America's Role in the World
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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 <u>anything</u> 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 Medicare and Social Security; an uncomplicated tax code; a smart and humane 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 <u>ALL</u> Americans thrive – not with handouts, but with opportunity. A country that understands that to be successful, *<u>every</u>* player on Team America needs to make sure *<u>every</u>* 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 *<u>every</u>* 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 36 million people live in poverty, plus staggering inequity in everything from wealth <u>to</u> incomes <u>to</u> education <u>to</u> 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 <u>to</u> help for the vulnerable <u>to</u> 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 $40 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. Over 36 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 Unare 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. As of mid-2026, China held $660 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," and that trend continued in the 2026 report.

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 Donald Trump-led Republican Trade Wars (one launched in 2018 and the other in 2025).

Far from being crushed by Trade War 2.0, as Republicans 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.

China's exports were still surging in June 2026: Its exports rose 27 percent from one year earlier, increasing from a 19.4 percent gain in May, and its imports grew 36 percent from the year before, up from a 27.4 percent gain in May. July 2026 marked the third straight month that China's exports exceeded its imports by over $100 billion, putting China on track to exceed its 2025 record of a $1.19 trillion trade surplus. That said, China's economic growth of just 4.3 percent in the second quarter of 2026 was the slowest rate in three years (more on this in a minute).

Meanwhile – far from the Republican's promise that their 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 had 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.

By May 2026, the U.S. trade deficit had *widened* 42.2 percent to $77.6 billion – *the highest level in 14 months*.

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 has retreated over and over again and got the nickname TACO (Trump Always Chickens Out) – since his return to the Oval Office. 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 ascendency 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 United States accounts for roughly 18 percent of global manufacturing value added (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 semiconductor manufacturing, scientific R&D, innovation, workforce development and related programs. This legislation was in response to the fact that the U.S. manufactures only 10 percent of the world's semiconductors – a significant drop from roughly 37 percent in 1990.

This is a major national security issue because semiconductor manufacturing – particularly production of the world's most advanced chips – is heavily concentrated in East Asia, including Taiwan, just across the Taiwan Strait from China. Taiwan has historically produced over 90 percent of the world's most advanced logic chips… just one Taiwanese company, for example, manufactures over 70 percent of the microcontroller units used in automobiles, technology that is 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 breakthroughs 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, Republicans immediately went after the legislation upon Donald Trump’s return to the White House – again, with zero strategy of their own to replace it. The president went so far as calling the CHIPS Act 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 Donald Trump and congressional Republicans all but ensured the United States will fall behind.

The Information Technology & Innovation Foundation warns that 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. In 2024, China approved 48 first-in-class medicines, over double the total in 2022. China now hosts over 7,100 clinical trials, overtaking the United States as the world's go-to destination. Not only are Western pharmaceutical companies increasingly conducting their trials in China, but they are also progressively licensing the drug candidates that Chinese biotechs develop. Already, China controls the production of the active pharmaceutical ingredients the rest of the world – including the United States – depends on. In fact, the U.S. relies on China for 44 percent of our pharmaceutical imports (by weight) and for around 100 ingredients that *can't be sourced anywhere else*.

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 – – for example, the consequences of President Trump's August 2026 executive order reducing universally recommended immunizations from 18 to 11 diseases at a time when measles cases are at a 35-year high will be suffered for decades – – 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 neuro-degenerative 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 four-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 <u>total</u> graduates (associate, bachelor's, master's and PhD programs) in <u>all</u> 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 2025, well 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.

Republicans like to say that China remains completely reliant on coal, with President Trump going as far as saying that China has "coal plants all over the place, but they build the windmills... They don't use it in terms of energy. They showed people, look how beautiful this is, as those poor suckers buy those windmills" – but unsurprisingly that is false.

China's national consumption of oil is projected to peak by 2027, then begin to fall. While China continues to rely heavily on coal through its evolution from fossil fuels to green technologies – – it remains the world's largest consumer of coal, accounting for 56 percent of global coal use in 2025 – – it has already made massive strides in the transition.

By the first half of 2026, coal's share of China's electricity generation had fallen below 50 percent for the first time, accounting for just 49.7 percent of the country's power generation, down from 65.5 percent a decade earlier. Meanwhile, non-fossil energy sources accounted for 62 percent of China's total installed power-generation capacity by May 2026, up from just 25 percent in 2010 – making non-fossil energy the dominant source of China's installed generating capacity. So, essentially, China went from 25 percent non-fossil installed capacity in 2010 to 62 percent in May 2026… an extraordinary structural change in only sixteen years.

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 one reason the Trump/Vance administration's plan to topple Venezuela to, in part, redirect much of its oil away from Beijing will not be effective long-term. Sure, it probably stung a little at first, but China is estimated to hold the world's largest strategic oil stockpile and had already diversified its supply, having ample access to discounted Russian and Iranian crude.

The U.S. Energy Information Administration estimates that China's strategic oil inventories reached around 1.54 billion barrels by the first quarter of 2026 – compared to the United States Strategic Petroleum Reserve, which was around 413 million barrels.

The Wall Street Journal reported it this way: "No one knows the exact size of the reserves –China won't say, and it stores some crude underground. Analysts put the total, including strategic petroleum reserves, oil held in refineries and the commercial reserves that represent the largest share of China's stockpile, at between 1 billion and 1.4 billion barrels."

"Beijing began stockpiling cheap Russian and Iranian oil in 2025, well before the Iran war. China injected an average of 1.1 million barrels a day into its oil reserves last year, the U.S. Energy Information Administration estimated. The stockpiling continued in March and April with oil that had left the Persian Gulf before the war started."

"Since the start of May, China has withdrawn around 56 million barrels from its commercial reserves and 15 million barrels from refineries. Meanwhile, according to Vortexa, China's on-the-ground strategic reserve remains largely untouched."

The truth is that, although global oil prices have been significantly impacted by the Iran war and the chaos in the Strait of Hormuz, one major reason prices haven't soared even higher is because China didn't want them to. *It now has that level of power over the world market*.

For example, China restricted fuel exports and slashed its oil purchases not long after the war began, specifically to keep prices down. From February to June 2026, China cut imports by 5.8 million barrels a day, a 48.9 percent reduction – taking millions of barrels of demand out of the global market and considerably softening the potentially devastating global effects of the Strait of Hormuz debacle.

The concerning news is that this works both ways. When China's oil imports pick up – and, because there is no end in sight to the train wreck that is the Iran war, they most certainly will – it will put enormous upward pressure on prices, particularly if Middle Eastern supplies are still constrained.

The upshot is that, although OPEC and OPEC+ remain enormously powerful because of their ability to increase or restrict the actual supply of oil, China has emerged as something different: the world's most important *swing* buyer. China's decisions about when to buy oil, when to draw from its enormous inventories, and when to replenish them can now materially move the world market, which is incredibly counterintuitive when you consider that China's power comes not from being the world's largest oil *producer,* but the world's largest oil *importer*.

The turnaround here is remarkable. 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 generated roughly 45 percent *more* electricity than the United States and European Union *combined* in 2025, and A LOT of it (42 percent) was generated by clean sources**,** including hydro, wind, solar, nuclear and bioenergy.

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 roughly the same time it took the United States to complete two new nuclear reactors – seven years late and $17 billion over budget – China built 13 and had 33 more under construction. Today, China has 36 reactors under construction, nearly half of all nuclear reactors being built worldwide. By 2030, China is expected to surpass the United States in installed nuclear capacity, making it the world's nuclear power leader – in a technology WE pioneered. The U.S. still has more operating nuclear reactors than any other country, but when it comes to building new ones, we're falling far behind.

China is also going all-in on nuclear fusion. Nuclear fusion – often called the holy grail of clean energy – combines light atomic nuclei to release extraordinary amounts of energy, potentially providing an abundant source of carbon-free electricity without the meltdown risk or long-lived nuclear waste associated with conventional nuclear power. Pound for pound, fusion can release about four times more energy than nuclear fission and nearly 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 essentially the opposite process, combining light atoms such as hydrogen isotopes to release enormous amounts of energy. Fusion remains experimental, expensive and technically challenging, and no fusion power plant currently supplies electricity to the commercial grid. But fusion research also has important national-security implications: some fusion technologies, particularly inertial-confinement and high-energy-density research, can provide valuable knowledge and experimental capabilities for nuclear-weapons science. >

The good news is that, from the jump, 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, public and 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, with more than 90 percent of its equipment domestically produced).

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 is reportedly producing roughly ten times as many Ph.D.s in fusion science and engineering as America.

They are also dedicating way more public money to the effort. China is estimated to be spending roughly $1.5 billion a year on fusion – nearly twice recent annual U.S. federal funding for fusion-energy sciences. 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 never fully funded the infrastructure envisioned in those plans. 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 championed advanced nuclear energy during his first term, although his administration's proposed budgets were less generous toward fusion research than the funding Congress ultimately provided.

In his second term, however, the administration has made fusion leadership an explicit priority, proposing more than $1 billion annually for Fusion Energy Sciences, creating a new Office of Fusion to coordinate commercialization efforts, and continuing and expanding public-private programs intended to turn America's scientific lead into commercial fusion power.

That's progress. But compared with the scale and speed of China's state-backed effort, this is not nearly enough money *or* attention. In 2025, several U.S. senators and fusion experts released a strategy for maintaining U.S. leadership in the fusion race. Its recommendation was considerably more ambitious: an additional $10 billion federal investment to build critical research infrastructure, accelerate commercialization-focused R&D, support fusion pilot plants and develop the domestic supply chain. < 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, over 90 percent of solar cells, and roughly 95 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 the lion's share (by far) of global wind energy patents. China produces around 85 percent of cathode active material and around 90 percent of anode active material for EV batteries, which leads to…

China's electric vehicle (EV) manufacturing industry crushes even the closest competitor. China now has well over 100 brands offering electric cars and half of its domestic new cars are powered by batteries.

The leading Chinese electric vehicle maker BYD – which, in a 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 and/or buying 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 arguably 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.

<u>WE</u> <u>ARE</u> <u>THE</u> <u>UNITED</u> <u>STATES</u> <u>OF</u> <u>AMERICA</u>.

THE GREAT NEWS IS THAT THE PROBLEM IS OBVIOUS.

AND NOW THAT WE HAVE IDENTIFIED THE PROBLEM,

<u>WE</u> <u>CAN</u> <u>FIX</u> <u>IT</u>.

The problem is our two-party political system. <u>PERIOD.</u> 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 prejudgment 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 <u>game</u> 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," our current 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 <u>*world*</u> *market.*

The thing that makes <u>ZERO</u> 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 <u>many</u> – their trade wars make no sense (read more on p. 100). 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. Analysts estimate there is a $130 *trillion* cumulative global market opportunity in clean energy technology through 2050. Right now, the United States captures only a small share of the global trade in many of these technologies, while China alone accounted for roughly half of global exports of key clean-energy technologies in 2025 – 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 and, 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 – automation, productivity improvements, changing consumer demand and technological change alone are causing some jobs to become obsolete.

One of the great strengths of a capitalist economy, however, is its ability to adapt – to create new industries, new businesses, and new kinds of work as old ways disappear. A healthy capitalist system should not try to freeze the economy in place; it should give people a realistic opportunity to acquire new skills, move into new work, and share in the prosperity that economic change creates.

Unfortunately, that doesn’t mean every displaced worker can easily make the transition. 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*.

To that end, 1787 has really cool ones to help with this transition. Read about *America’s Best Chance*, our education reform initiative, on p. 100 and *U.S. Works*, our jobs program, on p. 100 of the *Policy Guide*. >

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 books are Chinese. Of the 89 million deadweight tons of commercial ships built worldwide in 2024, 50.8 million – 57 percent – were built in China. 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. U.S. Navy data puts China's overall shipbuilding capacity by gross tonnage at more than *200 times* that of the United States. In 2023, China delivered 972 commercial ships; the United States delivered seven.

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 more than 40 percent of the world's electricity in 2024, and global investment in clean energy was nearly double investment in fossil fuels. Worldwide, renewable energy accounted for 92.5 percent of all new power-generating capacity added in 2024, and renewables represented 46.4 percent of all installed electricity-generating capacity. Solar alone accounted for more than three-quarters of the renewable capacity added that year. And in 2026, renewable energy is expected to overtake coal as the world's largest source of electricity.

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. That month, roughly three-quarters of EU electricity came 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 generation. By 2025, that figure had climbed to more than 40 percent, with renewables supplying about 24 percent of utility-scale generation and nuclear power contributing another 18 percent. And in 2025, renewable energy and battery storage accounted for more than 90 percent of new utility-scale power capacity added to the U.S. grid. This is a tremendous leap forward.

Texas, of all places, has emerged as an American clean-energy powerhouse. It produces more wind power than any other state, and in 2024 it surpassed California to become the national leader in utility-scale solar capacity. Texas has also become one of the country's largest markets for grid-scale battery storage.

That growth accelerated after passage of the Biden-era Inflation Reduction Act in 2022, which created hundreds of billions of dollars' worth of incentives and federal support for clean energy, electric vehicles, domestic manufacturing and other emissions-reducing technologies. Texas became one of the nation's biggest destinations for the resulting private investment, particularly in solar generation and battery storage.

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 could increase by more than 50 percent 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 its hardline stance against wind and solar is that increasing our reliance on intermittent renewable energy will make the electric grid less reliable. There is a legitimate challenge here: because the wind doesn't always blow and the sun doesn't always shine, a grid increasingly dependent on these resources requires adequate storage, transmission, dispatchable power and other means of balancing supply and demand. But the evidence does not support the broader claim that a grid with a high proportion of renewable energy is inherently unreliable.

Republicans frequently point to Germany's aggressive *Energiewende* – its transition away from fossil fuels and nuclear power and toward efficiency and renewable energy – as a cautionary tale, 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 measure of grid reliability is the System Average Interruption Duration Index (SAIDI), which measures the average duration of electricity interruptions experienced by customers during a year. By this measure, Germany operates one of the world's most reliable electric grids. In 2020, Germany's federal grid regulator reported an average interruption time of just 10.73 minutes per customer – the lowest recorded since it began publishing the figures in 2006. The regulator specifically concluded that Germany's energy transition and increasing share of distributed generation had not negatively affected the quality of its electricity supply.

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 <u>FREEZING</u>!

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, natural gas wells and gathering systems, 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).

< Sidebar: 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 the long-term increase in Earth's average temperature, which is happening. That's just a fact. Global warming, in turn, changes the climate. *Climate change* is the broader phenomenon – including rising sea levels, changing precipitation patterns, melting ice, shifting ecosystems and changes in the frequency and intensity of many kinds of extreme weather. As the planet warms, heat waves become more frequent and extreme, heavy rainfall becomes more intense in many regions, and drought and flooding risks change substantially.

None of this means that cold weather disappears. Even on a warming planet, individual places can still experience brutal cold snaps, snowstorms and record-low temperatures. 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're confusing weather with climate. A single cold spell neither disproves nor proves global warming. What matters is the long-term global trend – and that trend is unmistakably upward. 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 capacity crunches are expected to become much more common as electricity demand grows faster than generating and transmission infrastructure can be deployed. The surge is being driven by new manufacturing, electrification and, increasingly, massive data centers needed to support artificial intelligence. Some of these facilities can require hundreds of megawatts of electricity, while enormous data-center campuses can consume power on the scale of entire cities. In 2023, U.S. data centers consumed about 4.4 percent of the nation's electricity; by 2028, the Department of Energy's Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory estimates they could consume as much as 12 percent.

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 A.I. 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 through the first quarter of 2025, companies invested $321 billion in clean manufacturing, electricity generation and industrial facilities, helping bring 2,369 new facilities online across the country. And there was much more in the pipeline: another $522 billion in announced investment across 2,217 facilities, associated with approximately 686,000 projected construction and operational jobs.

Ironically, the overwhelming majority of this investment was flowing into Republican-held congressional districts. Nevertheless, the Republicans' Big Beautiful Bill eliminated or sharply curtailed tax credits for a wide range of climate-friendly technologies, while the Trump/Vance administration threw up additional roadblocks to renewable-energy projects – like blocking federal permits for wind and attacking "farmer destroying solar," whatever in the world that means.

The administration also cancelled the federal environmental review for a solar project in the Nevada desert known as Esmeralda 7 – one of the world's largest proposed solar developments, which would have had enough generating capacity to power nearly two million homes – and halted construction on multiple wind farms, although it has since suffered a string of federal court defeats on that front.

On October 1, 2025 alone, the Department of Energy announced that it was terminating 321 financial awards supporting 223 energy projects worth approximately $7.56 billion (they didn't release a public list identifying the individual projects whose awards were being terminated).

Now listen, I recognize there may be no better illustration of the differences between China's system of government and ours than this. The Center for Strategic and International Studies estimates that, from 2009 through 2023, the Chinese government provided $231 *billion* in support for its electric-vehicle industry, through purchase subsidies, tax exemptions, charging infrastructure, research and development, and government procurement.

That's what one-party socialist systems 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 "encourage" a "996" work culture – 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., six days a week (although such extreme schedules have been declared illegal under Chinese labor law, they are still widespread amid notoriously weak enforcement).

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 who or 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 had 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 <u>does</u> <u>not</u> 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 ($40 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 – in part because of relatively high sticker prices, along with concerns about battery range and access to charging stations – sales of hybrid vehicles, which combine gasoline engines with electric motors and batteries, continue to soar. Hybrid sales have increased more than 80 percent since 2023, to more than 2 million vehicles a year. Through July 2026, hybrids accounted for 15.4 percent of all new vehicles sold in the United States, compared with just 5.9 percent for fully electric vehicles.

There is also strong demand for electric vehicles on the used market, where lower prices can make the technology affordable to many more buyers. Sales of used electric vehicles rose 40 percent in July 2025 from a year earlier and continued to experience double-digit year-over-year growth in 2026.

So then, what's up with the $19.5 billion hit Ford was forced to take as it scaled back its EV ambitions and shifted more resources toward hybrids? It wasn't simply that Americans didn't want electric cars. For one, Ford appears to have 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; Honda's Acura ZDX sport utility vehicle; and the Porsche Taycan all struggled. One exception is the Cadillac Optiq, a midsize SUV, whose sales grew by 65 percent in the first quarter of 2026. >

So, okay, U.S. automakers misread the market a little, which was a major factor in their write-downs. But automakers' mistakes weren't the only major factor. They were also hit by extraordinary whiplash in federal policy over just four years. In fact, Ford itself cited "regulatory changes," along with lower-than-expected demand and high costs, when it announced its $19.5 billion restructuring.

U.S. auto executives had just sharpened their strategy to comply with Biden-era policies, investing billions adapting their factories, battery supply chains and product plans to take advantage of Biden-era incentives and comply with increasingly stringent emissions and fuel-economy requirements… just to have the Trump/Vance administration and Republican Congress come in and reverse much of it. Federal tax credits for new, used and leased/commercial electric vehicles were terminated; fuel-economy and emissions policy was weakened; and tariffs on imported vehicles, components, steel and aluminum simultaneously slashed billions of dollars from their bottom lines and disrupted their supply chains.

