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Breaking the West, bit by bit

Jaroslav Kuisz
Karolina Wigura

OPINION

WARSAW The world stage looks completely different to a small country. Large global powers may set the tectonic shifts of geopolitics in motion, but the other players have always had to figure out how to survive in the cracks in between.

In two months, the Trump administration has threatened allies with tariffs and trade wars, dismantled foreign aid and silenced Voice of America. President Trump scolded the president of Ukraine in the Oval Office and withheld military aid and intelligence sharing. America joined Russia, North Korea and Belarus in opposing a resolution in the U.N. General Assembly that demanded Russia immediately withdraw its forces from Ukraine, and Mr. Trump has treated President Vladimir Putin of Russia as a reliable partner for discussion.

Trump's America seeks to lead a world in which the great nuclear powers take what they can.

A Trump foreign policy doctrine is becoming clear, at least in outline. Mr. Trump's America seeks to lead a world in which the great nuclear powers take what they can. They choose their spheres of influence, the size of their territories and the shape of their borders. To other big powers Mr. Trump's approach may be understood as transactional or realist. But to many of the smaller democracies of Eastern Europe and South and East Asia, which have for decades hitched their fate to an America that they thought would enable them to continue to exist near the border of Russia or China, the Trump doctrine is the foreign policy of betrayal.

Since the fall of Communism, many of the small and medium-size countries in Eastern Europe, including the Baltic States, Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary, adapted to meet the demanding standards of liberal democracy. Those countries wrote and amended constitutions, democratized political life, built market economies and signed trade agreements. Some even agreed to the installation of American military bases or secret C.I.A. prisons. The Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary joined NATO in 1999, others followed later. This adaptation was imperfect and uneven — consider Prime Minister Viktor Orban's "illiberal democracy" in Hungary and the eight-year rule of Poland's nationalist-populist Law and Justice party, which did not end until KUISZ, PAGE 10

The New York Times publishes opinion from a wide range of perspectives in hopes of promoting constructive debate about consequential questions.



The headquarters of Huione Pay, in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Huione Group is an established firm that does brisk business in Southeast Asia, but not all of its affiliates are legitimate.

The scammer's handbook

PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA

Behind online fraud lies ruthlessly efficient system to launder victims' money

BY SELAM GEBREKIDAN AND JOY DONG

Every few weeks, fireworks light up the night sky in Cambodia, set off by scammers to salute their biggest swindles.

By the time the shells pop and crackle, somebody's life savings are probably gone. Maybe the victim fell for an online romance scam or bought into a fake cryptocurrency exchange. Whatever the scheme, the money has vanished, sucked into a complex money-laundering network that moves billions of dollars at a dizzying speed.

The U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, China's Ministry of Public Security, Interpol and others have tried to combat scammers, who often lurk on social media and dating apps, luring people into bogus financial schemes or other ruses. Telecom companies have blocked numbers. Banks have issued repeated warnings.

Yet the industry persists because its money-laundering operation is so efficient. Unsuspecting victims worldwide lose tens of billions of dollars each year, money that must be scrubbed of its criminal origins and deposited into the legitimate economy. The money-laundering system is so hydra-headed that when governments strike it in one place, it pops up in another.

This underworld peeks out in the Cambodian capital, Phnom Penh, home

How it works

Imagine you're a scammer, cheating people out of their life savings. You need a way to get money out of countries around the world. You need a matchmaker.

A matchmaker is a trusted intermediary who will shepherd your loot home.

A good matchmaker has a worldwide network of mules who can move money within hours.

The money mule can be a person or a shell company that controls a local bank account or a cryptocurrency wallet.

To start the working relationship, the matchmaker will pay a deposit to a third party to guarantee that they won't run away with your money.

Now, let us say that you have found someone willing to invest \$40,000 in your scam.

STEP 1 You, the scam boss, cut a deal with a matchmaker. For a U.S. scam, the matchmaker typically demands 15 percent of the proceeds for himself and his mules.

STEP 2 Your matchmaker finds the right mules for the job and gets you a deal.

STEP 3 The matchmaker sends you the mule's bank account or crypto wallet details. You send that information to your victim.

STEP 4 Your victim sends \$40,000 to your money mule's account.

STEP 5 The mule moves the money from one account to another account and eventually converts it to cryptocurrency.

STEP 6 Finally, the mule takes a cut for his services and sends the rest to the matchmaker. The matchmaker pays himself and gives you \$34,000.

The exchange seemed to show real feelings and judgments — that the Europeans are mooching and that any American military action, no matter how clearly in American interests as well, should be somehow paid for by other beneficiaries.

