Wall Street Journal reported that “wintry weather worsened already-desperate conditions in the enclave, especially for the half of the population struggling to rebuild their lives from temporary shelters. Structures made out of bed sheets and clothing – assembled by displaced Palestinians who haven’t received a proper tent – are disintegrating in the heavy rains and winds, leaving many out in the cold. Flooding is bringing raw sewage into the streets, as water-management and sanitation infrastructure is destroyed, and improvised latrines spill over.”

“More than one million of the enclave’s roughly two million residents are without adequate shelter, according to the United Nations.

More than 850,000 people are living in some 750 displacement sites that are at high risk of flooding, according to the UN, including along the seashore, where many pitched tents to avoid Israeli airstrikes during the fighting.”

“Since a cease-fire went into effect in the strip in October, little progress has been made in clearing rubble, let alone reconstructing permanent homes. Much of Gaza remains in ruins after thousands of Israeli airstrikes, along with ground fighting and controlled demolitions, destroyed more than 123,000 buildings and left an additional 75,000 damaged, accounting for 81 percent of the structures in the enclave, according to the latest review of satellite images by the UN. First responders in Gaza are urging caution for Palestinians sheltering in damaged buildings, some of which they said have collapsed in the downpours.”

“Aid groups said shelter supplies entering Gaza fall far short of what is needed to deal with the wintry weather. Part of the problem, they said, is that Israel considers many of the things aid groups would like to bring in to be dual-use items that could be repurposed for fighting or to make weapons. That means critical things such as prefabricated structures, tentpoles greater than a certain diameter used in more-robust tents, and heavy machinery to rebuild sanitation infrastructure aren’t allowed into Gaza.”

As rain pounded the cloth of her makeshift tent in central Gaza one night, Jihan Khalaf kept watch with a flashlight to ensure her three children didn’t drown in their sleep. “There are pools of water everywhere, sewage overflowing,” Khalaf, 29 years old, said. “We are always cold. And now my children are sick.”

“My eldest daughter used to be a top student at school, and now she collects things from the ground to use them to light a fire,” said Khalaf. “I cry when I see her.”

***It’s time to choose. We can have any kind of country we want.***

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