This is yet another clear distinction between China's form of government and ours: consistent inconsistency. China's industrial policy has plenty of disadvantages, but *consistency* isn't usually one of them. American automakers, by contrast, can be encouraged by one administration to spend tens of billions reorganizing their businesses around one set of rules – only to have the next administration rewrite those rules before the factories are even finished.

Chaotic and unpredictable policy is a killer for Corporate America. Companies responsible to shareholders, customers, employees and the communities they serve must make investment decisions based on the world as it exists *today* – even when those investments won't pay off for five, ten or twenty years. They must decide where to build factories, which technologies to develop and how to deploy billions of dollars in capital *today.* Which means they need something our political system has become increasingly bad at providing: some reasonable degree of consistency about what the rules will be *tomorrow*.

Remarkably, our automakers – God bless them – don't seem to have concluded from all this red ink that electrification is dead. Quite the opposite. Ford, GM, Toyota and Volkswagen are pursuing very different strategies, but all remain committed to putting more batteries and electric motors into the vehicles Americans drive.

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. Ford is continuing to develop a new low-cost EV platform designed to support a family of smaller, more affordable electric vehicles, 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 announced plans to invest up to an additional $10 billion in American manufacturing over the next five years.

Volkswagen, meanwhile, has confirmed plans to develop hybrid versions of its bestselling U.S. SUVs, including the Tiguan and Atlas, after its American dealers pushed hard for hybrid options as consumer demand for the technology surged.

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 can hybrids get up to 50 percent better gas mileage than comparable conventional gas-powered vehicles, 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 quickly, though in the United States it remains unevenly distributed and heavily concentrated in California and other major metropolitan and coastal markets. By early 2025, China already had nearly 14 million charging points – about 4 million public and 10 million private – and the total continued growing rapidly during the year. The United States had roughly 200,000 public charging ports going into 2025, with that number also climbing substantially during the year (the U.S. figures don’t include the millions of Americans who charge their EVs at home). >

We need to get this show on the road because, although steep tariffs and other trade barriers have effectively kept Chinese automakers out of the U.S. passenger-vehicle market for the time begin, 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 in supply 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. Unfortunately, I've seen this unwise attitude my entire career, which, because I'm old, has been a long time. Regardless of the facts on the ground, it's just DRILL, BABY, DRILL …*<u>right</u> <u>this</u> <u>second</u>*. With little regard for tomorrow. Just churn and burn until the next inevitable bust.

This is wildly irresponsible on so many levels. 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. *<u>But then what?</u>*

< 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. >

WAKE-UP FELLAS. Even Saudi Arabia doesn't see a conflict between oil and gas and renewable energy. *<u>They see dollar signs</u>*. Three Saudi companies – ACWA Power, the Water and Electricity Holding Company (Badeel), and Saudi Aramco Power Company (SAPCO) –

are jointly developing $8.3 billion worth of renewable-energy projects with 15 gigawatts of capacity, including 12 GW of solar and 3 GW of wind. The projects are part of Saudi Arabia's National Renewable Energy Program and PIF's mandate to develop 70 percent of the Kingdom's targeted renewable-energy capacity 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 a financial landscape in which producers no longer have the same access to abundant private-equity capital to fund relentless drilling. < 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 – <u>*literally reshaping the entire global international order away from the United States.*</u>

We have to Wake-Up America. This Can Happen. This is <u>Not</u> 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. <u>LOSE</u>. We are going to <u>LOSE</u> 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 <u>THE</u> <u>UNITED</u> <u>STATES</u> <u>OF</u> <u>AMERICA</u>. At this point, America retains enormous economic and military advantages. American companies dominate many of the world's most consequential industries, including technology, aerospace and defense, banking and capital markets, biotech and pharmaceuticals, media and entertainment, and professional services, while American universities remain among the world's leading centers of research and higher education.

Our private economy remains unmatched in its depth and capacity to finance innovation. The United States attracted nearly two-thirds of global venture-capital investment in 2025, with some $320 billion invested in American companies, and U.S. firms captured roughly three-quarters of all global venture funding for artificial intelligence. More than half of the world's 100 most valuable publicly traded corporations are American. And while the United States has only about

4 percent of the world's population, its stock markets account for around 44 percent of global equity-market capitalization.

Also, President 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."

< All these human rights abuses are abominable, but what the Chinese government is doing in Xinjiang to over one million Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities – including mass detention, intense surveillance,

forced labor, and forced sterilization – must be stopped at once. Its actions are at best crimes against humanity and at worst genocide (China denies all allegations, claiming the vile facilities their victims are subjected to are “vocational training centers”). >

Meanwhile, many people in China feel their leaders are prioritizing world domination over their needs. 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.”

While their leaders were throwing money at other countries in 2019, for example, 40 percent of Chinese households – over 600 million people – were living on just $135 a 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.

All this at a time when President Xi 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 five of the six generals appointed to the Central Military Commission (CMC) in 2022, leaving only Zhang Shengmin. 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 any of that is true. >

Without question, the United States 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 the dystopian vision for America's future being thrust upon us by Donald Trump, JD Vance, Marco Rubio, and congressional Republicans.

Everything these guys do is designed to move us backward. They are *obsessed* with the past. Donald Trump, JD Vance, Marco Rubio and congressional Republicans 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 Marco Rubio, the late 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"…. which is why the narcotrafficking explanation made no sense from the jump.

What made perfect sense – and came as no surprise – was President Trump's announcement in late August 2026 that he had cut what he called the "biggest oil deal in world history" with President Delcy Rodríguez for preferential rights to 65 billion barrels of Venezuelan oil reserves. Essentially, America will take a 35 percent stake in a private company run by Alejandro Betancourt, a Venezuelan businessman who Swiss authorities have issued a warrant for in connection with a money laundering investigation. His company, North American Blue Energy Partners, will have the right to develop those 65 billion in reserves and America will have the right to 20 percent of what they produce at the cost of production. Colonialism at its finest.

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, the agreement doesn't impose a specified numerical cap on U.S. personnel at Pituffik.

Not to mention that carrying out Donald Trump's Greenland "vision" by force would run headlong into U.S. law. The Senate ratified the North Atlantic Treaty, making it part of the "supreme Law of the Land" under the Constitution's Supremacy Clause. And Article 1 explicitly requires NATO members to settle international disputes peacefully and refrain from the threat or use of force inconsistent with the U.N. Charter (and shockingly, seizing territory from a fellow NATO ally is not among our treaty obligations).

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 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 <u>our</u> 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 vulnerable to debt crises, chronic instability, or what Roosevelt regarded as governmental "wrongdoing or impotence." 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 a law, but a unilateral statement of American foreign policy – came at a time when the United States was still a young republic of around ten million people and 24 states, with a small military and limited ability to project power around the world. Two hundred years later, the United States is the world's preeminent military and financial power. So, invoking Monroe today is not a return to the geopolitical circumstances of 1823; it's the world's most powerful country invoking a doctrine conceived when America was not yet powerful enough to enforce it on its own. Because of this…

The national security strategy Republicans – including Donald Trump, JD Vance & Marco Rubio – have laid out is not what a strong, strategic world power would do.

It's what an empire in decline would 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.

< 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 and other Republicans 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." >

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).

Whether it be by two, four or five centuries, the foreign policy and national security strategy of Donald Trump, JD Vance, Marco Rubio, and other Republicans look backward. Full stop. But when it comes to Donald Trump's economic heroes, his longings for the past get even more misguided – and his misunderstanding of history is taking this country into incredibly dangerous territory.

Since his second inauguration, Donald "Tariff Man" Trump has loved comparing himself to William McKinley, the 25th president of the United States (1897–1901). He even celebrated McKinley in his inaugural address, declaring that McKinley "made our country very rich through tariffs and through talent."

There is just one problem: the current president leaves out an important part of McKinley's story. McKinley was unquestionably a protectionist. He initially believed tariffs could shield U.S. manufacturers and workers from foreign competition, and he signed the highly protectionist Dingley Tariff into law in 1897. But as American industry and productivity surged, McKinley started to understand that the United States could not simply build tariff walls around an increasingly powerful and productive economy. He came to recognize that American companies needed customers abroad.

As a result, by the end of his presidency, McKinley was championing reciprocity agreements that would lower trade barriers and open foreign markets to American goods. By then, McKinley wasn't arguing that America should retreat behind ever-higher tariff walls; rather, he was telling Americans that their newfound industrial might made greater access to the world economy essential. In his final public speech in 1901, he declared: "We should sell everywhere we can and buy wherever the buying will enlarge our sales and productions" and "the period of exclusiveness is past… commercial wars are unprofitable." America, he explained, was producing more than its domestic market could consume: "What we produce beyond our domestic consumption must have a vent abroad."

… an approach significantly different from that of President Trump, who has used tariffs not to protect American industries or negotiate better trade terms, but as a blunt-force instrument of economic coercion to influence policies having little to do with trade itself (like immigration, for example).

Tariff Man Trump is also wrong to credit tariffs with making the United States "probably the wealthiest it ever was" during the 1890s – a decade that included one of the most severe economic contractions in American history. In fact, the Panic of 1893 was followed by years of bank failures, business collapses and extraordinarily high unemployment, with a sustained recovery not taking hold until around 1897.

And when prosperity returned, America was experiencing extraordinary gains in industrial productivity and technological innovation, massive railroad and infrastructure investment, rapid population growth, expanding exports and capital formation. At the same time, new supplies of gold helped expand the money supply.

President McKinley certainly believed in tariffs. But the lesson he eventually drew from our emergence as an industrial powerhouse was ultimately less protectionist than The Donald claims: protect American industry when necessary, but recognize that a rich, productive America also needs the world's markets.

Donald Trump and Co. are wrong yet again when they try 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.

The U.S. government now has equity stakes in over 30 private companies, up from ZERO just one year earlier. This can, among other things, inflate share prices, lead to capital misallocation, and allow *the government* to dictate business terms – undoubtably making the American economy less neutral, less dynamic, and less productive in the years to come.

I don't want to hear one Republican say ANYTHING about how the Democrats are going to bring "socialism" to America. If they want to see "socialism," they need to look in the mirror.

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 the U.S. government the right to appoint a director to the board of U.S. Steel. The U.S. government's 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.

In yet another move that looks far more like something that would happen in China than in the United States, the Trump/Vance administration has taken the unprecedented step of using export-control powers in a way that effectively forced an American A.I. developer to pull frontier models from the market over purported national-security concerns.

The most hard-core example is the way the administration has treated Anthropic, one of the most advanced A.I. laboratories on the planet – and a company that the leaders of the United States of America should be immensely proud of.

The official story from Donald Trump, JD Vance, Marco Rubio and Pete Hegseth is that their administration, using its export-control power, demanded that Anthropic restrict access to its powerful Mythos model over concerns adversaries could exploit it for cyber warfare. To help assuage the administration's concerns, Anthropic then released Fable 5, a version that has most of the capabilities of its Mythos model (i.e., advanced coding, research, analytic, and agentic features) but also includes safeguards to prevent its use for cyber. < In reality, Anthropic itself had already deliberately restricted Mythos because of its cyber capabilities and Fable was Anthropic's attempt to make Mythos-level capabilities generally available safely. >

But that still didn't seem to be good enough for the brain trust of Trump, Vance, Rubio and Hegseth (whom I'm guessing know next to nothing about the inner workings of A.I.). While it's true that Amazon researchers found a way to bypass Fable's guardrails soon after its release, it's very likely that concerns about the adequacy of safeguards were only one of the reasons these guys have beef with Anthropic.

There is no public proof that the June export-control action was retaliation for that earlier fight. But given what happened between Anthropic and the administration only months earlier, I'm suspicious that the main reason Donald Trump, JD Vance, Marco Rubio, Pete Hegseth and the rest of the gang are ticked off at Anthropic is that its CEO Dario Amodei had the *audacity* to demand restrictions on how the Pentagon can deploy Anthropic's tech for mass domestic surveillance and fully autonomous weapons. In other words, Donald Trump, JD Vance, Marco Rubio, Pete Hegseth and the rest of the gang are ticked off at Anthropic for *having a conscience*.

For years, Anthropic has been, by far, the most vocal advocate from the A.I. world for guardrails to ensure the technology is used safely and responsibly. In a statement made amid heated discussions with administration officials, Mr. Amodei made Anthropic’s position clear: “I believe deeply in the existential importance of using A.I. to defend the United States and other democracies, and to defeat our autocratic adversaries.”

“However, in a narrow set of cases, we believe A.I. can undermine, rather than defend, democratic values. Some uses are also simply outside the bounds of what today’s technology can safely and reliably do. Two such use cases have never been included in our contracts with the Department of War, and we believe they should not be included now: mass domestic surveillance and fully autonomous weapons.”

Outraged, this led to Pete Hegseth designating Anthropic a “supply-chain risk,” removing its models from military systems, and President Trump directing federal agencies to stop working with the A.I. giant, accusing the company’s executives of being “leftwing nutjobs.”

Amodei responded: “These threats do not change our position: We cannot in good conscience accede to their request.” (BRAVO and THANK YOU, Dario!)

So, to recap: For 18 days, the United States federal government demonstrated that it could use export-control authority to impose restrictions so sweeping that one of America’s leading A.I. companies was effectively forced to pull its most advanced commercial models from the global market. That is an extraordinary precedent for government intervention in America’s A.I. industry and could not only potentially undermines our lead in A.I., but also push companies around the world into the arms of the Chinese and their open-weight and open-source A.I. models.

< Open-weight means you are given pre-trained parameters to fine-tune the A.I. model, but the source code, architecture details, and datasets remain confidential. Open-source goes further, providing total transparency by including the source code, training methodologies, and training data so the public can audit and rebuild it. These models work great for users who want unconstrained access to systems they control because they are free to download, modify, and adapt them.

By advancing these types of models, China can bypass U.S. hardware sanctions and restrictions; learn and implement best practices; rapidly integrate A.I. across its vast manufacturing base; and build global soft power through A.I. influence and dominance. >

The Trump/Vance administration's inconsistent approach to A.I. is confounding, but it looks even more contradictory and careless when you consider the Nvidia deal.

In December 2025, President Trump announced that the United States would allow Nvidia – the dominant supplier of the advanced GPUs powering the A.I. boom – to sell its powerful H200 chips to approved customers in China, with the government collecting the equivalent of 25 percent through an unusual tariff arrangement.

Five months earlier, the administration had brokered an even more extraordinary arrangement requiring Nvidia and AMD to pay the federal government 15 percent of revenue from certain A.I.-chip sales to China in exchange for export licenses. That arrangement immediately raised serious legal questions under both the Export Control Reform Act – which generally prohibits fees in connection with export-license applications – and the Constitution's Export Clause, which prohibits federal taxes or duties on exports.

This is quite possibly the most stupefying idea I have ever heard. For one, if advanced American A.I. chips really pose a national-security threat in Chinese hands, why does that threat become acceptable when the United States government gets paid?

But setting aside the legal and national security concerns, 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 China's domestic accelerators still lag Nvidia's most advanced chips in important areas, particularly frontier-model training. 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? 15 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 A.I. 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 A.I. 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 A.I. 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 A.I. superiority and are integral to modern military applications. *The country that controls these chips will control AI technology; the country that controls A.I. 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 <u>they</u> 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 all is just 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, yuan-based financial channels now handle the overwhelming majority of Russia-China trade payments. CIPS, which launched in 2015, now links over 5,000 banks across 190 countries and reported RMB (renminbi, the official name of China's currency) 100.9 trillion of payments in the first half of 2026 alone.

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 settlement currency for around half of China's cross-border deals, up from practically zero fifteen years ago.

Make no mistake, although the yuan is nowhere close to replacing the dollar, almost everything mentioned in the last three paragraphs points toward a concerning long-term direction for the United States. The danger is not that the yuan will suddenly dethrone the dollar. It's that these developments can gradually erode the extraordinary advantages the United States enjoys from dollar dominance: cheaper financing, enormous financial leverage, and a degree of economic power no other country possesses.

But the Trump/Vance administration doesn't see it that way. President Trump, for one, 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 little understanding of how global trade actually 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 <u>not</u> <u>true</u>. 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 the Trump/Vance administration 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 create serious strain on 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 *<u>want</u>* this role. It gives us unparalleled power in global finance, not to mention lower interest rates which leads to cheaper financing.

So, guys in the Trump/Vance administration, 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: America enjoys these extraordinary privileges only as long as the rest of the world continues to trust the United States, its institutions, its financial markets, and ultimately its ability and willingness to honor its debts. 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 could likely trigger a debt crisis and worldwide panic. Next comes major stock market volatility and a run on the dollar. Interest rates spike, exponentially increasing 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 de-leveraging of private ones) or things like the economic fallout caused by the Covid pandemic (when American families were in dire straits).

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.

This will make us more beholden to foreign investors – including foreign private investors as well as foreign governments – who already hold roughly 9 trillion of Treasury securities. It's important to remember that our vulnerability isn't that China can suddenly call in our loans. It's that the United States depends on a vast, continuous pool of domestic and foreign demand for Treasury securities to finance increasingly large deficits at manageable interest rates.

This underscores a fundamental tension in the Trump/Vance administration's strategy: They want smaller trade deficits and a weaker dollar while simultaneously wanting the dollar to remain the world's dominant reserve currency, foreigners to continue pouring enormous amounts of capital into the United States, and American borrowing costs to remain low. Those objectives don't coexist. The same global demand for dollars and dollar-denominated assets that gives the United States extraordinary financial power also tends to strengthen the dollar and helps sustain the capital inflows associated with America's external deficits.

For all the reasons given above, the possibility of the world questioning the United States as the leading global economic force and/or losing confidence in our direction is something we must watch very, very closely because there are already serious warning signs.

In August 2026, The Wall Street Journal reported that two new studies – one from MIT and the other from Stanford – suggest investors don't seem as willing to accept low bond yields because of the U.S. Treasurys' safety: "Treasurys, long the world's preferred 'safe' asset, are looking less safe. Relative to other securities, their yields are no longer quite so low, and in moments of stress, they don't behave like a haven."

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.

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.

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

When it came to the perception of political leaders in 2025, "Donald Trump had an almost universal negative perception rating: in 82 percent of countries around the world, Trump had a net negative rating, significantly worse than both Putin (61 percent) and Xi (44 percent)."

In the 2026 survey, global perceptions of the United States fell *below* those of Russia for the first time. The survey found that views of the U.S. deteriorated for a second consecutive year, citing perceptions to U.S. foreign policy decisions, including tariffs, tensions with NATO allies, reduced support for Ukraine, and threats involving Greenland.

In July 2026, the Pew Research Center reported that China is now seen more positively than the U.S. in most of 36 countries surveyed. The gap is especially large in several Asia-Pacific and Middle Eastern countries, and Canadians and Mexicans also view China more positively than the United States. This happened quickly. A majority of Canadians (57 percent) had a positive view of America in 2023, while only 14 percent viewed China positively. In 2025, Canadians were equally favorable toward America and China. Now, however, more Canadians have a favorable view of China (44 percent) than America (33 percent).

Further, "confidence in these countries' respective leaders to d*o the right thing regarding world affairs* has followed a similar pattern. In the latter half of Joe Biden's presidency, confidence in him was higher than confidence in Chinese President Xi Jinping across most countries surveyed, though Biden's rating declined in many places from 2023 to 2024. During the first two years of Trump's second term, ratings of the U.S. president worsened significantly. While many people still lack confidence in Xi, positive views of him have become more widespread, and more overall now say they have confidence in Xi than in Trump."