A member of the chat identified as "SM," and believed to be Stephen Miller, a top aide to President Trump, suggested that both Egypt and "Europe" should compensate the United States for the operation. "If Europe doesn't remunerate, then what? If the US successfully restores freedom of navigation at great cost there needs to be some further economic gain extracted in return," SM wrote.

TRUMP, PAGE 4

Trump team lays bare its contempt for Europe

BRUSSELS

Leaked chat messages deliver the latest blow to a weakening alliance

BY JEANNA SMIALEK AND STEVEN ERLANGER

Trump administration officials have not kept their disdain for Europe quiet. But the contempt seems to be even louder behind closed doors.

Europeans reacted with a mix of exasperation and anger to the publication of parts of a discussion among top-ranking Trump administration officials, carried out on the messaging app Signal. The discussion, about a planned strike on Yemen, was replete with comments that painted Europeans as geopolitical parasites, and was revealed on Monday in The Atlantic, whose editor was inadvertently included in the conversation.

"I just hate bailing out the Europeans again," wrote Vice President JD Vance, asserting that the strikes would benefit Europe far more than the United States. "I fully share your loathing of European freeloading," Pete Hegseth, the secretary of defense, later replied. "It's PATHETIC."

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TRUMP, PAGE 4



IN A leaked group chat between Trump administration officials, Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth referred to "European freeloading," calling it "pathetic."

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DEFENSE CHIEF'S ROCKY START CONTINUES Even before he disclosed secret battle plans, Pete Hegseth had brought controversy to the Pentagon. PAGE 4

He invested in Russia. It threw him in jail.



Michael Calvey leaving a sentencing hearing in Moscow in 2021. He spent 25 years running a successful venture capital firm in Russia before he was accused of fraud.

U.S. executive, convicted without evidence, says he underestimated the risks

BY NEIL MACFARQUHAR

A foul cell in a Moscow detention center was about the last place an American businessman named Michael Calvey expected to find himself after spending 25 years building a flourishing venture capital firm in Russia that transformed some tech start-ups into global brands.

First, beefy agents from the F.S.B., the federal security service, ransacked his apartment before dawn. Hours later he was confined to a holding cell with two other inmates and a filthy hole in the floor for a toilet.

"The cell is stuffy and hot, an oppressive stench hanging in the air as if from accumulated decades of human sweat mixed with the indescribable horrors emanating from the toilet hole area," Mr. Calvey wrote in a new book out this week called "Odyssey Moscow." It de-

tails his extended ordeal through the Russian court system in a fabricated fraud case initiated in 2019: "In the course of a few surreal, terrifying hours I have morphed from one of the most successful Western businessmen in Russia into a prisoner of the state."

With President Trump lauding the possibility of "major economic development transactions" between the United States and Russia as he seeks improved relations with Moscow, Mr. Calvey's fate stands as a cautionary tale about the significant personal and professional risks involved in doing business in Russia, particularly given the arbitrary nature of its courts.

Perhaps no Western businessman promoted foreign investment in Russia more than Mr. Calvey, 57, who helped to forge internet titans from tech start-ups like Yandex — a version of Google, Amazon and Uber rolled into one — or Tinkoff Credit Systems, one of the world's biggest digital banks. The firm he founded, Baring Vostok Capital Partners, earned colossal returns.

RUSSIA, PAGE 2

RICHARD MILLE



RM 43-01 FERRARI

A Racing Machine On The Wrist

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PAGE TWO

Families grieving after plane crash find solace together

MUAN, SOUTH KOREA

Relative of Jeju Air victim says 'only here can we cry' as many gather at airport

BY JOHN YOON

It was the site of the worst aviation disaster on South Korean soil. Now the terminal at Muan International Airport serves as a community center for grieving relatives of the 179 people who perished in the crash. Families frequently gather here to talk, eat together — some even stay overnight in tents.

It was in that cavernous building in southwestern South Korea that the families waited anxiously for news after Jeju Air Flight 7C2216 crash-landed on Nov. 29. Then there were tears and outbursts of anger as officials periodically read out the names of the dead, many identified by DNA tests.

"We're a family now," said Son Joo-taek, who lost his son in the accident and was among about 20 people who sat around a row of folding tables that held water and snacks on a recent Saturday. "The people here understand what others just can't."

Lately, the talk among some of the grieving families has turned toward action: They want to find out what caused the crash. The jet — carrying mostly vacationers home from a year-end trip to Thailand — belly-flopped onto the runway and sped along until it hit a concrete berm and exploded into flames, leaving just two survivors.