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, Marco Rubio, and many other Republicans 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 that many NATO members fell short of their defense-spending commitments for years, those days are over. In 2025, all 32 members of the alliance met or exceeded the benchmark of spending two percent of GDP on defense – the first time that has happened since NATO adopted the target in 2014.

And NATO has now raised the bar considerably. At the 2025 summit in The Hague, members committed to investing five percent of GDP annually in defense and security by 2035: at least 3.5 percent for core military requirements and up to another 1.5 percent for critical infrastructure, cybersecurity, civil preparedness, resilience and the defense industrial base.

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 has gone into overdrive since he chose to go to war with Iran. He has repeatedly lashed out at our NATO allies for not, in his estimation, "helping" enough with 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 8, 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.

Then, of course, came the July 2026 NATO summit in Turkey, where our president once again blasted allies he believed had failed to adequately support the U.S. in Iran. Spain received particularly harsh treatment: "Spain is a wasted cause. We don't want to do any trade business with Spain anymore."

He wasn't finished, then calling Spain a "terrible partner in NATO" and instructing Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent to "cut off all trade with Spain" – even saying the United States should stop visits and communication with the country. Incidentally, Spain had already reached NATO's previous benchmark of spending two percent of GDP on defense; its dispute with Trump centered in part on its refusal to embrace the alliance's new five-percent target on the timetable he wanted.

In August 2026, as the 60-day U.S.-Iran ceasefire arrangement expired, Trump weirdly threatened Oman – a key mediator in efforts involving Iran – warning that if Oman "gets in the way," the United States would "bomb the shit out of them again."

Around the same time, he ordered the Pentagon to substantially scale back the annual Ulchi Freedom Shield military exercises with South Korea. He cited the cost of the exercises and his relationship with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, but he also made clear in a discombobulated Truth Social posy that Seoul's refusal to participate in the Iran campaign was very much on his mind: "While somewhat unrelated (?), I recently asked the President of South Korea if they would like to join us in the Denuclearization of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and they said, 'No thanks!'"

Typically, the connection was apparently not so "unrelated" after all, since Trump's order regarding the military exercises ultimately resulted in the U.S. and South Korea agreeing to shorten the exercises from eleven days to five and reduce field-training activities – modifying one of the longstanding pillars of our military alliance with Seoul while an erratic, nuclear-armed North Korea remains just across the border.

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 suffered one of the very highest per-capita military death rates of any NATO ally in Afghanistan – 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 (more on this in a minute).

The Trump/Vance administration's insulting answer 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. Lately, however, the Board of Peace is marketing itself as a new international peacekeeping body. Kind of like a global Mar-a-Lago, countries can upgrade to permanent membership 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. Belgian then reported that, according to a government source, the United States had apparently confused Belgium with Belarus. (insert: is there an emoji for humiliation?)

Not so with former 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, 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.

In July 2026, the Board of Peace announced its 15-point proposal to achieve peace and security in Gaza, which included a plan for the disarmament of Hamas and an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza – a proposal that was met with an immediate escalation of Israeli bombings. Israeli bombs killed 18 people right after the announcement, making it one of the deadliest days there since the "cease-fire" announced in October.

In case the bombings didn't make clear the Israeli position, a spokesman for the Israeli prime minister's office said, "The version that has been made public does not reflect Israel's positions. Israel has conveyed its comments and concerns on the proposed framework to our American counterparts."

So, seven months after Donald Trump, JD Vance and Marco Rubio unveiled their shiny new Board of Peace, its inaugural peace project has reached the awkward stage where one side says it has accepted the board's plan, America's closest ally in the conflict refuses to accept it, and the "peace" being overseen by the Board of Peace continues to include Israeli bombs falling on Gaza. In fact, Jared Kushner – Donald's son-in-law, informal advisor and key negotiator on Middle East policy – personally met both Hamas leader Khalil al-Hayya and Netanyahu trying to rescue the deal… and still couldn't get Israel to accept it. Is this really better than NATO can do?

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.”

In July 2026, President Trump revived his crusade to seize Greenland at the beginning of NATO’s annual summit in Turkey – – saying “Greenland should be controlled by the United States, not by Denmark” – – forcing the Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen to reiterate that “we are ready to defend every inch of NATO, including our own territory. One of the reasons why we built NATO many, many years ago is if anything happens to one of us then everybody should stand up for each other.”

Make no mistake, the two people who benefit most – or perhaps the *<u>only</u>* people who benefit *<u>at</u>* *<u>all</u>* – from Donald Trump, JD Vance and Marco Rubio 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 off all our allies, we may not be able to coordinate an international response if they do (which we have already seen happen in Iran).

Some Republicans 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 overselling the reality. Venezuela isn't nearly as important to China as the Trump/Vance administration would have you believe. While China has been the largest buyer of Venezuelan oil, Venezuelan crude amounted to less than 5 percent of China's seaborne crude imports in 2025. And despite all the talk about China's grip on Venezuela, the country's trade with China is tiny compared with Beijing's overall economic footprint: China-Venezuela trade accounted for only about 1.2 percent of China's total trade with Latin America and the Caribbean during the first eleven months of 2025.

In truth, China could actually benefit from America successfully rebuilding the Venezuelan economy and energy sector. China is one of Venezuela's largest creditors, having poured tens of billions of dollars into the country over the years, much of it through oil-backed loans. Venezuela subsequently defaulted on its sovereign debt and is still estimated to owe Chinese creditors at least $10 billion. A healthier Venezuelan economy pumping – and selling – a lot more oil would have a much better chance of paying that money back.

And China's relationship with Caracas hasn't exactly been a love affair. Beijing became increasingly frustrated with Venezuela's corruption, economic mismanagement and collapsing oil industry after lending the country enormous sums of money. Beijing had become sufficiently wary of Venezuela's perilous economic situation by 2016 – making no new sovereign loans to them as of 2016 – meaning they stopped throwing good money after bad nearly a decade before the United States intervened.

So, let's take a minute to assess what the United States has both lost and gained from attacking at least 67 boats, killing at least 221 people – including Alejandro Carranza, a Colombian fisherman who had long fished the Caribbean for marlin and tuna (we learned of this from his 14-year-old daughter, who told The New York Times, “I never thought I would lose my father in this way.”) – and seizing Nicolás Maduro and his wife.

I’ve already mentioned we lost the right to say anything if Xi Jinping decides to overthrow Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te.

We lost any moral authority we had since the military strikes the Trump/Vance administration is conducting in the Caribbean Sea and the Eastern Pacific are illegal under domestic and international law. The administration has ordered the execution of people who are not at war with the United States and who have not been afforded due process. Essentially, they are acting as judge, jury and executioner – and that is not allowed by the global community or by the United States of America.

We lost this round in the war on drugs itself. President Trump has said at least 15 times that the American strikes have reduced maritime drug trafficking into the country by 97 or 98 percent, including an April post on Truth Social that said, “98.2% of Drugs coming into the U.S. by Ocean or Sea have STOPPED!”

That’s a flat out lie. On May 29, 2026 – after the United States had spent $4.7 billion, which included AC-130J Ghostrider gunships, F-35 fighter jets and guided-missile destroyers, and around 15,000 U.S. military personnel – The New York Times reported that “epidemiologists, addiction scientists and public health experts say cocaine, by far the top drug smuggled out of South America, is as easy to get in much of the United States as it was before the strikes began” (these findings were based on evaluations of street prices, lethal overdoses, purity of samples and drug seizures at U.S. borders).

For example, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection “seized 47,808 pounds of cocaine in the eight months since the strikes began, more than the 43,227 pounds the agency seized in the eight-month period before the campaign.”

Then, on July 27, 2026, The Washington Post followed that up with a report of its own. According to a previously unreported assessment by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), a closeddoor congressional briefing, and interviews with current and former U.S. and foreign officials: "The Trump administration's deadly military strikes on alleged drug trafficking boats have not reduced the amount of cocaine entering the United States, but they're prompting criminal organizations to develop new strategies and tactics and undermining traditional investigative methods."

"In a recent assessment reviewed by The Washington Post, DEA analysts found the strikes had failed to affect the supply or price of cocaine in the United States and had led traffickers to diversify beyond go-fast boats and to avoid international waters, opting instead for larger boats and hemming close to coastlines, where U.S. forces are less likely to open fire… traffickers are also relying more on aircraft, which take off from clandestine airstrips along the Colombian-Venezuelan border and head east to Guyana and Suriname to avoid U.S. forces."

A senior Colombian security official told the Post that the boat strikes have had a minimal impact: "There was a dissuasive effect in one type of transportation. So, it has forced them to seek out other methods. Taking the drugs out through ports has increased, stockpiling it on large ships."

We have <u>gained</u> one thing though!! Now that we are "running" Venezuela until it can be "put back on track," in President Trump's words, the United States is now on the hook to help cleanup and rebuild after two earthquakes on June 24th caused an estimated $37 billion in damage (equivalent to roughly a third of Venezuela's annual economic output) and killed more than 4,930 people.

Danny Muñoz, "a bricklayer who pulled the lifeless body of his pregnant stepdaughter out from underneath debris after their apartment building along the coast collapsed", summed it up perfectly to the Wall Street Journal: "We're in the hands of God, as well as the Americans. No one else can save us now."

In a million years I will never understand what Donald Trump, JD Vance, Marco Rubio and congressional Republicans 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***.

Of course we should always put America first. Few people in this country would argue that. And *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.

Without question, any deterioration in our NATO relationships undermines our military edge, diminishes our global leverage, and weakens our ability to wrangle China… all of which make our nation less safe. The abject disaster that is the war in Iran – recklessly entered without the broad allied military coalition characteristic of several previous U.S.-led Middle East campaigns – has already made this depressingly apparent.

For one, America’s premiere leadership role in NATO has given us the opportunity to have roughly 30 major/persistent U.S. bases, plus numerous additional military sites throughout Europe. Donald Trump, JD Vance, Marco Rubio and congressional Republicans seem to think we have these bases in other countries as some sort of favor to them. That’s inaccurate. While it’s true that having the U.S. military around is advantageous for other countries, having a strong military presence in Europe allows the U.S. to not only project power in that region, but also in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Many of our military operations in the Middle East alone have heavily depended on these European bases, and our allies typically allow us wide-ranging access, whether they agree with our mission or not.

Dumping on our allies is also just bad business, because our strong relationships have not only benefited national security but our economy as well. How many times can I say it? *We don’t have such an embarrassment of riches in this country that we can just blow everyone else off*.

Trump, Vance, Rubio, Hegseth and the rest 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 numerous NATO countries either fly or plan to fly. In fact, Europe accounted for 38 percent of U.S. major-arms exports from 2021 through 2025 – more than any other region in the world. The United States also supplied 58 percent of the major arms imported by European NATO members during that period.

Thanks to our current leadership's thuggish behavior, however, the European Commission – the main executive body of the European Union (EU) – has stepped up efforts to increase the share of European weaponry in its arsenals and procurement contracts to effectively replace those of the United States to any extent possible.

In response – in what must be one of the most hypocritical statements of the year – the Trump/Vance administration actually had the nerve to say: "The United States strongly opposes any changes to the Directive that would limit U.S. industry's ability to support or otherwise participate in EU member state national defense procurements. *Protectionist* and *exclusionary* policies that strong-arm American companies out of the market – when Europe's largest defense firms continue to greatly benefit from market access in the United States – are the wrong course of action." Do these guys even hear themselves?

Also, the EU outlined a plan in early June 2026 to expand its data centers, semiconductors and cloud computing capabilities with the goal of reducing its dependence on U.S. technology. The plan put forth by the 27 nations goes as far as excluding some American technology providers from sensitive government and critical-infrastructure cloud contracts if they fail the EU's sovereignty and security requirements.

On the economic front, the European Union is part of the world's largest bilateral trade and investment relationship with the United States, supporting millions of jobs on both sides of the Atlantic. In 2025, U.S.–EU trade in goods and services totaled approximately $1.6 trillion – about $4.4 billion every day – while goods trade alone reached $1.0 trillion and services trade reached $542.4 billion. The relationship is especially important for U.S. services: in 2025, the United States ran a $107.3 billion services trade surplus with the EU, an increase of 10.8 percent over 2024. This was offset by a $220.3 billion U.S. goods trade deficit with the EU, itself a 6.9 percent improvement from 2024.

This means our European allies can hurt us economically – big time. Even before Donald Trump's first 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 Vietnan – designed to eliminate trade barriers and establish new market-oriented trade rules.

At the time, these twelve countries represented nearly 40 percent of the global economy. U.S. trade with TPP countries totaled more than $1.5 trillion in merchandise in 2015 and more than $276 billion in services in 2014. Annual U.S. foreign direct investment flowing into TPP countries totaled $61 billion in 2014, while TPP countries invested nearly $59 billion in the United States that year.

TPP was offering greater access to markets for service providers, and addressed tariffs on goods and services, nondiscrimination rules, 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. The agreement would have eliminated more than 18,000 tariffs that other TPP countries imposed on U.S. products alone.

After grueling negotiations, TPP was signed by the twelve member countries on February 4, 2016. But the agreement became a political lightning rod during the 2016 presidential campaign, with both Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton opposing it. Facing uncertain support in Congress, the Obama administration never submitted implementing legislation for a vote, and the United States therefore never ratified the agreement.

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 Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), an agreement designed to expand trade and investment, lower trade barriers and consumer costs, and increase economic growth and employment among its members. The United Kingdom joined in 2024, becoming its 12th member. China, Taiwan, Ecuador and Ukraine have formally applied to join; Uruguay is now in accession negotiations; and Costa Rica substantially concluded its accession negotiations in May 2026. Indonesia, the Philippines and the United Arab Emirates entered preparatory accession discussions in June 2026, while South Korea and Thailand have also expressed interest in joining.

So, CPTPP didn't just survive America's departure – it has continued expanding. 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, <u>*who*</u> has <u>*what*</u> 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 <u>Japan</u> 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 trade grudge with Canada, a beef that was still going strong in August 2026 when Canada suspended trade negotiations; which triggered President Trump's 50 percent tariffs on a range of Canadian goods; which caused Prime Minister Mark Carney to say he would retaliate "dollar for dollar." Trump's long-standing grievance is bizarre because Canada is actually one of our best trading partners. Personally, I'm convinced that Donald's main problem with Canada initially started in his first term because then Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was 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 a full member of BRICS, the grouping of major emerging economies whose first leaders' summit was held in 2009. It joined Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran and the United Arab Emirates. Saudi Arabia was also invited to join and is listed as a member by BRICS itself, although

Riyadh has stopped short of formally confirming its accession. The expanded BRICS represents nearly half the world's population and roughly 40 percent of global economic output when measured by purchasing-power parity. Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Nigeria, Thailand, Uganda and Uzbekistan also became BRICS "partner countries" in 2025, with Vietnam subsequently joining them.

In May 2025, the ten members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) –Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam – met in Malaysia with the six Middle Eastern nations of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) – Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Timor-Leste, then an observer, was poised to become ASEAN's eleventh member, with ASEAN leaders agreeing at their May summit to admit it formally in October 2025. The ASEAN-GCC summit sought to deepen economic ties between the two regions, including exploring a potential free-trade agreement. Meanwhile, India, which already maintains a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and extensive economic and political cooperation with ASEAN, was moving to deepen that relationship under a new 2026–2030 Plan of Action. Canada, an ASEAN Strategic Partner since 2023, was likewise developing a new 2026–2030 Plan of Action covering political-security, economic and socio-cultural cooperation.

Britain and the Gulf Cooperation Council concluded their free-trade negotiations on May 20, 2026. The agreement reduces tariffs and nontariff barriers and expands market access for goods, services and investment between Britain and one of the wealthiest regional blocs in the world. The UK government estimates that once fully implemented, the tariff reductions alone will eliminate nearly $800 million annually in duties on current UK exports to the GCC.

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.

In June 2026, the European Commission formally sent the EU–Indonesia Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement forward for authorization to sign, and on January 9, 2026, EU 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."

India, clearly on a roll, wasn't even close to finished. After remarkably fast negotiations, India and New Zealand signed their new free-trade agreement on April 27, 2026. The agreement provides duty-free access for all Indian exports to New Zealand, while India will cut or eliminate tariffs on about 95 percent of New Zealand exports. New Zealand also committed to facilitating $20 billion of investment into India over 15 years.

THEN, India signed an agreement with the United Kingdom that entered into force on July 15, 2026 – wherein India substantially reduces tariffs on British goods, while the UK provides greatly expanded duty-free access to Indian exports. Britain estimates the agreement could increase bilateral trade by approximately $35 billion annually in the long run and increase UK GDP by about $6.5 billion annually. THEN, India and Oman's Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement entered into force June 1, 2026. The deal gives Indian products duty-free access across most of Oman's tariff lines and expands access for services and investment.

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 helped facilitate the signing of the ASEAN-led Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), an agreement between the ten ASEAN nations and China, Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea. Signed in 2020 after eight years of negotiations, RCEP became the world's largest free-trade agreement by the combined GDP of its members, encompassing roughly 30 percent of global economic output and around 2.2 billion people – nearly 30 percent of the world's population.

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 UK 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.

China and Switzerland completed negotiations on a substantial expansion of their existing free-trade agreement on August 20, 2026, which expands rules covering services, digital trade, trade facilitation, competition and economic cooperation. Under the new terms, 99.8 percent of current Swiss exports will be able to enter China duty-free, compared with only about half under the previous arrangement.

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 now LAC's second-largest trading partner, behind the United States, with bilateral merchandise trade reaching roughly $510 billion in 2024. In South America, however, China has become the largest trading partner overall and is the number one trading partner of several of the region's major economies, 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 nevertheless overseen a remarkable expansion of economic ties with China. Argentine exports to China surged 125 percent year-on-year, and China even overtook Brazil as Argentina's largest trading partner during certain months. At the same time, Milei's government has maintained important Chinese investments and extended Argentina's multibillion-dollar currency-swap arrangement with Beijing.

Then there is China's blossoming relationship with Mexico. After investing $140 million in a Nuevo León factory producing electric aerial work platforms, China's Lingong Machinery Group (LGMG), a major construction-machinery manufacturer, announced plans with strategic partners and suppliers for a much larger industrial development in the state, with total investment estimated at $5 billion and the potential to create roughly 7,000 jobs. Nuevo León's proximity to the United States and access to the broader North American market were major attractions. In 2024, BYD, China's leading electric-vehicle manufacturer, sent a delegation to the Mexican state of Jalisco to explore establishing an EV manufacturing plant there.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) – with a combined GDP of roughly $3.8 trillion – is China's largest trading partner, while China is ASEAN's largest external trading partner. According to Chinese statistics, bilateral trade reached $982.3 billion in 2024, roughly twice the value of U.S.-ASEAN merchandise trade. On October 28, 2025, ASEAN and China signed the ACFTA 3.0 Upgrade Protocol, the latest expansion of the ASEAN-China Free Trade Area, which was originally established in 2002 and fully implemented in

2010. The new agreement expands cooperation into areas including the digital and green economies and strengthens supply-chain connectivity.

China is the largest trading partner of both Japan and South Korea. Chinese manufacturers have also made startling headway into Southeast Asian consumer markets. In 2024, roughly 90 percent of battery-electric vehicles sold in Indonesia were produced by Chinese automakers, while Chinese automakers have increasingly challenged the longstanding dominance of Japanese brands in markets such as Thailand and Malaysia. Chinese smartphone manufacturers have likewise captured a large share of Southeast Asia's smartphone market, collectively far outselling Apple's iPhones in unit shipments.

In April 2025, Xi Jinping embarked on a three-nation tour of Southeast Asia – to Cambodia, Malysia and Vietnam – where he signed over 100 agreements addressing infrastructure, technology, education and health.

Between 2018 and 2022, Chinese investment in Vietnam roughly doubled, while Chinese exports to Vietnam surged 75 percent, reaching $147 billion. The relationship has continued to deepen. In 2025, investors from mainland China and Hong Kong together registered roughly $8.14 billion in pledged foreign direct investment in the strategically important Southeast Asian country. Meanwhile, U.S. registered investment in Vietnam fell from roughly $700 million in 2022 to $500 million in 2023**.** In 2024, U.S. registered investment fell further, to just $287 million – a 54 percent decline from the previous year – leaving the United States 12th among sources of registered foreign investment 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.

As of late August 2026, the comprehensive U.S.–India Free Trade Agreement that was negotiated in February is still not completed, but regardless of what happens with it, major damage has already been done … which may be one of the most outrageously irresponsible things the Trump/Vance administration has done yet regarding one of our closest allies.

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 and multinational companies had begun planning major investments in India as part of what is known as "China Plus One" – a strategy in which companies reduce their dependence on China by adding manufacturing and sourcing capacity in other countries. India emerged as one of the leading beneficiaries. But in August 2025, the Trump/Vance administration levied tariffs reaching 50 percent on many Indian exports to the United States, including an additional 25 percent penalty tied to India's purchases of Russian oil. The tariffs weakened India's cost advantage for U.S.-bound manufacturing and threatened to undercut some of the progress it had made in attracting supply chains away from China.

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.

Measured at current exchange rates, India is among the world's five largest economies and is rapidly moving up the rankings as it closes the gap with Japan and Germany. The Indian government has explicitly set its sights on becoming the world's third-largest economy. On a purchasing-power-parity basis, India has already achieved that ranking and accounts for roughly 8–10 percent of global economic output.

Think about it this way: middle-income countries are home to roughly 75 percent of the world's population and account for nearly one-third of global GDP. During Donald Trump's first term, researchers at the Brookings Institution – a nonprofit think tank that conducts research in the social sciences – 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'." The middle class, they concluded, had already become the largest source of consumer demand in the global economy. Their projections at the time illustrated where that market was heading: by 2030, they estimated India's middle-class consumption market could reach $12.3 trillion in 2011 purchasing-power-parity dollars, approaching the projected $15.9 trillion U.S. middle-class market.

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 in China, Xi Jinping continues to execute Mao's Phase Two like a boss. Remember the *strategic stalemate* phase? Where China is supposed to be building strength and <u>*recruiting allies*</u> 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 early 2019, China dramatically expanded the reach of the Belt and Road Initiative. By March 2019, Beijing had signed 173 cooperation documents with 125 countries and 29 international organizations. Eighteen of the European Union’s 27 members would sign memoranda of understanding with China on the initiative. Between 2013 and 2018, trade between China and Belt and Road countries exceeded $6 trillion, growing by an average of 4 percent annually. Even during the pandemic, Beijing continued pursuing economic agreements.

Ten years after Xi Jinping launched what he would later call his "project of the century," nearly 150 countries had signed on to the Belt and Road Initiative in some form, while Chinese institutions had committed hundreds of billions of dollars to infrastructure and other development projects 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."

A January 2026 investment report published by Christoph Nedopil – a University of Queensland professor, a visiting professor at Fudan International School of Finance Shanghai, and a professorial research associate at SOAS University of London – 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.

That said, in recent years, China's role as global creditor has changed. After two decades of explosive growth, lending for large new overseas infrastructure projects fell sharply, while many developing-country borrowers struggled to service existing debts. Beijing increasingly found itself refinancing and restructuring old loans and providing emergency financing to distressed borrowers. By 2023, researchers had identified more than $1.3 trillion in Chinese official-sector loans and grants supporting nearly 21,000 projects in 165 low- and middle-income countries between 2000 and 2021. And by 2025, researchers had uncovered another feature of China's lending system: nearly $420 billion in public and publicly guaranteed loans across 57 countries were effectively secured by collateral, often through foreign-currency revenues deposited in accounts controlled by Chinese lenders. So essentially, China has evolved from one of the world's most aggressive development lenders into something else as well – a major creditor managing the consequences of its own unprecedented global lending boom.

Meanwhile, China has been wooing Russia for years, all the way back to when 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 Western export controls). Chinese components have repeatedly been identified in Russian drones and other weapons, while Chinese machinery, electronics, materials, and other dual-use goods continue to feed Russia's defense-industrial base.

China has also been Russia's largest purchaser of fossil fuels during the war in Ukraine. From December 5, 2022, when the Western oil price cap and EU embargo took effect, through July 2026, China bought 50 percent of all Russian crude exports. In July 2026 alone, China bought approximately $9 billion worth of Russian fossil fuels, accounting for 43 percent of Russia's fossil-fuel export revenues from its five largest importing countries. Crude oil accounted for roughly $6.3 billion of those purchases.

This has provided Moscow with a crucial source of revenue as it finances its war: oil and gas revenues remain an important source of funding for the Russian federal budget, while oil proceeds have also helped replenish reserves that Moscow has drawn upon to finance defense spending.

China, meanwhile, has become an exceptionally important market for oil constrained by Western sanctions. Sanctioned crude from Iran, Russia, and Venezuela probably supplied more than one-fifth of China's total crude-oil imports in 2025 – at least 2.6 million barrels per day. China bought approximately 1.38 million barrels per day from Iran and 389,000 from Venezuela, in addition to at least 800,000 barrels per day of sanctioned Russian crude.

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*. In March 2026, three U.S. officials told The Washington Post that Russia was providing Iran with targeting intelligence to attack American forces in the Middle East, including the locations of U.S. warships and aircraft. The assistance reportedly included satellite imagery and other intelligence that could help Iran target American military positions, radars, and command-and-control facilities. Russia did this even as Moscow publicly called for an end to the war, which it condemned as an "unprovoked act of armed aggression."

This helped Iran … A LOT. Iran subsequently demonstrated a striking ability to hit American military facilities: a Washington Post analysis of satellite imagery found that Iranian attacks damaged or destroyed at least 228 structures or pieces of equipment at 15 U.S. military sites across the Middle East. Russia has also reportedly shared drone tactics and technology developed during its war in Ukraine with Iran.

China has continued supplying Iran with materials critical to its ballistic-missile program. In March, The Washington Post tracked two ships operated by Iran's sanctioned state shipping company, the Shabdis and Barzin, as they left the Gaolan chemical-storage port in Zhuhai, China, loaded with cargo and headed for Iran. Both ships had taken on cargo at a port known for handling sodium perchlorate, a key precursor used to manufacture the solid propellant in ballistic missiles.

Those shipments were not isolated. At least four sanctioned Iranian ships believed to be carrying sodium perchlorate from China subsequently reached Iranian ports, while a fifth was tracked near Iranian waters. All had departed from Gaolan. These shipments continued even as Iran was firing ballistic missiles and drones at American forces and U.S. allies across the Middle East.

And this was part of a much larger pipeline. European intelligence sources reported that China had already supplied Iran with roughly 2,000 tons of sodium perchlorate in several shipments beginning in September 2025, as Tehran attempted to rebuild its ballistic-missile arsenal after its war with Israel. Earlier shipments in 2025 reportedly included roughly another 2,000 tons – about 1,000 tons in February and another 1,000 tons in June. The U.S. Treasury has sanctioned Chinese and Iranian companies involved in procuring sodium perchlorate from China for Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

The evidence that Russia and China are both helping Iran fight against the United States is only getting stronger. Russia's help didn't stop at satellite intel. The Wall Street Journal reported Moscow also sent Iran upgraded Shahed drone parts – better navigation, better targeting – plus tactical playbooks straight from the Ukraine battlefield: how many drones to send, what altitude to fly. One Carnegie analyst put it bluntly: Iran barely has its own military satellites, so Russian imagery is a massive force multiplier. The irony isn't lost on Ukraine, which is now sending air-defense specialists to the Gulf to help U.S. partners shoot down the exact same drones Ukraine has spent years learning to counter.

Even Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth is admitting this reality, telling Congress that both Russia and China are helping Iran "to some extent." UK Defense Secretary John Healey has said Britain suspects Russia of helping Iran improve its drone tactics, including techniques developed in Ukraine, while Volodymyr Zelensky himself says Ukraine has its own signals intelligence proving Russia is still feeding Tehran targeting data.

China's role is murkier but no less alarming. Experts told Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) a Chinese firm may have used A.I. to analyze satellite imagery of Prince Sultan Air Base days before Iran hit it hard.

The Guardian reported that Iranian missiles were displaying increasingly sophisticated capabilities, including steerable warheads and improved terminal guidance, while analysts pointed separately to Chinese electronics and imagery and tactics resembling those Russia developed in Ukraine. And leaked documents shared with Iran International revealed Chinese trading firms allegedly lining up a shipment big enough for 2,500 missiles. So, all this means that the sodium perchlorate pipeline from March wasn't a one-off, it was a preview.

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, congressional Republicans, 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 aggressive military posture toward Taiwan and its massive military buildup in the South China Sea make strong U.S. alliances in the Indo-Pacific an urgent priority.

China claims enormous portions of the South China Sea are within its famous "nine-dash line," but in 2016 an international tribunal ruled that there was no legal basis for China's sweeping claims of historic rights beyond those allowed under international maritime law. Unsurprisingly, Beijing simply rejected the ruling, still claiming Taiwan as its territory, saying that roughly 90 percent of the South China Sea has belonged to them since "ancient times." They again pointed to waters within the "nine-dash line" that, oddly enough, appears only on Chinese maps. Maybe Xi Jinping would like to borrow Donald Trump's black Sharpie! :) Because of its staunch position, China has repeatedly pledged to take Taiwan "back," by force if necessary.

In any event, the scale of China's buildup is staggering. A Washington Post analysis estimated that the replacement value of Chinese military infrastructure on Hainan Island and across its South China Sea positions exceeded $50 billion as of 2022. About $15 billion of that was on its fortified artificial-island bases, which now feature long runways, hardened aircraft shelters, missiles, radars and other military infrastructure. Hainan – sometimes called China's Hawaii – serves as a major launching pad into the South China Sea, hosting warships, aircraft, missiles and submarines, including ballistic-missile submarines that carry nuclear weapons.

And China is still expanding. In August 2026, satellite imagery showed that Beijing had completed the first stage of reclamation at disputed Antelope Reef, creating a roughly six-kilometer artificial island with a harbor and indications of a future runway.

China has also developed an enormous state-supported maritime militia operating partly through ostensibly civilian fishing vessels. In December 2025, roughly 2,000 Chinese fishing boats assembled into enormous formations in the East China Sea. Weeks later, about 1,400 vessels formed another floating formation stretching more than 200 miles – demonstrating a remarkable ability to coordinate civilian vessels that could potentially obstruct shipping or support a blockade.

In May 2026, The Wall Street Journal reported that “about 200 Chinese fishing boats – part of China’s state-directed maritime fleet – recently pushed further east in the Yellow Sea. Some came within 150 miles of the Japanese city of Sasebo, home to a core U.S. naval base.”

The elaborate system being built is designed to allow China to restrict who has access to the Western Pacific – and it’s working. For decades, analysists 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, demonstrating the growing ability of the People’s Liberation Army Navy to project power thousands of kilometers from China.

Clearly, Beijing is steadily acquiring more ways to threaten, surveil and potentially deny access to U.S. and allied forces across a much larger area… which brings us to Taiwan. For years, China has used significant pressure to force Taiwan to accept its “One China” vision, which essentially gives China complete control of Taiwan.

Let's be crystal clear: We _cannot_ under any circumstances allow China to invade Taiwan. Period. Full stop.

There are multiple reasons this cannot happen. For one, a Chinese attack could pull Japan – and potentially the United States – into the conflict. Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi has said some Chinese military action against Taiwan could constitute a "survival-threatening situation" for Japan, potentially allowing Japanese military intervention.

While the U.S.-Japan security treaty does not automatically require America to enter a Taiwan war simply because Japan does, if China attacked Japanese territory or U.S. forces stationed in Japan, America's treaty obligations could come directly into play.

A Chinese invasion or blockade would also be an economic catastrophe since 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 one-third of global maritime shipping – trillions and trillions of dollars – passes through the South China Sea, making it one of the most important commercial waterways on Earth.

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.

Four years later, a 2026 Bloomberg Economics analysis estimated that a Chinese invasion of Taiwan that draws the United States into the conflict could cost the global economy $10.6 trillion – nearly 10 percent of worldwide GDP – in the first year alone. U.S. GDP could fall 6.6 percent. Much of the damage would come from losing access to Taiwan's semiconductor production, which currently accounts for roughly 62 percent of the world's cutting-edge logic chips. Even a yearlong blockade of Taiwan, without a full-scale war, could reduce global GDP by 5.3 percent and U.S. GDP by 3.2 percent.

But the strategic and human consequences could be even greater. A forcible takeover of democratic Taiwan would dramatically alter the military balance in East Asia and increase pressure on U.S. allies including Japan and the Philippines.

When Washington established diplomatic relations with Beijing in 1979, the United States recognized the People's Republic of China (PRC) government as the sole legal government of China. But it did not recognize Beijing's sovereignty over Taiwan. Instead, Washington merely "acknowledged" the Chinese position that Taiwan is part of China.

Congress simultaneously passed the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979 which 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. isn't automatically required to go to war if China attacks Taiwan, we are required to make defensive weapons available to Taiwan and maintain the capacity to resist force or coercion against it.

We cannot ignore the danger here. 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 billon 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.

Now, as of August 2026, the Trump/Vance administration is procrastinating on a $14 billion arms package to Taiwan – in addition to $30 billion of U.S. approved weapons to Taiwan that have yet to be delivered – enabling China and further undermining U.S. deterrence in the Indo-Pacific. We need to get these air-defense systems, missiles, drones and other weapons to Taiwan to strengthen deterrence and to allow Taiwan to defend itself against China when – not if – it comes to that.

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. 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 amid all the trade chaos, the Trump/Vance administration's actions still don't remotely resolve one of the fundamental complaints U.S. companies have about China: Beijing's heavily state-directed economic model gives favored Chinese companies advantages their market-based competitors don't enjoy.

When China joined the WTO in 2001, many Western policymakers hoped integration into the global trading system would push Beijing toward a more market-oriented economy. Instead, China remains heavily reliant on state-owned enterprises, industrial policy, preferential financing and government subsidies. WTO members continue to complain about inadequate subsidy transparency, state intervention and policies that contribute to global overcapacity.

Steel is a prime example. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Chinese steelmakers receive substantially more government support than competitors elsewhere. As Chinese domestic demand has weakened, more of that production has gone overseas: Chinese steel exports reached a record 131 million metric tons in 2025, putting additional pressure on manufacturers and prices around the world.

China's frustrating trade practices extend beyond subsidies. U.S. officials continue to raise concerns about forced or pressured technology transfers, discriminatory intellectual-property policies and alleged state-supported cyber theft of commercial information. China also manages its currency closely; although the U.S. Treasury does not currently label China a currency manipulator, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has concluded that the renminbi is undervalued in real terms.

These are precisely the kinds of problems that demand a coordinated response. The WTO provides a multilateral, rules-based trading system covering 166 countries and roughly 98 percent of world trade, along with mechanisms for challenging subsidies, discrimination and other violations.

And this may be an unusually good time to do so, because America is no longer alone in complaining about China's economic model. As trade with the United States weakened, China increasingly redirected exports elsewhere. In 2025, Chinese exports to the U.S. fell roughly 20 percent, while exports increased 8.4 percent to the European Union, 13.4 percent to ASEAN countries and 25.8 percent to Africa. China finished the year with a record trade surplus of nearly $1.2 trillion.

That means other countries are increasingly being asked to absorb China's surplus production. Cheap imports benefit consumers, but massive flows of subsidized goods can also squeeze domestic manufacturers, depress prices and discourage investment.

Europe has certainly noticed. At the July 2025 EU-China summit, European leaders told Xi Jinping that the trading relationship had become "critically unbalanced," citing manufacturing overcapacity, market distortions and unequal access to China's market. French President Emmanuel Macron subsequently warned that the imbalance was becoming unsustainable.

Then, in February 2026, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz delivered essentially the same message in Beijing. He called on China to reduce market-distorting subsidies and industrial overcapacity, open its markets further, allow greater flexibility in its currency and improve access to raw materials and critical minerals.

In other words, this is no longer just an American complaint. Many of China's major trading partners increasingly share the same concerns… which creates an opportunity. Rather than fighting its trading partners one by one, the United States should be building a coalition of market economies and using the WTO to confront Chinese subsidies, overcapacity and discriminatory trade practices collectively. There is strength in numbers – and when it comes to China, America has more potential allies than adversaries.

For example, the WTO could 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 the record tells a different story. 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."

A 2019 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). Historically, around 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. The Appellate Body effectively stopped functioning on December 11, 2019, when it fell below the three members needed to hear an appeal. 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 August 2026, the United States had blocked a motion to fill these vacancies 92 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 it make sense that a system in which the United States historically won the overwhelming majority of the cases it brought – including an extraordinary record against China – was effectively disabled in significant part by the United States itself?

Look, the WTO is far from perfect and there are legitimate concerns about judicial overreach, missed deadlines, and the body exceeding its mandate. But disabling the appeals system without replacing it with something better weakened one of the most useful mechanisms the United States had for holding China accountable.

Now is the time the United States should be leading an effort with Europe, Japan and other major trading partners to reform WTO dispute settlement, strengthen rules governing industrial subsidies and state-owned enterprises, and confront China collectively… you know… actually LEAD SOMETHING AGAIN!

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 report from the U.S. State Department's Global Engagement Center reveals that "the People's Republic of China (PRC) "spends billions of dollars annually on foreign information manipulation efforts. Beijing uses false or biased information to promote positive views of the PRC and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). At the same time, the PRC suppresses critical information that contradicts its desired narratives on issues such as Taiwan, its human rights practices, the

South China Sea, its domestic economy, and international economic engagement. More broadly, the PRC seeks to cultivate and uphold a global incentive structure that encourages foreign governments, elites, journalists, and civil society to accept its preferred narratives and avoid criticizing its conduct."

"The PRC's approach to information manipulation includes leveraging propaganda and censorship, promoting digital authoritarianism, exploiting international organizations and bilateral partnerships, pairing cooptation and pressure, and exercising control of Chinese-language media." The Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a right-of-center American think tank, put a dollar number to China's efforts: $10 billion.

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 – an American nonprofit global policy think tank, research institute, and public sector consulting firm – "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 Russian 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., Britian, 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.

Before the Iran war began on February 28, 2026, the United States was spending $2.6 billion *a day* on defense.

Military spending – which makes up over 3 percent of our GDP – is the largest individual area of federal discretionary spending, accounting for about 13 percent of all federal spending in 2025.