Relatives of those killed say they are unhappy with the trickle of information from officials, and the refusal to release records, including transcripts from the control tower. They want to know more about the reports of a bird strike a few minutes before the landing, how the jet came down without its landing gear, and why the berm it hit was not designed to give way.

In desperation, some have turned to books and videos to learn about aviation safety, including how flight recorders, air traffic controllers, localizers and jet engines work. They are also looking into airport design.

"The families' first priority is to get the truth," Son Ha-yeon, the daughter of Mr. Son, said at the airport where her brother and his girlfriend were killed. "Otherwise, we're only relying on the investigators, who often use jargon."

Ms. Son, who has taken about three months' leave from her job in Seoul, said she felt the need to read Boeing manuals and aviation regulations, and has been studying terms that had previously meant nothing to her: C.V.R., F.D.R., I.C.A.O. She has been in touch with other relatives who also wanted to learn more about what could have gone wrong.

The South Korean authorities have said it could take more than a year to complete the investigation, which has faced hurdles that have frustrated the families. Among them: The jet's flight recorders stopped recording for the final four minutes of the flight.

"The families want to know why their loved ones died," said Park Cheol, a lawyer for the families. "They also feel that, by studying, they are making an effort for those who died."

Some relatives have challenged officials at meetings over the crash. They say they are concerned that there are not enough people investigating the cause, compared with instances in the United States. Nor have the authorities acceded to their request to release communications from the control tower around the time of the crash.

South Korea's transport ministry said the investigative body was in talks with the authorities to increase the number



CHANG W. LEE/THE NEW YORK TIMES



LEE FAMILY

"For about a month, my father appeared in my dreams every day."

LEE BONG-KYUNG, left, who lost Lee Yeon-cha, above.



CHANG W. LEE/THE NEW YORK TIMES



SON FAMILY

"I feel a sense of regret and guilt for not being able to protect my son."

SON JOO-TAEK, above, in a tent at Muan Airport. His son, Son Chang-kook, left, died in the Dec. 29 disaster.



CHANG W. LEE/THE NEW YORK TIMES



LEE FAMILY

"My heart is ripped apart. They were far too young."

LEE JUNG-KEUN, with his wife, Lee Mi-jung, above. Their son, Lee Jae-hyeok, and his wife, Tae Ari, left, were both 32.



CHANG W. LEE/THE NEW YORK TIMES



KIM FAMILY

"My whole family just evaporated overnight. I just want to know why."

KIM YU-JIN, left, who lost her parents, Kim Deok-won and Jung Sun-suk, and brother, Kim Kang-heon, above.

A U.S. executive invested in Russia and ended up in jail

RUSSIA, FROM PAGE 1

Then Baring Vostok got mired in a nasty commercial dispute with two dubious Russian partners who were stripping assets out of a bank in a troubled merger. Once, Mr. Calvey's empty Moscow apartment mysteriously caught fire hours before a dinner involving tense negotiations.

After his firm filed a case with a London arbitration court, the partners conceded Department K of the F.S.B., responsible for internal financial crimes, that the American and several partners had perpetrated a massive fraud as part of a dastardly foreign plot to undermine Russia's financial sector.

The agents pounced in February 2019, and although no evidence of wrongdoing ever emerged in court, Mr. Calvey and several partners spent years in jail or under house arrest.

"Once the F.S.B. gets involved in a case, they're like a car with six gears going forward and none in reverse," Mr. Calvey said in an interview in Switzerland, his home since finally being allowed to leave Russia in 2022. Lanky and trim, he retains a boyish air despite his gray hair. "They will never back up or lose face."

His arrest stunned Western investors. "Everyone I knew was incredulous, angry and shocked," said Bernie Sucher, an American banker with extended experience in Russia. "It was viewed as a direct assault on the very idea of long-term investment in the Russian economy."

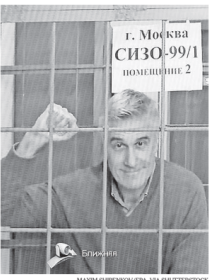
Unusually, dozens of influential Russians defended Mr. Calvey. They included Kirill Dmitriev, the head of Russia's sovereign wealth fund and now a key negotiator for ending the Ukraine war; German Gref, the chief executive of Russia's largest bank; and Alexei Kudrin, a previous finance minister. The U.S. Embassy in Moscow also objected strenuously to his arrest.