We spend more on our military – by far – than any other country on the planet. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), U.S. military spending represented 33 percent of all military expenditure worldwide in 2025. At $954 billion, the United States spent about 2.8 times as much as China, the world's second-largest military spender.

Nevertheless, Donald Trump, JD Vance, Pete Hegseth, 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."

That 50 percent increase would be, in inflation-adjusted terms, the largest defense budget ever – including what it was during World War II.

… yet weirdly, somehow, as the war with Iran uncovered, we didn't have enough munitions for *just that one fight*…. against an adversary that doesn't have even close to the capabilities we supposedly do. The claim about American munitions stockpiles that the U.S. president made in March 2026 – that they were "unlimited" and "higher or better than ever," and enough to fight "forever" – was a flat-out lie.

On April 23, 2026, The New York Times reported that "the United States has burned through around 1,100 of its long-range stealth cruise missiles built for a war with China, close to the total number remaining in the U.S. stockpile. The military has fired off more than 1,000 Tomahawk cruise missiles, roughly ten times the number it currently buys each year."

"The Pentagon used more than 1,200 Patriot interceptor missiles in the war, at more than $4 million a pop, and more than 1,000 Precision Strike and ATACMS ground-based missiles, leaving inventories worrisomely low, according to internal Defense Department estimates and congressional officials."

The situation has worsened considerably since then. The Washington Post reported on August 1st that "the top U.S. general in Europe privately warned the Pentagon that he lacks sufficient naval forces to continue protecting Israel from incoming ballistic missiles, officials said, illustrating how the ongoing Iran war has imposed constraints on the military. Gen. Alexus Grynkewich, the head of U.S. European Command, sent written notification to senior Pentagon officials saying that without another Navy destroyer he will be forced to choose defense of the United States 'homeland' over that of Israel, said the officials, who like some others spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the correspondence."

Five days later, The Atlantic's Nancy A. Youssef and Jonathan Lemire reported this: "The United States is running out of missiles. After five months of war with Iran, stockpiles of long-range weapons are so low, current and former U.S. defense officials told us, that they don't believe the U.S. has enough to combat a threat in Asia."

"The remaining supplies, depending on the munition, are as low as 20 percent of what the Pentagon would like to have in hand. And stores of sophisticated interceptor missiles, such as Patriots and Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missiles, are too depleted to give or sell the weapons to Ukraine or effectively defend against Iran's launch of ballistic missiles. Even when troops see Iranian missiles approaching, they are forced to decide in a matter of seconds whether to expend a limited number of interceptors or hope for the best, the defense officials told us."

On August 13th, The Washington Post reported that "the U.S. military has lost at least 45 MQ-9 Reaper drones during the war with Iran, or roughly 25 percent of its fleet, according to three U.S. officials familiar with the matter. The Reaper is used to conduct surveillance and targeted strikes, and it can cost between $30 million and $50 million depending on the type of sensors and weapons it carries, according to the Air Force. The potential taxpayer cost of recent losses is over $1.3 billion for that weapon system alone."

While the United States has "deep inventories" of less advanced munitions, according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies, those came with trade-offs: "Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM), for example, has the same precision and explosive yield as Tomahawk or Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile (JASSM). However, it is short-ranged and requires aircraft to overfly adversary territory, resulting in greater vulnerability and potentially greater losses."

Meaning, the warplanes that carry them have to get close to their target, which obviously puts them at far greater risk.

Our diminished stockpile of weapons – particularly air-defense interceptors – is a key reason further escalation against Iran has been repeatedly taken off the table. In July, the Trump/Vance administration effectively acknowledged that constraint when President Trump halted a nearly two-week renewed bombing campaign against Iran.

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.

The munitions 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 heck 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. According to the Pentagon, 90 percent of missiles come from just three sources.

You can just imagine what this lack of competition does to costs. Incidentally, 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.

There are really disturbing things about this reality, but one of the biggest is that Russia and China are just sitting by, licking their chops… because the very long-range missiles we would use against them – like say if China invaded Taiwan – are the very ones we've burned through in Iran.

So, now let's circle back to money. At the time The New York Times published its April 23rd article, White House officials had refused to provide a comprehensive estimate of the cost of the war, while two independent groups put the price at between $28 billion and $35 billion – just under $1 billion a day. Defense officials told lawmakers that the military had burned through $5.6 billion in munitions in the first two days alone.

The administration's own estimates subsequently crept upward. Pentagon comptroller Jay Hurst put the cost at $25 billion on April 29th and $29 billion on May 12th. In late June, OMB Director Russell Vought said roughly $30 billion had been spent. Then, in late July, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth put the figure at $37.5 billion.

We now know the cost was higher. In September, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimated that the war had already cost about $38 billion through August 1st and was continuing to cost another $2 billion to $3 billion every month. Then U.S. Central Command provided Congress with an even newer estimate: at least $43.6 billion through September 3rd, including roughly $28 billion just to replace munitions already expended and another $4.3 billion in lost or damaged equipment.

And even that $43.6 billion figure is not the full bill. There is the *expensive weapons stockpiles depletion* situation, but this number also doesn't include the future cost of repairing or rebuilding U.S. military bases damaged by Iranian attacks. A Pentagon inspector general report found that Iran had damaged or destroyed hundreds of buildings and other structures at American bases across Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Oman and Jordan. Dozens of American aircraft and drones were also damaged or destroyed, while U.S. diplomatic facilities sustained an estimated $184 million in damage – meaning the ultimate cost will include not only what we have already spent, but billions more to replenish weapons and repair damaged infrastructure (more on this later).

That helps explain the enormous additional funding requests. Just days before Vought put the war's cost at roughly $30 billion, the White House requested another $67.1 billion for the Defense Department, including $21 billion for munitions, $17.3 billion for operational costs and $12.1 billion for classified programs. By July, Hegseth was defending still more defense funding before Congress.

Since the September 11 attacks, Congress has given the Pentagon well over *$15 trillion* for military spending.

... which 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 reduced the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency's (CISA) workforce by roughly 1,000 people through layoffs, buyouts, resignations, contract cuts and eliminated positions; 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 fired dozens of employees 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, again, *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.

Throughout the years, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) has found things like this: "In 2014, Congress authorized the creation of the Iraq Train and Equip Fund (ITEF) to provide equipment and other assistance to Iraq's security forces, including the Kurdistan Regional Government forces, to counter the expansion of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. As of December 2016, DoD had disbursed about $2 billion of the $2.3 billion Congress appropriated for ITEF in fiscal years 2015 and 2016 to purchase, for example, personal protective equipment, weapons, and vehicles for these forces."

However – hear this – *the Pentagon had no idea where many of these shipments ultimately landed*. According to the GAO, "DoD could not fully account for ITEF-funded equipment transfers because of missing or incomplete transfer documentation. Without timely and accurate transit information, DoD could not ensure that the equipment had reached its intended destination, nor could program managers conduct effective oversight of ITEF-funded equipment."

In 2015, in what I'm guessing was an effort to clean this mess up, consultants from management consulting firm McKinsey and Co. and members of the Defense Business Board – a group that provides senior leaders at the Department of Defense (DoD) independent advice on business management issues – found that DoD could save $125 billion over five years... an assertion that inherently implied there was $125 billion being wasted there.

The report revealed the Pentagon was spending almost a quarter of its then $580 billion budget on overhead and operations (think human resources, accounting, logistics and property management), and that the agency was paying 1,014,000 contractors, civilians and uniformed personnel to fill administrative-type jobs in support of just 1.3 million active-duty troops, the fewest number of troops in 75 years.

Even though the study was commissioned by President Obama's Deputy Defense Secretary Robert Work, Pentagon leaders ultimately buried the results, placing secrecy restrictions on it and removing it from its website …. which is a strange reaction because members of the Defense Business Board warned them about the possible ramifications from the start.

The Washington Post reported that Kenneth Klepper, the former chief executive of Medco Health Solutions, told Robert Work that he was "about to turn on the light in a very dark room" and that "all the crap was going to float to the surface and stink the place up." To which Work replied, "Do it."

After seeing the jarring results of the study, however, Work changed his tune, making excuses like, "We will never be as efficient as a commercial organization. We're the largest bureaucracy in the world. There's going to be some inherent inefficiencies in that" – a statement that was not encouraging for those of us who hope for a more efficient Defense Department.

The final report included a "clear path" for savings that should be achieved not through civil servant or military personnel layoffs but by focusing on streamlining bureaucracy, offering early retirements, reducing the number of high-priced contractors, and embracing information technology (remember, this was 2015).

Have things improved? Over <u>TEN</u> years later, The Department of Defense (DOD) remains on the Government Accountability Office High Risk List because of, among other things, persistent financial management vulnerabilities, weapons acquisition challenges, and a massive infrastructure maintenance backlog.

Yep. Even though the DoD's financial management practices have been on the GAO's High-Risk List since 1995 – yes, you did the math right, that's <u>OVER</u> <u>30</u> <u>YEARS</u> – it <u>still</u> has major issues: "DOD's financial management is hampered by ineffective processes, aging systems, and inadequate controls; incomplete corrective action plans; and insufficient monitoring and reporting. Further, DOD has not taken effective steps to manage its interrelated fraud risks, including developing and implementing a robust fraud risk management program."

Another GAO report put it this way: "Although DoD's spending makes up about half of the federal government's discretionary spending, and its physical assets represent more than 70 percent of the federal government's physical assets, it remains the only major agency that has never been able to accurately account for and report on its spending or physical assets. DOD's financial management issues extend beyond financial reporting as long-standing control deficiencies adversely affect the economy, efficiency, and effectiveness of its operations."

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."

There are two other major problems beyond wasteful spending: 1) the status quo seems to be so entrenched in the old-school, traditional way of doing things – clinging to antiquated philosophies, concepts, assumptions, and tactics – that they have been slow to anticipate and adapt to new realities, and 2) many people in Washington have fought hard to preserve the military industrial base.

Let's start with that last one first. U.S. defense contractors spent a whopping $190,998,142 to lobby Congress in 2025. 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.

In FY2025, federal defense agencies obligated approximately $491 billion in contracts, accounting for more than 60 percent of the roughly $793 billion in contract obligations across the entire federal government. Lockheed Martin alone reported $49.4 billion in net sales to the U.S. government in 2023, representing about 73 percent of the company's total sales that year. (incidentally, Lockheed Martin has spent $356,735,302 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 *super* *expensive* bombers, helicopters, Super Hornets, Growlers, HIJENKS, B-21 Raiders, F-47/NGAD, Lightning IIs, LRHW Dark Eagles, PAC-3, F-15EX Eagle II, Block V subs, 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 is 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 their Article I powers, hold extensive constitutional authority over military and defense policy – off the hook from asking the truly critical questions.

Questions like: Can our military handle simultaneous, competing threats around the world? 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 A.I., robotics, directed-energy weapons, and space-based systems? What types of missions will hypersonic weapons be used for, and are they even 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 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."

Unfortunately, in July 2026 the Government Accountability Office (GAO) reported that "the Navy is currently 24 months behind in its efforts to modernize three DDG 1000 Zumwalt class destroyers to host the Conventional Prompt Strike (CPS) hypersonic missile as part of its surface strike mission" – and continues to face significant challenges.

Nevertheless, "DoD is planning to invest at least $50 billion into developing, testing, producing, and fielding CPS capability across several programs," even though the department "does not have a comprehensive strategy across all programs that ensures that each program's investments achieve CPS's common objectives."

"Without a comprehensive investment strategy that includes more formal coordination," they warn, "the Army and Navy are not well-positioned to make timely and efficient investments in key areas, such as addressing shortfalls on their shared production lines or ensuring the economical sustainment and performance of the DDG 1000."

Oh, for the love of %$#%. You have GOT to be kidding me with this.

This is downright ridiculous. We have spent an obscene amount of money on this already. What due diligence is being done to justify this program? What are the accountability procedures, beyond DoD simply ignoring the GAO's recommendations? 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?

We have got to get with the program, people – and *force* the U.S. Department of Defense to *do better*. War is clearly evolving, BIG TIME. As we learned the hard way, 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 itself and $690 million for its missiles).

Clearly, our military and defense strategies *must* evolve as quickly as possible… which means 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.

It goes without saying that 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, Marco Rubio, and Pete Hegseth 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.

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.

But our leaders still don't seem to get it. 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… and the military in particular seems to be having an exceptionally difficult time keeping up with the times.

The Wall Street Journal reported back 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.

Even though Silicon Valley has been pouring tons of money into this – looking for that sweet military-industrial complex cash – almost a year later the WSJ reported that, in April and May 2026, Ukrainian drone operators easily spotted and defeated American troops and armored vehicles during a military exercise in Germany called Combined Resolve. "Ukrainian drones were doing this so quickly that they had to be sent back into the exercises as new units, or 're-spawned,' to keep the exercise going, a U.S. official briefed on the drill said."

… and what was the Pete Hegseth-led military's response? To shut down the U.S. Army's new 600-member "Unmanned Assault Battalion" that was established in January 2026 to master drone and ground robot warfare. Specifically, the new battalion was supposed to learn tactics and skills from Ukraine's fight against Russia and apply them to the U.S. military.

Even though General Christopher LaNeve – the acting chief of staff of the Army who replaced General Randy George after he was fired by Pete Hegseth – vowed the Army would establish units to advance cyber, electronic-warfare and A.I. technologies, he shuttered the specialized drone unit so the Army could "refocus on its core warfighting tasks as an airborne infantry battalion." Pete and LaNeve think our military should go "back-to-basics" – evidently meaning the 1950s.

But they aren't the only ones. The FY2026 defense appropriations process included more than $300 million in unrequested Humvee-related procurement and upgrades. Congress also ultimately provided $240 million for additional MQ-1C Gray Eagle drones, even though Army leaders had announced plans to stop buying what they called "obsolete" Gray Eagles, and $360 million for additional AH-64E Apache aircraft that were not included in the Army's FY2026 request.

At one stage of the appropriations process, the House and Senate bills contained a combined $52.2 billion in 1,403 "program increases" above the Pentagon's weapons request, according to an analysis by Taxpayers for Common Sense. This came after Congress had enacted $156.2 billion in mandatory defense funding through the One Big Beautiful Bill Act in July 2025.

Congress forcing the military to spend money on weapons and equipment it hasn't requested is nothing new. During the post-Iraq War drawdown, for example, the Army repeatedly sought to pause production and upgrades of the Abrams tank, only to have Congress continue funding them, in part to preserve the tank-production industrial base.

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.

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, as we now have seen in Iran, they have been the wrong ones.

In The New York Times *Overmatched* series, it was reported 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.

From the report "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."

But here we go again. Donald Trump is building a "Golden Fleet" of 15 nuclear-powered battleships that the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimates will be at least 50 percent more expensive than the original estimate. The total cost now stands at $275 billion. The first ship – that will have Donald's name plastered all over it, naturally – is estimated to cost $23.4 billion, making it the most expensive warship ever built, with the next 14 ships averaging $18 billion.

Incidentally, even though the Navy's new aircraft carriers are in various stages of development, our president has decided he wants a major redesign of them, to look more like those from World War II… a change that could cost billions. Even before this brilliant design idea, our president issued a national security memorandum directing the Navy to replace electromagnetic catapult systems on future aircraft carriers with steam catapults. This redesign will also add billions to the cost.

Our president also thinks the Golden Dome missile-defense system is a fabulous idea. Although the Trump/Vance administration initially put its cost at about $175 billion, the CBO has since estimated that an illustrative missile-defense architecture capable of meeting the administration's stated objectives could cost $1.2 trillion over 20 years.

Let's be clear: This is *not* a fabulous idea. For one, don't let the name fool you. Golden Dome has faced serious criticism from physicists, arms-control experts and budget analysts who question its cost, feasibility and strategic consequences – mainly because even an enormously expensive system like this can't provide an impenetrable shield against a large Russian or Chinese nuclear attack.

Then there are the basic laws of physics. Golden Dome's proposed space-based interceptors would have only minutes to detect and destroy an ICBM during its boost phase, potentially requiring thousands of orbiting interceptors. Russia and China could simply counter the system by building more missiles and warheads, deploying decoys and other countermeasures, or attacking Golden Dome's satellites and communications systems.

Meanwhile, while our leaders have, for decades, been recklessly relying on extremely expensive missiles and munitions – – and 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 laser focused on investing in new strategies and technologies to exploit our weaknesses and vulnerabilities, which they have been doing now for decades.

The implications of this 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.

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 imageable, 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, as we've already covered, we're not making much 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 around 6,000 individual foreign-sourced components across its weapons programs, and there are zero U.S. weapon systems and/or military platforms that have no foreign parts.

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. >

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 roughly 195 generally recognized sovereign states in the world. We have an estimated 3,700 nuclear warheads in our military stockpile (1,477 are retired and awaiting dismantlement).

If you take only our 1,770 deployed warheads – 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 9 *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 1,760 deployed warheads rather than 1,770? … which is a difference of *billions* of dollars in our bank account?

We already know that the global nuclear arms competition is the ultimate Prisoner's Dilemma, where two adversaries would both be better off if each limits its arsenal, yet neither can be certain the other will commit to the same restraint. So, each believes they must maintain or even increase its military capabilities rather than risk falling behind. The result is that individually rational decisions can produce a collectively worse outcome, as both sides spend more and potentially increase the danger to themselves.

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 declined the offer and the New START Treaty officially expired on February 5, 2026 – ending more than half a century in which U.S.-Soviet/Russian strategic arms control agreements imposed negotiated constraints on their nuclear forces. We have now returned to a world that has virtually 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. The global inventory has fallen by more than 80 percent from a Cold War peak of roughly 70,000 warheads in the mid-1980s, to an estimated 12,187 at the beginning of 2026, and of the over fifty nation states that could have worked toward a nuclear option, only nine 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 February 3, 2021, Presidents Biden and Putin agreed to extend the New START Treaty through February 5, 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 has conducted critical nuclear-weapons experiments, and the United States has now accused China of doing so as well. In February 2026, U.S. officials alleged that China secretly conducted a very-low-yield underground nuclear explosive test at Lop Nur in June 2020 and employed techniques intended to conceal its seismic signature. China denies the allegation, and international monitoring data have not independently established that the event was a nuclear explosion. But the evidence and China's lack of transparency certainly demand serious concern. That said, 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's abdication of leadership regarding the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, the New START Treaty, and nuclear testing could not have come at a worse time…. especially since the world's authoritarian dictators clearly don't take anyone in the administration seriously.

For example, in October 2025, President Trump practically begged Kim Jong Un to meet with him on a swing through Asia. The answer was no. Then in August 2026, after he scaled back military drills with South Korea – giving Kim Jong Un a huge gift on a silver platter – the U.S. president boasted about his friendship and "very good relationship" with Kim, adding that they "understand" one other. He also claimed, without evidence, that the North Korean leader had responded "positively" to his request for a meeting by the end of the year. Again, there was the sound of crickets from North Korea.

This is not good. 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, despite what Donald Trump would like the world to believe, the June 12, 2018 "summit" (read: photo op) between Kim Jong Un and Donald Trump during Trump's first term didn't go quite as planned.

You know the one, where an American president met with a brutal tyrant 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 there's fervor. You don't show fervor in North Korea you get your head chopped off. What *is* it with this man's fascination with dictators? >

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. Pyongyang is now estimated to have around 60 assembled nuclear warheads in its stockpile and enough fissile material to produce at least 30 more, while continuing to produce additional fissile material.

The 2025 Annual Threat Assessment confirmed that Kim "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.

Four months later, Kim 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.

By April 2026, IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi had announced there had been a "very serious" expansion in North Korea's nuclear weapons production capabilities, including heightened activity at the Yongbyon nuclear site (which has a 5-megawatt reactor, a light water reactor, and reprocessing units).

< 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. >

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, China was estimated to have around 240 nuclear warheads, but that number is changing quickly. In its December 2025 assessment, the Pentagon estimated that China's nuclear stockpile remained in the low 600s and that the country was on track to possess more than 1,000 warheads by 2030. The Federation of American Scientists' current 2026 estimate puts China's stockpile at approximately 620 warheads (34 deployed strategic warheads and 586 reserve or nondeployed warheads).

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 grossly underqualified, 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 20 months into President Trump’s second term, he had authorized military operations in seven nations – Iran, Iraq, Somalia, Syria, Yemen, Nigeria and Venezuela, where U.S. forces captured President Nicolás Maduro, removed him from power, and declared that the United States would now “run” the country. He threatened to use military force to take control of Greenland; threatened military action in Colombia; pressed Mexico to allow American forces to participate in operations against suspected fentanyl labs; and directed a campaign of lethal strikes against suspected “drug smugglers” at sea that, at the one year mark, had killed at least 227 people in 68 strikes in the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific – while providing zero evidence substantiating the government’s claims about many of those targeted (leading to the strikes being heavily questioned by the UN and legal experts).

Across his two terms, Trump had ordered military strikes in 10 countries – more countries than any other U.S. president in the post-9/11 era. In 2025 alone, the Trump/Vance administration carried out 658 air and drone strikes, nearly as many as the 694 conducted during President Biden’s entire four-year term.

All this, even though Donald Trump 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 interventionalists 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 United States that placed significant restrictions on Iran’s nuclear program. < Note: China, Russia, France, Germany and the United Kingdom all remained in the JCPOA after President Trump withdrew the United States from the agreement in 2018. >

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. As sanctions were lifted under the JCPOA, Iran regained access to billions of dollars *of its own* previously restricted assets abroad. Separately, the United States paid Iran $1.7 billion to settle a decades-old legal claim stemming from money Iran had paid the United States for military equipment before the 1979 Iranian Revolution that was never delivered. The $1.7 billion consisted of $400 million in Iranian funds held in a Foreign Military

Sales account and approximately $1.3 billion to settle Iran's claim for accrued interest, which was paid from the U.S. Treasury's Judgment Fund. Because sanctions effectively prevented a normal dollar-denominated transfer to Iran, the settlement was paid in foreign currency and delivered in cash. The initial $400 million was transported by air, with the remaining roughly $1.3 billion subsequently disbursed in two additional installments.

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 300 kilograms of low-enriched uranium; agreed not to enrich uranium beyond 3.67 percent; and agreed that, for 15 years, uranium enrichment would take place only at Natanz. Iran's Fordow facility would remain open but would no longer enrich uranium or contain nuclear material. Most importantly, Iran accepted an extensive monitoring and verification regime that gave the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) substantially greater access to and information about Iran's nuclear program.

And make no mistake: Despite President Trump's claims that Iran had violated the agreement, when he withdrew the United States from the JCPOA the IAEA was reporting that Iran was implementing its nuclear-related commitments.

On May 9, 2018 – one day after President Trump announced the U.S. withdrawal – IAEA Director General Yukiya Amano stated that "Iran is subject to the world's most robust nuclear verification regime under the JCPOA, which is a significant verification gain." He added: "*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 Donald Trump specialty.

Now operating alone, the first Trump administration tried a "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran, imposing economic sanctions against the country, individuals, companies, and financial institutions that did business with Iran. While the U.S. sanctions did have a devastating effect, they did not deliver the knockout blow the administration envisioned. At least fourteen banks continued to do business with Tehran.

The U.S. also designated the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organization – the first time the United States had applied that designation to part of another government – and seized Iranian petroleum cargoes aboard foreign-flagged vessels. Iran seized foreign oil tankers and shot down a U.S. surveillance drone, while the United States destroyed what it said was an Iranian drone that had threatened the USS Boxer. The U.S. also deployed additional forces to the Persian Gulf region, including Saudi Arabia, as confrontations in and around the Strait of Hormuz intensified.

But the worst part was that Iran wasted little time getting back into the nuclear bomb-making business – with gusto. Beginning in 2019, Iran progressively exceeded the JCPOA limit on its enriched-uranium stockpile, eventually breaching its 3.67 percent enrichment ceiling and expanding its use of advanced centrifuges. By September 2020, the IAEA reported that Iran possessed more than 2,100 kilograms of enriched uranium, many times the amount permitted under the agreement. These actions helped Iran significantly reduce its "breakout time," the estimated time it would need to produce enough weapons-grade uranium for a nuclear weapon.

By 2020, Iran was also moving critical nuclear infrastructure underground. Following the destruction of an above-ground centrifuge-assembly facility at Natanz, Iran began constructing a deeply buried replacement complex in the mountains south of the site, making important parts of its nuclear program substantially harder to destroy from the air.

This entire ordeal escalated even further with the January 2020 U.S. drone assassination of Maj. Gen. Qassem 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. Two days after he was killed, Iran announced that it would no longer observe the JCPOA's operational limits on centrifuges, enrichment capacity, enrichment levels or its enriched-uranium stockpile.

Then after the November 2020 assassination of Iranian nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh in an attack Iran attributed to Israel, Iran enacted legislation accelerating its nuclear activities. In January 2021, it began enriching uranium to 20 percent at Fordow, an underground facility where the JCPOA had prohibited enrichment altogether. Iran eventually enriched uranium to 60 percent, far above the JCPOA's 3.67 percent ceiling and much closer to weapons-grade material.

Another thing the 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 United States attempted to invoke the UN "snapback" mechanism to restore sanctions on Iran. Britain, France and Germany rejected the attempt, arguing that the United States could no longer use the mechanism after withdrawing from the JCPOA. China and Russia agreed, and 13 of the Security Council's 15 members rejected the U.S. position.

Earlier that same month, the Security Council had rejected a U.S. proposal to extend UN restrictions on conventional-arms transfers involving Iran. The vote was striking: Only the United States and Dominican Republic voted in favor; China and Russia voted against; and the other 11 members – including Britain, France and Germany – abstained.

Cut to June 22, 2025, when the confrontation reached an entirely different level. During the 12-day Israel-Iran war, the United States launched Operation Midnight Hammer, directly attacking Iran's Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan nuclear facilities. Seven B-2 stealth bombers dropped 14 30,000-pound GBU-57 bunker-busting bombs, while a U.S. submarine launched more than two dozen Tomahawk missiles. The strikes came during an Israeli campaign that also targeted Iran's nuclear infrastructure, senior military officials and nuclear scientists.

Next, of course, came Operation Epic Fury.

Regardless of what happens from here, the Trump/Vance administration's decision to launch a war of choice was a mistake of epic proportions (at least they got one of the words in the name of the operation right!). Let's just call this what it is: an unmitigated disaster.

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 buy-in of the American people, but Republicans will have to answer for that in the next few elections. >

Even if you disregard 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 the Caribbean Sea and the Eastern Pacific Ocean, where they conducted lethal and illegal boat strikes, and Venezuela, where they illegally abducted a head of state, but Operation Epic Fury is another ballgame altogether.

Regardless of what you think of Iran or Venezuela, the United Nations Charter – which the U.S. Senate overwhelmingly approved in 1945 and President Truman ratified on behalf of the United States – requires member states to refrain from the threat or use of force "against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations." (Iran and Venezuela both joined the UN in 1945 as two of the original founding members and remain full members today.)

The Charter does recognize exceptions, most importantly the right of individual or collective self-defense and military action authorized by the UN Security Council. But absent a valid legal justification under the Charter, using military force to overthrow another country's government would violate the Charter's prohibition on the use of force and its foundational principles of state sovereignty and political independence. Likewise, using force in another state's territory to attack its political leadership must have a valid basis under international law; the fact that the intended target is a head of state does not, by itself, create an exception to the Charter.

< I understand there are those who would argue that there were "valid legal justifications" for the recent violence in the Caribbean Sea and the Eastern Pacific Ocean, Venezuela and Iran – I just vehemently disagree. In the Caribbean Sea and the Eastern Pacific Ocean, the Trump/Vance administration ordered the execution of people who were not at war with the U.S. and who were not afforded due process. In Venezuela, the Trump/Vance administration launched the military operation under false pretenses. In Iran, the non-violent JCPOA *was working* before Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew the United States, plus the administration's 2026 self-defense claims make no sense because there was no imminent threat from Iran (more on this in a minute). >

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 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 by 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 <u>ZERO</u> reason we had to attack Iran when we did – *<u>right now</u>, <u>right this second</u>*. 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.

This entire fiasco makes us look like complete amateurs. 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, kablow" 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."

We look ridiculous. It's embarrassing and horrifying in equal measure. 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.

And now we are stuck in yet another astronomically expensive quagmire in the Middle East.

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."

Inevitably, 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.

As concerning, 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, as the polls earlier in the chapter revealed. Our influence and legitimacy continue to rapidly erode.

It's true that by operational standards, the Operation Epic Fury initial military strikes achieved substantial successes. But more than six months in, Iran's nuclear and ballistic-missile programs have been severely degraded, not destroyed. Kenneth Pollack, a former CIA analyst who is vice president for policy at the Middle East Institute, summed it up nicely for the Wall Street Journal: "The Iranians have shown a remarkable ability to innovate and reconstitute their forces quickly. They are a much more formidable opponent than most Middle East militaries other than the Israelis."

But what the United States has or has not blown up 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 the 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, and congressional Republicans 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.

The Trump/Vance administration has now replaced military action with an economic one called "Operation Economic Outcast" (insert: eyeroll emoji) – – which begs the question, why didn't they just do that in the first place – – but it will likely also fail since Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent named severing Iran's economic lifelines and pushing it toward global isolation as goals, but failed to articulate how long the campaign will last, what would constitute success, and precisely what conditions Washington would accept as an end state.

Not to mention that the Islamic Republic's leaders have had experience withstanding American sanctions for decades. In fact, the government, says Ali Madanizadeh, the economy minister, "has been planning to confront U.S. sanctions for a long time and is fully prepared for new sanctions." He even alluded to a secret two-year plan they have in place for dealing with harsher sanctions.

Plus, as The Wall Street Journal points out, "the experience of Western sanctions and economic pressure on autocracies such as Cuba, North Korea, Venezuela and Syria shows the challenges facing Washington in trying to bend Tehran to its will. Indeed, the strongmen ruling such countries have historically used a mix of violence, economic adaptation and political suppression that enables them to withstand economic pain for years, if not decades. Autocratic countries adapt in various ways. Sanctions typically push activity underground, creating flourishing black markets for goods, services and even people. Dictators also use outside pressure to rally their populations, especially among elites."

In the end, the success of "Operation Economic Outcast" will depend largely on whether the Trump/Vance administration can convince Iran's main trade partners – above all China, but also countries such as Turkey, Iraq and Russia – to join. This looks to be easier said than done. Beijing, which buys the overwhelming majority of Iran's oil exports and has long maintained economic ties with Tehran despite U.S. sanctions, has already denounced the new measures and said it would "take all necessary measures to firmly safeguard its own rights and interests."

Iran is already warning Gulf states against participating in the new sanctions campaign. Its new national security chief, Mohsen Rezaei, has threatened the interests of Gulf states if they join the American pressure campaign and warned that Tehran would seek to prevent "even a single drop of oil" from leaving the Persian Gulf. He also said that any country that becomes a partner in imposing economic restrictions on Iran would be regarded as an enemy.

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; protecting the Iranian people; creating an opening for regime change; "getting back" at them for trying to "kill" Donald Trump; Iran's past transgressions against America; and even achieving "world peace" in general – after almost seven months of bombastic threats, scorched-earth bombing, whipsawed markets, panicked allies, and widespread civilian terror, <u>*nothing*</u> has been accomplished. <u>*Literally*</u> <u>*nothing*</u>.

In fact, in many ways Iran now has *more* advantages than it had before the conflict began. Two months *before* the war started, 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 *after* the war started, Iran had learned they had the power to inflict substantial global economic pain by weaponizing the Strait of Hormuz – which is more 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.

On September 4, 2026, The New York Times reported that “Iran has grown more confident in its ability to attack targets in the Middle East and appears determined to continue the conflict for months to frustrate the United States, according to U.S. intelligence reports in recent weeks.”

“The intelligence reports, according to people who have read them, suggest that Iran’s hardline government might be contemplating a significant escalation. Iran has emerged from months of the on-again, off-again war with a far better understanding of its military strengths and is more sure of its capabilities, according to officials briefed on the intelligence.”

The article continues: “U.S. officials also believe that Iran-linked hackers were most likely responsible for cyberattacks on more than 100 water systems throughout the United States in late July. Though there were no indications any system was degraded in a way that made water unsafe to drink, the attacks in some cases led to disruptions that required manual overrides and precautionary boil-water advisories.” < Naturally, the president of the United States blamed Minnesota Democratic governor Tim Walz for the cyberattack on his state’s own water systems – without an ounce of evidence, of course. >

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 particularly close to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), reinforcing the growing influence of Iran’s security establishment over the country’s leadership. And unsurprisingly, the Iranian leaders are even angrier and more resentful than they were before the United States and Israel – in the case of Mojtaba Khamenei – killed his father, mother, wife, at least one of his sons, his sister, her husband, and their young daughter.

In fact, The New York Times reports that “American intelligence agencies believe that Iran’s new supreme leader, Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, is far more interested than his father and predecessor in pursuing a nuclear weapon, according to officials briefed on the assessments. Ayatollah Khamenei’s father, who was killed at the start of the war in an Israeli attack aided by U.S. intelligence, had sworn off developing a nuclear weapon. While American officials long asserted that Iran wanted to be capable of building a nuclear weapon, many believed Ayatollah Ali Khamenei’s hesitancy was genuine.”

“U.S. intelligence agencies believe that Mojtaba Khamenei and the harder-line government that emerged after the United States and Israel killed many of Iran’s previous leaders have ambitions to develop advanced nuclear weaponry… If the U.S.-Israeli war has made Tehran more, rather than less, likely to pursue a nuclear weapon, it would amount to one more grave consequence of the killing of the supreme leader and the steps toward regime change the Trump administration initially pursued.”

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 its political and military systems contain layered and overlapping centers of authority, along with constitutional and institutional mechanisms designed to preserve continuity after the death or incapacitation of senior leaders. As a result, removing individual officials – even those at the very top – does not necessarily dismantle the system itself.

This tracks with a classified report by the National Intelligence Council – completed about a week before the U.S. and Israel launched their 2026 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.

Meanwhile, there is no agreement requiring Iran to end its support for regional armed groups, including the Houthis, Hamas and

Hezbollah. These groups have continued carrying out attacks across the region throughout the war, including Houthi missile and drone strikes in Yemen and the Red Sea, Hezbollah drone attacks against Israeli forces, and attacks by Hamas and other Palestinian militants in Gaza.

Globally, the war has metastasized into a full-blown international crisis, with more than a dozen countries subjected to attacks, military operations, or other direct consequences of the fighting, while several others have been reluctantly pulled into supporting roles. Early on, the U.S. sank 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 were driven from their homes in Lebanon at the height of the crisis, and more than 330,000 remain displaced across Lebanon today. The U.S. military targeted Iranian-backed militias so – just like that – we were back in combat in Iraq. An Iranian-backed 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 Gulf allies have been royally screwed by this entire mess. Even though many of them tried hard in the months leading to Operation Epic Fury to get the Trump/Vance administration to understand the dire consequences of an all-out war in Iran, they now face weakened economies, major oil market disruptions and massive regional instability, not to mention bombed out energy infrastructure that will take years and years and billions and billions to rebuild.

A Congressional Research Service report found that Iran fired more than 6,700 drones and missiles at Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states between February 28 and May 17 alone. All six GCC countries were attacked. In its April regional outlook, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) projected GCC economic growth of just 2 percent in 2026 – a 2.3-percentage-point downward revision from its October 2025 forecast. By July, economists surveyed by Reuters had downgraded most Gulf economies again as hopes for a rapid normalization of shipping through the Strait of Hormuz faded.

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; tourists have cancelled; expats are rethinking their futures; and real-estate deals are on hold. During the initial weeks of fighting, the World Travel & Tourism Council estimated that the war was costing the region around $600 million *a day* in lost tourism revenue.

Dubai billionaire Khalaf Ahmad Al Habtoor, chairman of the Al Habtoor Group, gave voice to that anger when he addressed President Trump in a post on X: “Who gave you the authority to drag our region into a war with Iran? And on what basis did you make this dangerous decision? You have placed the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Arab countries at the heart of a danger they did not choose.” He ended with this: “Who gave you permission to turn our region into a battlefield?”

And now – regardless of what happens from here – our allies are stuck with an empowered, resentful, defiant, and extremely ticked-off Iran that has nothing to lose.

Then there’s the fate of Iran’s stockpile of highly enriched uranium (HEU) – which is far (FAR!) from resolved. In the last verified inventory from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) before the June 2025 strikes, the agency estimated that Iran possessed 440.9 kilograms – roughly 970 pounds – of uranium enriched to 60 percent. The IAEA believed that most of it, though less than 70 percent, was stored in an Isfahan tunnel complex (satellite imagery from June 2025 appeared to show a truck moving blue barrels – possibly overpacked HEU containers – into the Isfahan tunnel complex). IAEA Director General Grossi had said publicly that Iran’s HEU was held across Isfahan, Natanz, and Fordow.

Although it’s impossible to know with certainty the extent of the damage done to Iran’s nuclear program during Operation Midnight Hammer – the June 2025 assault by the U.S and Israel – a convincing consensus seems to be that the military strikes destroyed and/or rendered inoperable 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 two ventilation shafts (two additional GBU-57s hit Natanz). The intelligence evidently suggests that the attack destroyed perhaps thousands of nuclear centrifuges at the deepest levels of Fordow (estimated to be over 250 feet under a mountain), although, again, 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 was taken out completely – even though Natanz had been targeted by Israel for days and was finally hit with two Massive Ordnance Penetrator bombs. By March 2026, even with the new U.S. and Israeli strikes, U.S. intelligence officials told The New York Times that Iran or others could now get to Iran's primary store of highly enriched uranium that had been buried under Isfahan through a very narrow access point (the uranium is in gas form and stored in canisters).

Of course, before Operation Midnight Hammer, Iran's nuclear capabilities reached much further than Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan and, even though it appears Iran lost many of its nuclear scientists in the June 2025 Israel-Iran war, it still likely had the knowledge and sophistication to rebuild. To that end, by September 2025, satellite imagery was picking up signs of new construction underway at Pickaxe Mountain – a location that has never been attacked, mainly because it's estimated to be 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.

The massive underground complex, located about a mile south of Natanz, has also never been inspected by the IAEA, so there is no way to know exactly what is inside. Iran claims Pickaxe was constructed to replace an advanced centrifuge assembly facility destroyed in 2020, but outside experts believe it's large enough to accommodate considerably more – potentially including centrifuge production and assembly, uranium enrichment, storage, and other nuclear-related activities. HOW'S THE JCPOA LOOKING ABOUT NOW, AMERICA?

I was going to try to just move past this, but I simply cannot let the firehose of lies that spew from Donald Trump, JD Vance, Marco Rubio, Pete Hegseth and most of the rest of this administration go. After Operation Midnight Hammer targeted Iranian nuclear facilities in June 2025, President Trump and others in the administration swore to the American people that Tehran's nuclear program had been "totally obliterated."

President Trump said this over and over and over: "Iran's key nuclear enrichment facilities have been completely and totally obliterated" AND "Monumental Damage" has been done to "all Nuclear sites in Iran… Obliteration is an accurate term!" AND "It was my great honor to Destroy All Nuclear facilities & capability" AND "THE NUCLEAR SITES IN IRAN ARE COMPLETELY DESTROYED!"

On NBC's Meet the Press, JD Vance said: "We destroyed the Iranian nuclear program." Afterward, he qualified that somewhat, saying, "I think we set that program back substantially," but days later, he again said that Iran's nuclear program had been destroyed and was no longer capable of producing a nuclear weapon. Marco Rubio said of the damage beneath Fordow: "This was complete and total obliteration."

At a Pentagon briefing, Pete Hegseth said, "We devastated the Iranian nuclear program" and "Iran's nuclear ambitions have been obliterated." Later, he went even further: "Our bombing campaign obliterated Iran's ability to create nuclear weapons. You want to call it destroyed, you want to call it defeated, you want to call it obliterated – choose your word." White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said on ABC that, "We are confident, yes, that Iran's nuclear sites were completely and totally obliterated" and, three days later, she reiterated that the strikes represented "a total obliteration" and described the three facilities as "completely demolished." Steve Witkoff called suggestions that Midnight Hammer had failed to achieve its objective "completely preposterous."

But then, to justify starting Operation Epic Fury, the Trump/Vance administration and some congressional Republicans claimed that Iran not only still had its nuclear program but was developing long-range missiles that would be able to *hit the United States*. *Really soon*. Nearly three months after the war started, Energy Secretary Chris Wright told the Senate Armed Services Committee that Iran was "frighteningly close" to a nuclear weapon. Steve Witkoff even said on Fox News on February 21st that Iran was "probably *a week away* from having industrial-grade bomb making material." … just a downright, flat-out lie.

Four days before the war began, President Trump told Congress in his February 24th State of the Union address that Iran was developing long-range missiles that "could soon reach the American homeland." Later, he said, "If we didn't hit within two weeks, they would've had a nuclear weapon" AND "Remember, they were two weeks away"…. "If we didn't knock the hell out of them, they would have had a nuclear weapon within two to four weeks."

Were they lying then or are they lying now – because both things can't be true. There's also the fact that they started this war in the first place. I can't imagine how betrayed MAGA feels, after Donald Trump 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?

Here are a few facts: Three U.S. officials with access to current intelligence about Iran's missile programs told The New York Times that President Trump had "exaggerated the immediacy of the threat posed to the United States." One official said some intelligence analysts were concerned that senior officials had inflated the threats, or that intelligence was being selectively presented or distorted.

On February 27th – the day before the war began – Reuters reported that three sources familiar with U.S. intelligence reports said President Trump's claims that Iran would soon possess missiles capable of striking the United States was not backed by the intelligence assessments they had reviewed. The sources said they were unaware of any U.S. intelligence assessment concluding that Iran was developing a missile that could soon reach the American homeland.

Two sources told Reuters that there had been no change to the Defense Intelligence Agency's 2025 assessment that Iran could take until 2035 to develop a "militarily viable intercontinental ballistic missile" from its existing space-launch technology. Another source said that even with technological assistance from China or North Korea, Iran would probably need as long as <u>*eight years*</u> to produce something operational at the ICBM level – obviously a far cry from "soon."

While Iran's missiles could strike U.S. military bases throughout the Middle East and reach Israel and portions of Europe, it's existing missiles generally have maximum ranges of approximately 2,000 kilometers, or roughly 1,240 miles. This matters when Tehran is approximately 10,000 kilometers from Washington, D.C.

Just two days before the war began, Daryl G. Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association, wrote that "there is no imminent threat. Iran is not close to 'weaponizing' its nuclear material so as to justify another U.S. attack." That assessment was consistent with what International Atomic Energy Agency Director General Rafael Grossi said after the war began. Asked directly whether Iran had been days or weeks away from building a nuclear bomb, Grossi said no. Just say'n...

So, how much has this strategic loss and profound humiliation cost the United States of America? Earlier, we covered the actual cost: In September, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimated that the war had already cost about $38 billion through August 1st and was continuing to cost another $2 billion to $3 billion every month. Then U.S. Central Command provided Congress with an even newer estimate: at least $43.6 billion through September 3rd, including roughly $28 billion just to replace munitions already expended and another $4.3 billion in lost or damaged equipment.

And even that $43.6 billion figure is not the full bill. There is the *expensive weapons stockpiles depletion* situation, but this number also doesn't include the future cost of repairing or rebuilding U.S. military bases damaged by Iranian attacks. In just one incident, three American

F-15E Strike Eagles were mistakenly shot down by Kuwaiti air defenses during an Iranian attack – aircraft worth $100 million *each*. In early April, Iranian fire brought down another U.S. F-15E Strike Eagle over Iran and an A-10 Warthog attack aircraft. Two U.S. combat-search-and-rescue helicopters also came under Iranian fire during the operation, and two MC-130J Commando II transport aircraft used in the rescue mission were subsequently abandoned at a makeshift airstrip inside Iran and deliberately destroyed by U.S. forces after they could not be flown out.

Iranian drones and missiles have significantly damaged U.S. military facilities across the Middle East. On the very first day of the war, Iran targeted several major U.S. installations, including Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia; Ali Al Salem Air Base and Camp Buehring in Kuwait; and Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, one of the largest U.S. air bases in the Middle East.

The attacks continued from there, damaging bases, barracks, hangars, fuel depots, aircraft, radar and communications systems, and critical air-defense infrastructure across the region. Some of the heaviest damage was concentrated at Naval Support Activity Bahrain – headquarters of the U.S. Fifth Fleet – and three U.S. bases in Kuwait: Ali Al Salem Air Base, Camp Arifjan and Camp Buehring.

It's undeniable that the Iran war has tied down an extraordinary share of U.S. military power. Even before the first bombs fell, the Pentagon had massed two aircraft-carrier strike groups, 16 surface warships and hundreds of combat and support aircraft in and around the Middle East – a buildup that some analysts estimated represented roughly 40 to 50 percent of America's globally deployable air power.

As the war dragged on, the buildup only grew. By March, the Army had mobilized roughly 2,000 soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division, joining a U.S. force in the region that swelled past 50,000 troops. Six months later, much of that force is still there. Roughly 50,000 U.S. troops and 19 warships – including two aircraft carriers and 13 guided-missile destroyers – remain deployed across the region, while elements of the 82nd Airborne have had their deployments extended into 2027.

The toll this war has already taken on our troops came into stark relief when families of those on the USS Abraham Lincoln reported that the roughly 5,000 sailors and Marines onboard faced severe supply shortages, deteriorating living conditions, and a mounting mental health crisis – after the 1,100-foot warship left its homeport of San Diego in November 2025 for a routine Pacific cruise but was redirected to the Middle East by January 2026.

Families said the crew suffered from shortages of fresh food, rationed meals, and a lack of basic hygiene items like soap, toothpaste, and deodorant at the ship's store. There were also reports of broken laundry facilities and toilets, moldy showers without hot water, and chronic mail disruptions. Many relatives reported that their family members were raising alarms over extreme exhaustion and psychological distress, recounting stories of sailors expressing suicidal thoughts and/or self-harm and even attempting to jump overboard.

During a town hall meeting, family members spoke directly to Acting Secretary of the Navy Hung Cao and other senior officials. One spouse, through tears, shared that she had received a message from her husband saying "he hopes he doesn't wake up tomorrow."

Finally, after 286 total days at sea, including 264 consecutive days without a port visit, the USS Abraham Lincoln began its journey home after making a scheduled port visit in Thailand. The ship arrived in Thailand for its first full port call in nearly nine months, visibly covered in rust from bow to stern thanks to an extraordinary nine-month deployment without routine maintenance.

Naturally, the full extent of the mayhem and destruction to our military facilities emerged only gradually as the Pentagon tried to gaslight the American people. A Washington Post investigation using satellite imagery ultimately identified at least 228 damaged or destroyed structures and pieces of equipment at 15 U.S. military sites – including Patriot and THAAD air-defense equipment, satellite communications systems, an E-3 Sentry command-and-control aircraft and a refueling tanker. The Post concluded that the damage was far more extensive than the U.S. government had publicly acknowledged.

Complicating efforts to determine the full extent of the damage, the U.S. government asked commercial satellite-imagery providers to withhold recent images of the war zone. Planet Labs complied, ultimately imposing an indefinite hold on imagery dating back to March 9 and moving to a managed-access system. The restrictions made it considerably more difficult for journalists and independent analysts to assess Iranian strikes on U.S. facilities. Vantor also restricted access to imagery from parts of the Middle East, although the company said those restrictions were imposed under its own conflict-zone policies and that it had not been contacted by the U.S. government.

Meanwhile, 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) as mentioned earlier, draining our missile stockpiles and stretching our forces, threatening our readiness for what may happen in the Yellow, East and South China seas. A terrifying example is that, as of early September, we have no aircraft carrier strike group forward-deployed in the western Pacific – precisely the region where we would need substantial naval power if China decided to make a move against Taiwan.

The Gulf, home to about half of the world's proven oil reserves, has been in turmoil since February 2026, and the International Energy Agency has called the conflict the largest supply disruption in the history of the global oil market.

Because shipping through the Strait of Hormuz – which before the war carried roughly 20 percent of the world's oil and one-fifth of global liquefied-natural-gas trade – remains severely restricted, prices at American pumps were nearly a dollar higher by Labor Day 2026 than a year earlier… and the highest Labor Day gasoline price on record. Diesel prices also reached a record national average of $5.85 per gallon in early September. And remember, before the U.S. and Israel launched their attacks on Iran on February 28th, the Strait had been operating as a major free-flowing international shipping artery.

Now there is another major problem. In September, Iran-aligned Houthi forces swept through Yemen's Red Sea coast, capturing the strategic port of Mocha and Perim Island in the middle of the Bab el-Mandeb Strait – another of the world's most important shipping chokepoints. This had become an increasingly important alternative for Saudi oil exports after traffic through Hormuz was disrupted. Houthi attacks and territorial gains have now sharply reduced traffic there as well, threatening to squeeze global energy supplies from both directions and putting additional upward pressure on oil prices.

And even the principal land-based workaround has been hit. Saudi Arabia's East-West pipeline – built to carry oil from the Persian Gulf to the Red Sea and bypass the Strait of Hormuz – was attacked in September, disrupting shipments through the Red Sea port of Yanbu. Saudi Aramco subsequently halted some October crude deliveries to European refiners. So, pressure is now being applied not only to the two critical maritime chokepoints, Hormuz and Bab el-Mandeb, but also to one of Saudi Arabia's most important routes for bypassing them.

Although traffic through Hormuz is still well below prewar averages, some ships are starting to get through. But with the Bab el-Mandeb route now also under severe pressure, there is even less room for the global oil market to compensate for disruptions in the Gulf. And energy prices could remain elevated even if crude prices decline because of a phenomenon economists call "rockets and feathers": gasoline prices tend to rise like rockets when oil prices increase but fall like feathers when oil prices come back down.

Plus, missile and drone strikes have damaged more than 80 energy facilities across the Middle East, with more than one-third sustaining severe or very severe damage. Repairing some of the hardest-hit facilities, including Qatar's Ras Laffan LNG complex, could take years. Rystad Energy initially estimated regional energy-infrastructure repair costs at more than $25 billion but subsequently raised its estimate to between $34 billion and $58 billion, with a $46 billion midpoint.

Incidentally, because the Trump/Vance administration authorized a massive emergency release after the war disrupted tanker traffic through the Strait of Hormuz, America's emergency oil stockpile has fallen to a level not seen since the Reagan era. The Strategic Petroleum

Reserve (SPR) dropped to 298.7 million in early August, its lowest level since January 1983, and by August 28th it had fallen further to roughly 286.6 million barrels (the reserve held roughly 415 million barrels in mid-March).

But the only costs that truly matter are heartbreaking. As of mid-September 2026, the latest U.S. Defense Department figures put total American military casualties at 808: 18 killed and roughly 790 wounded/injured.

But those numbers may understate the human toll. In September, The Washington Post reported that six U.S. officials familiar with the Pentagon's internal casualty data said more American service members have died than the military has publicly acknowledged. Five put the death toll at at least 22 and a sixth said 23 service members have died since the war began on February 28th (although not every additional death has been established as directly caused by the conflict). Three U.S. contractors based in the region have also died.

It's no surprise there are discrepancies because the Trump/Vance administration has tried like hell to keep these numbers hidden. Which is just hideous. On September 2nd, Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick claimed there had been <u>no</u> American deaths in the Iran war (he later claimed he meant there had been no deaths in Venezuela). The Pentagon keeps emphasizing that many of the injured troops "just" have/had "minor concussions." President Trump has constantly tried to minimize the deaths in Iran by comparing them with Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq and Korea, even posting charts contrasting 18 U.S. deaths in Iran with the thousands killed in those much longer wars.

In perhaps the most hideous of the hideous, the Pentagon's official casualty counts suddenly fell from 18 dead to 14 on July 23rd, and the reported wounded count fell from 482 to 420. The Pentagon initially blamed the abrupt decline on a "temporary data disruption," but subsequently removed the four July deaths from the Iran-war tally altogether, classifying them – and hundreds of wounded troops – under the newly created category "Overseas Operations." The missing casualties were eventually restored to the Pentagon's overall accounting, but not to the Operation Epic Fury tally.

This fits a pattern. Even though, by their count, 808 U.S. soldiers had been killed or wounded/injured in Iran, on September 3rd Vice President JD Vance said he wouldn't call it a war at all: "I wouldn't call it a war. Right now, there is no active shooting." The very next day, President Trump called the Iran conflict "small potatoes:" "I call it a military conflict because it's small potatoes for us. It's not a big thing."

As for the toll on the Iranian people, although the exact number is uncertain, the best available evidence suggests that at least 3,600 people have been killed inside Iran since the U.S.-Israeli war began. This includes those killed in a devastating strike on the Shajarah Tayyebeh Girls' School in Minab, where at least 175 people were killed, most of them students.

The pain the strike on the school 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 of 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 Guard Corps. A video released after the Times' initial investigation shows a Tomahawk cruise missile striking the naval complex beside the school; although several U.S. allies possess or have ordered Tomahawks, the United States was the only participant in the conflict known to be using them. Additional photographs subsequently showed mangled missile fragments bearing serial numbers, manufacturers' names and other markings consistent with a U.S.-made Tomahawk cruise missile.

Reuters later reported that a preliminary U.S. military investigation pointed to American forces as the likely source of the strike, although the investigation had not yet reached a final conclusion. Gen. Dan Caine also confirmed that U.S. forces were conducting strikes in southern Iran at the time, and a map he displayed showing targets struck during the operation's first 100 hours included the Minab area.

Nevertheless – huge surprise – both President Trump and Pete Hegseth blamed Iran for the school strike before the Pentagon's investigation had reached a conclusion, with the U.S. president saying that, based on what he had seen, he believed it had been caused by Iran's inaccurate munitions… of course, as usual, offering ZERO evidence for this claim. 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 the U.S. military's preliminary investigation concluded that U.S. forces were likely responsible for the Minab school strike, and subsequent reporting has revealed that the Pentagon's own inquiry uncovered serious failures in the intelligence and targeting process. Investigators found that a U.S. analyst had identified the building as a school years earlier, but the warning never made its way into the authoritative targeting database. Planners were also relying on years-old imagery and other outdated intelligence when the target was approved. An independent general submitted a more extensive investigation to U.S. Central Command in April, but months later the Pentagon still had not publicly released its findings or formally acknowledged responsibility for the strike.

And Donald Trump wonders why the Iranian people don't believe him when he claims to have their backs? 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 (HRANA), a U.S.-based human-rights organization focused on Iran, reports that the regime's sweeping crackdown on anti-government demonstrations resulted in at least 53,777 arrests and nearly 26,000 civilian injuries. HRANA has documented 7,007 deaths – including thousands of protesters and hundreds of children – while another 11,744 reported deaths remain 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.

And yet he still 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 across the region, where lofty promises of freedom and democracy have too often given way to chaos, civil war, or prolonged foreign occupation.

In Afghanistan, for example, American support for anti-Soviet mujahideen fighters through the 1980s, followed by years of civil war and neglect after the Soviet withdrawal, helped create the conditions in which the Taliban and transnational jihadist movements like al-Qaeda emerged – ultimately drawing the United States into another two decades of war after 9/11.

Then there is what happened in their own country in 1953, when the United States and Britain orchestrated a coup – codenamed Operation Ajax – that overthrew Iran's democratically elected prime minister, Mohammad Mossadegh, and consolidated the power of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. This was long treated by Washington as an open secret rather than an admitted fact, until the CIA itself declassified documents in 2013 formally acknowledging its role in planning and executing the coup.

What followed was more than seven decades of accumulated grievances and retaliation: America's support for the Shah's increasingly repressive rule until he was overthrown by the Iranian people in 1979; Iranian revolutionaries seizing the U.S. Embassy and taking 66 Americans hostage, 52 of whom would remain captive for 444 days; Washington tilting toward Saddam Hussein during Iraq's devastating eight-year war against Iran, providing Baghdad with intelligence and other forms of assistance even as the Reagan administration secretly facilitated arms sales to Iran; Hezbollah and other Iran-backed militants carrying out devastating attacks against Americans in Lebanon, including the 1983 U.S. Embassy and Marine barracks bombings; the United States and Iran effectively fighting an undeclared naval war in the Persian Gulf, culminating in Operation Praying Mantis in 1988; and, less than three months later, the USS Vincennes shooting down Iran Air Flight 655 after mistaking the civilian Airbus for an Iranian F-14, killing all 290 people aboard.

Decades later, Iran would arm, train and fund militant groups that repeatedly attacked American forces in Iraq, with declassified U.S. military assessments attributing to the deaths of over 600 American service members between 2003 and 2011 to Iran and its proxies.

That's <u>A</u> <u>LOT</u> of history to add to President Trump's broken promises of early 2026. But nevertheless, almost seven months into the war, he was still at it: “When are the Iranian people going to rise up and fight?” he asked on Truth Social.

By now, though, the Iranian people had seen their country blown to smithereens by the very man who claimed he wanted to help them. At the time of the April 7th “ceasefire,” The New York Times had independently verified damage to at least 22 schools and 17 health-care facilities – some directly hit and others damaged by strikes on nearby targets – reiterating that its findings represented only a fraction of the likely devastation to Iran’s civilian infrastructure. Iran’s Red Crescent Society reported a far greater toll, saying that at least 763 schools and 316 health-care facilities had been damaged or destroyed during the war.

Military strikes have also damaged many of Iran’s most cherished cultural treasures – losses that extend far beyond buildings themselves to sites deeply entwined with the country’s history and identity. Among them are Isfahan’s 17th-century Safavid-era Ali Qapu Palace and Chehel Sotoun palace and garden, as well as the ancient Jameh Mosque, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the great surviving monuments of Islamic architecture. The centuries-old Golestan Palace in Tehran – transformed into the royal residence and seat of power of the Qajar dynasty – was also damaged, as was the ancient Falak-ol-Aflak castle in Khorramabad. Iran’s Ministry of Cultural Heritage now says experts have documented damage to 149 historical monuments across 18 provinces and 29 cities.

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 to Iran’s national soccer stadium and the site of the 2025 match that clinched the country’s place in the World Cup – is among the sports and youth facilities badly damaged during the U.S.-Israeli assault. The complex also occupies an emotional place in Iran’s struggle for women’s rights. It was at Azadi Stadium that Sahar Khodayari, a young Iranian woman barred from attending men’s soccer matches, was arrested in 2019 after attempting to enter disguised as a man. Facing prosecution and fearing that she would be imprisoned, Khodayari later set herself on fire outside a courthouse. She died from her injuries a week later. Known afterward as "Blue Girl," for the colors of her beloved Esteghlal soccer club, her death sparked outrage inside and outside Iran.

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The Trump/Vance administration'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 <u>*every*</u> <u>*single*</u> <u>*one*</u> of the Taliban's outrageous demands … to the point where, by the end of the "negotiations," the <u>*Taliban*</u> were giving <u>*us*</u> – the <u>*United States of America*</u> – 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 <u>to</u> taking a wrecking ball to the European alliance and USAID <u>to</u> 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 Trump says he "ended" a "war" between Egypt and Ethiopia, the two countries were never at war. Plus, their long-running dispute over Ethiopia's Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and Nile water rights remains unresolved. Previous negotiations have repeatedly stalled, including U.S.-facilitated talks during Trump's first term. In 2026, the Trump/Vance administration renewed its efforts to mediate between Cairo and Addis Ababa, but so far those efforts have produced no agreement.

The Donald also claims to have ended a "war" between Serbia and Kosovo, although the two have not been at war since 1999. Nor has the

Trump/Vance administration made progress toward resolving their long-running dispute (Kosovo considers itself an independent country, while Serbia considers Kosovo part of Serbia). In fact, in September 2025, the United States indefinitely suspended a planned Strategic Dialogue with Kosovo, accusing its government of taking actions that increased tensions and instability.

During Trump's first term, his administration did broker a 2020 economic-normalization agreement between Serbia and Kosovo, but much of that agreement was never implemented. The broader normalization process has also largely stalled, and despite renewed U.S. engagement with Serbia in 2026, relations between Belgrade and Pristina remain unresolved.

In May 2025, President Trump stuck his nose into the long-standing conflict between India and Pakistan after hostilities erupted following a terrorist attack in Indian-administered Kashmir. Although Pakistan publicly praised Trump for his role in bringing the fighting to an end, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government emphatically rejected Trump's repeated claims that the United States had mediated the ceasefire or that the prospect of a U.S. trade deal had persuaded the two countries to stop fighting (India maintains that the cessation of hostilities was negotiated directly between the Indian and Pakistani militaries).

Trump's repeated claims of credit became a significant source of friction between Washington and New Delhi and contributed to the deterioration of relations as U.S.-India trade negotiations collapsed later that summer. < Note: In February 2026, the U.S. and India reached a framework for an interim trade agreement and resumed negotiations toward a broader bilateral trade deal, but it's still not completed. >

In June 2025, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo signed a U.S.-brokered peace agreement aimed at ending decades of conflict in eastern Congo… but fighting continued, and days after the two countries reaffirmed the agreement at the White House in December, the Rwanda-backed M23 rebel group seized the strategic city of Uvira.

Nevertheless, in his February 24, 2026 State of the Union address, President Trump claimed he had “ended” the war between “the Congo and Rwanda.” Six days later, his own administration sanctioned the Rwandan military and four senior officers, saying thousands of Rwandan troops remained in eastern Congo actively fighting and supporting M23 in “blatant violation” of the peace agreement. Fighting continued into the summer, and although ceasefire monitors were finally deployed in August, M23 still controls substantial territory in eastern Congo and the peace process remains unresolved.

In August 2025, the foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan initialed a peace treaty at the White House, while Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and President Ilham Aliyev signed a joint declaration committing their countries to peace. However, the two countries had already been moving steadily toward a settlement since Azerbaijan regained control of Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023. However, more than a year later, the peace treaty itself has still not been formally signed or ratified, and several issues, including final border demarcation, remain unresolved.

On July 28, 2025, after five days of fighting along their border, Thailand and Cambodia agreed to an unconditional ceasefire – but the talks were hosted by Malaysia (to be fair, President Trump did pressure both governments, speaking with their leaders and threatening to halt U.S. tariff negotiations unless they stopped fighting). However, the agreement began unraveling within months, and Thailand suspended parts of a subsequent peace declaration in November after several of its soldiers were injured by a landmine.

When fighting erupted again in December, Trump claimed on December 13th that the two countries had agreed to stop, but Thai Prime Minister Charnvirakul immediately rejected that characterization and said military operations would continue. The fighting lasted another two weeks before Thailand and Cambodia signed a new ceasefire at a border checkpoint on December 27th. That ceasefire has largely held, but the underlying territorial dispute remains unresolved and tensions between the two countries 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 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 – made a significant effort to establish formal diplomatic relations between Israel and several Arab states. The Abraham Accords, signed at the White House on September 15, 2020, normalized relations between Israel and the UAE and Bahrain, and Morocco followed in December. Sudan also agreed to pursue normalization, but the process was never completed as the country descended into civil war.

The idea behind the Abraham Accords was that economic, diplomatic and security cooperation could help overcome longstanding geopolitical divisions, while eventually fostering broader cultural and social ties.

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 bilateral assistance 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 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 250 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*.

Although the Abraham Accords themselves have survived years of regional conflict, efforts to expand them have stalled, particularly with Saudi Arabia, which continues to insist that normalization with Israel must include a credible path toward Palestinian statehood. Tensions also 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.

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 fervent 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 – a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas went into effect… but the agreement soon began to unravel. Israel halted the entry of humanitarian aid into Gaza on March 2nd, and on March 18th resumed large-scale airstrikes, killing more than 400 Palestinians in a single day. Netanyahu said Hamas had refused to release additional hostages and rejected proposals to extend the ceasefire, while Hamas accused Israel of deliberately overturning the original agreement.

Israel's Operation Gideon's Chariots was a major ground offensive intended to seize and hold much more of Gaza while concentrating its population into increasingly restricted areas. The plan was 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's siege on Gaza halted 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 at the Shajarah Tayyebeh Girls' School and the one where a U.S. bomb missed a nearby target in Southern Iran, destroying a home hosting a wedding celebration – killing at least four civilians and injuring dozens more. 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 <u>NO</u> country, group or government – whether it be Hamas, Israel or the United States – has a right to disregard the established 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. At the time of the October 7th attacks, roughly 3.2 million Palestinians lived in the West Bank and another 2.2 million in the Gaza Strip. For Israeli political and military figures 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.

Many 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. 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 much of the world collectively put its foot down against the atrocities happening in Gaza.

It was too little, too late. After Israel ended its 11-week blockade, the U.S.- and Israeli-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation established just four distribution sites, mostly in southern Gaza and guarded by private American security contractors. The UN refused to participate, calling the system inadequate, dangerously militarized and incapable of safely feeding Gaza's population.

Conventional aid convoys were frequently overwhelmed by starving civilians and, in some cases, looted by armed gangs. Even more alarming were the repeated shootings of Palestinians attempting to obtain food. Hundreds were killed and thousands wounded near aid routes and distribution sites, with witnesses and UN officials repeatedly reporting Israeli forces opening fire on crowds of desperate civilians. < Israel disputed some of these accounts and maintained that its forces fired warning shots or responded to perceived threats. >

By August 2025, the UN made it 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 agreed to on October 9th – almost nine months after President Trump had been sworn in – Israel’s two-year ground and air campaign in the Gaza Strip had killed at least 67,194 Palestinians. Children accounted for roughly 30 percent of the dead. As of October 10th, Gaza health officials had identified 20,179 children among the 67,194 people then recorded as having been killed.

And even those staggering numbers did not represent the full human toll. They did not include, for example, the unknown number of people whose bodies remained buried beneath Gaza’s extensive rubble or were otherwise inaccessible to rescue crews. Independent research had already found evidence that deaths from traumatic injuries were substantially undercounted, although estimates of the true toll varied considerably.

Nor did the official war-death numbers include hundreds of deaths attributed to malnutrition. By October 7th, Gaza health authorities had recorded 461 malnutrition-related deaths, including 157 children.

< Another claim made by the Israeli government is that the Hamas-run Palestinian Ministry of Health has exaggerated Gaza’s death toll, but independent research suggests the opposite. The Ministry maintains detailed casualty records containing names, ages, sex and identification numbers, although thousands of missing or unidentified victims remain uncounted. A 2,000-household mortality survey led by researchers at Royal Holloway, University of London estimated that around 75,200 people were violently killed between October 2023 and January 2025 – about 35 percent *more* than the Ministry recorded for the same period. A separate study using a different statistical method estimated an undercount of about 39 percent. Although the studies didn’t distinguish civilians from combatants, the household survey found that 56 percent of those killed were women, children or people over 64. >

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 – and later leading – 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 UN's highest court, has been considering a genocide case brought by South Africa against Israel since December 2023. South Africa alleges that Israel's actions in Gaza – including mass killings, forced displacement, destruction of homes and healthcare facilities, restrictions on humanitarian aid, and measures preventing births – were intended to destroy a substantial part of the Palestinian population. The ICJ hasn't ruled on whether Israel committed genocide, although it has issued several legally binding provisional measures ordering Israel to prevent acts prohibited by the Genocide Convention and address Gaza's humanitarian crisis.

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 UN 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.

In her March 2024 report, Anatomy of a Genocide, Francesca Albanese, the United Nations special rapporteur for the West Bank and Gaza, found "reasonable grounds to believe" that Israel's actions in Gaza met the threshold for genocide. In October 2025, she described the "ongoing genocide" as a "collective crime" enabled by other countries through military, economic and diplomatic support. In her March 2026 report, Torture and Genocide, Albanese went further, concluding that Israel's systematic torture of Palestinians had become a "structural feature" of the ongoing genocide. She cited not only abuse in detention – including beatings, sexual violence, starvation and lethal mistreatment – but also mass killings, forced displacement, deprivation and the destruction of conditions necessary for life.

Speaking as an American, one of the most concerning indictments of Israel's conduct came in October 2025, when The Washington Post reported that a classified U.S. State Department inspector general investigation had identified "many hundreds" of potential human-rights violations by Israeli military units in Gaza that could take the State Department years to review.

It was the first U.S. government report to acknowledge the scale of Israeli actions in Gaza potentially falling under the Leahy Laws, which prohibit U.S. security assistance to foreign military units credibly implicated in gross human-rights violations.

Unsurprisingly, this remains unresolved. In November 2025, eleven U.S. senators urged Secretary of State Marco Rubio to expedite the investigations, warning that Israel's unusually cumbersome vetting process could allow cases to drag on indefinitely. However, there is no public indication that the State Department has completed its review of the hundreds of cases or declared an Israeli military unit ineligible for assistance under the Leahy Laws.

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, particularly Christian Zionists and evangelical Christians, believe that supporting Israel is a biblical responsibility that aligns believers with God's purposes. This belief is often rooted in God's covenant with Abraham in Genesis 12:3: "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." They interpret this passage as extending to Abraham's descendants and, ultimately, to the modern State of Israel, leading some believers to conclude that those who support Israel will receive God's blessing, while those who oppose it risk divine judgment.

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 over 90 MILLION DOLLARS lobbying Congress, spending over $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 to these totaled over 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 January 2026; the $740 million armored vehicles sale also in January; and the $650 million worth of bombs the Trump/Vance administration sold them in March without the normal congressional review period.

The Trump/Vance administration's support of the government of Israel and Prime Minister Netanyahu didn't stop at just handing over tons of money. Since inauguration day, the administration has repeatedly imposed sanctions on officials of the International Criminal Court (ICC), largely in retaliation for the Court's investigations and proceedings involving alleged war crimes by Israel in Gaza.

The administration initially sanctioned ICC Prosecutor Karim Khan in February 2025, followed by four judges in June and two more judges and both deputy prosecutors in August. Additional judges were sanctioned in December 2025, and the administration expanded the sanctions again in August 2026 to include ICC President Tomoko Akane and a senior prosecutor. As of August 2026, nine of the ICC's eighteen judges, both deputy prosecutors, Prosecutor Karim Khan, and one other member of the prosecutor's office had been sanctioned by the United States.

< It's important to note that President Trump's beef with the ICC extends beyond Israel. It goes back to his first term, when, in March 2020, the ICC Appeals Chamber unanimously authorized an investigation into alleged crimes committed in Afghanistan since May 2003, including alleged crimes by the Taliban and other armed groups, Afghan government forces, and U.S. personnel. The Trump/Vance administration maintains that the ICC has no jurisdiction over American or Israeli officials because neither the United States nor Israel is a party to the Rome Statute, the treaty that established the Court. The ICC takes a different view: it maintains that it can prosecute nationals of non-member states for crimes allegedly committed on the territory of a state that has accepted the Court's jurisdiction. Afghanistan and the State of Palestine are both parties to the Rome Statute, giving the Court territorial jurisdiction, according to the ICC,

over qualifying crimes committed in Afghanistan and the Palestinian territories regardless of the alleged perpetrator's nationality. This matters because, although major countries including the United States, China and India are not parties to the Rome Statute, 125 countries are, and those states have obligations to cooperate with the Court, including with requests for the arrest and surrender of individuals subject to ICC warrants. >

Although there has been significant tension between Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu at times during the Iran war, Trump's defense and support of Netanyahu pre-war extended well beyond money and ICC sanctions. Despite the mounds of evidence suggesting Netanyahu violated the Geneva Convention, the laws of armed conflict, and the laws of humanitarian law, 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.

< Netanyahu has been on trial in Israel since 2020 on charges of fraud, breach of trust and, in one case, bribery, stemming from three separate corruption cases. In Case 1000, prosecutors allege that Netanyahu and his wife received nearly 700,000 shekels – about $210,000 – worth of luxury gifts, including cigars and Champagne, from Hollywood producer Arnon Milchan and Australian billionaire James Packer, and that Netanyahu performed favors benefiting Milchan in return.

In Case 2000, Netanyahu was secretly recorded negotiating with Arnon Mozes, publisher of Yedioth Ahronoth, a newspaper that had long been critical of him. Prosecutors allege they discussed a deal in which Netanyahu would receive more favorable coverage in exchange for helping curb the growth of Yedioth's principal competitor, Israel Hayom – a newspaper founded and financed by Sheldon Adelson, the U.S. billionaire, major Republican donor and longtime Netanyahu supporter. The alleged deal was never implemented.

In Case 4000, the most serious, prosecutors allege that Netanyahu advanced regulatory decisions benefiting telecommunications giant

Bezeq and its controlling shareholder, Shaul Elovitch, in exchange for favorable coverage on the Bezeq-controlled news site Walla. It is the only case in which Netanyahu is charged with bribery as well as fraud and breach of trust.

In a huge coincidence, the legal proceedings have been repeatedly disrupted and delayed amid Israel's wars in Gaza and Iran. Netanyahu denies all the charges and has repeatedly denounced the prosecution as a… wait for it… politically motivated "witch hunt." >

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 signed the Sharm el-Sheikh declaration or were even represented in any way.

In Egypt, Donald Trump joined Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, the President of Egypt, who has been known to detain tens of thousands of political prisoners, including women, children, journalists, and human rights defenders; former Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who 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 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." (more on all this on p. 100)

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 who lived there – roughly 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 – overwhelming rejected President Trump's idea to forcibly displace Palestinians, Jared Kushner unveiled their vision for postwar Gaza in front of an audience of the World Economic Forum at Davos on January 22, 2026: "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 as many as 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.

Kushner and his sidekick Steve Witkoff took their show on the road, pitching their "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! The Trump/Vance administration has the perfect solution for that. 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 done even more to help lay the groundwork for this "magnificent" deal, taking steps to deepen Israeli control over both Gaza and the occupied West Bank.

In the West Bank – in a move widely considered a violation of the Oslo peace process Israel signed decades ago – Israel's security cabinet approved measures in February 2026 making it easier for Israeli settlers to purchase land while expanding Israeli authorities' enforcement powers and reducing some of the Palestinian Authority's powers.

And thanks to additional aggressive moves made by Netanyahu, Israel has also expanded the territory under its control in Gaza since the ceasefire. Israeli forces initially withdrew to the "Yellow Line" (a military deployment line that still left Israel controlling roughly 53 percent of the Gaza Strip) but subsequently pushed restrictions farther into Palestinian territory.

Reuters reported in July that Israeli forces had moved the concrete blocks marking the "Yellow Line" (the Israeli military's initial withdrawal/deployment line inside the Gaza Strip) deeper into Palestinian-controlled territory in several places, including around Gaza City, Deir al-Balah, Khan Younis and Rafah. Residents have been ordered to leave some of these newly encompassed areas.

The UN reported in June that Israel's newer "Orange Line" placed 64.9 percent of Gaza under tighter and more direct Israeli control. Netanyahu said in May that Israel intended to increase Israeli control to 70 percent.

Already, tens of thousands of Palestinians, along with schools, health facilities, food services and water infrastructure, were located between the Yellow and Orange Lines and under pressure to leave. Israeli demolitions and clearing have also continued in areas under its control, even though much of Gaza's agricultural land is also within this zone and now inaccessible to Palestinians.

This has gotten so bad that, on September 8, 2026, Britain announced a ban on trade in goods and services with Israeli settlements, while France and Canada announced similar measures and nine other countries backed the initiative. The governments cited accelerating settlement expansion and settler violence, which they believe are undermining the possibility of a future Palestinian state.

Meanwhile, as the eyes of the world turn to the war in Iran, Israel has continued military operations in Gaza despite the ceasefire. Although the fighting isn't as intense as during the pre-ceasefire war, airstrikes, shelling and shootings have continued. Gaza's Health Ministry says more than 1,250 Palestinians have been killed since the ceasefire (remember, it doesn't distinguish civilians from combatants in that figure).

On August 31, 2026, The New York Times reported that, increasingly, former Israeli generals, intelligence officials and prime ministers are accusing settlers in the West Bank of committing ethnic cleansing with government support. General Ben-Reuven – who survived the Arab-Israeli war of 1973, then went on to command a division in the West Bank and lead Israel's ground forces in the 2006 war against Hezbollah – told the NYT, with "his eyes welling with emotion": "What the settlers are doing here, is the real threat to Israel. This is more concerning to me than Iran, Gaza or Lebanon."

"Once a society behaves this way," Asaf Agmon, a retired Israeli Air Force general, said, "that society is doomed."

At the end of 2025, The Wall Street Journal reported that, in Gaza, "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.