Mr. Calvey thought such interventions, combined with the blow to invest or confidence, would get the case dropped. But nothing outweighed the F.S.B.

President Vladimir V. Putin did summon top Kremlin officials, ordering them to get the American businessman out of prison, but also to find something illegal that Mr. Calvey had done, he said he later learned. At a tense time in U.S.-Russia relations, the Kremlin could not admit to arresting a prominent American businessman on false pretenses, he said.

Released from prison after two months, Mr. Calvey was confined to his apartment with an electronic monitoring device strapped around his ankle for two years, and spent a third under court-ordered supervision with an 8 p.m. curfew. When he developed a cancerous tumor in one leg, the court refused to allow him to remove the device, so doctors operated without benefit of an M.R.I. scan.

The Russian Foreign Ministry and the Russian Embassy in Washington did not respond to requests for comment about Mr. Calvey's account. At the time of his



Michael Calvey appeared via video from prison during an appeal hearing in 2019. After serving two months in prison, he spent two years under house arrest.

conviction, Dmitry Peskov, the presidential spokesman, quoted Mr. Putin as saying that the government could not interfere in the courts.

When first arrested, Mr. Calvey was jailed in Matrosskaya Tishina prison, near downtown Moscow. It is sometimes called "Kremlin Central" because so many inmates face charges in high-profile corruption cases pushed by the Kremlin. There were no violent criminals, but nobody is ever acquitted, ei-

ther, Mr. Calvey wrote. His cellmates greeted him with a toast: "Novoselye," or welcome.

One was a former deputy minister of culture. Another was an army general. A younger one was a computer hacker, and three were construction moguls. Trust nobody, one of them confided.

Their cell was tidy and somewhat comfortable, with a television and a separate toilet. The men shared everything equally from cleaning chores to food supplies from outside. He dedicated his book to the men of Cell 604, and tears up when he talks about them. The book will be released on Thursday in Britain and in April in the United States.

The trial underscored F.S.B. control over the courts, with the closing statements repeating the opening accusations almost exactly, Mr. Calvey said. All the witness testimony might never have happened. "Russian people are of course the main victims of its courts," he wrote.

In August 2021, Mr. Calvey was convicted of the misappropriation of funds and given a five-year suspended sentence. The conviction on false charges grated, he said, a stain on all his work for Russia.

His Russia saga started in 1991, when just two years out of the University of Oklahoma, Mr. Calvey went to work for his former Wall Street boss at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. It was established to help the former Soviet bloc transition to a market economy.

He worked on financing energy sector projects. Considered young for the magnitude of the deals, he tried to camouflage his age by adopting a serious demeanor at work, said Charlie Ryan, his first Moscow roommate.

"Life for an expat in 1990s Moscow was equal parts bizarre and marvelous," Mr. Calvey wrote. Pizza Hut was considered a high-end restaurant to impress a date. Kilos of inexpensive caviar proved a substitute for breakfast cereal.

Mr. Calvey established Baring Vostok to build businesses catering to the new middle class. He married a Russian woman named Julia, with whom he had two sons and a daughter, now all young adults.

He existed within an elite business bubble, surrounded by people eager to integrate Russia into the global economy. At the time of his trial, Baring Vostok said that overall, it had invested more than \$2.8 billion in 80 companies across the region, making it the biggest such Western player.

He learned Russian through countless hours he spent with young, ambitious entrepreneurs. "It was hard to spend time with them and not feel like Russia was a much, much better place than at the time of their grandparent's generation," he said.

When prominent businessmen got arrested, Mr. Calvey attributed it to their meddling in politics. He considered his Russian associates overly gloomy about the direction of their country.

He ignored repeated red flags that Mr.

of investigators. The ministry was also considering providing a transcript of the air traffic control communications, though they were not typically released to the public, it said.

Kim Yu-jin has been watching YouTube videos and reading books about past aviation disasters since her parents and her brother died in the crash.

She said her parents had helped raise her four children. After the crash, she temporarily closed the cafe she ran to deal with the grief.

"Everything has my parents' touch," she said. "There are traces of them everywhere."

After losing his son and daughter-in-law, Lee Jung-keun has researched one specific factor: the concrete berm. Most airports worldwide do not have similar structures so close to runways, and when they do, they are made of more fragile materials meant to break apart upon impact, experts have said.

Mr. Lee has scoured the internet for information about the berm and he's become convinced that it was the biggest factor in the high death toll.

"If it weren't for the berm, almost everyone would have survived," he said during a visit to the airport with his wife, Lee Mi-jung.

His son, Jae-hyeok, and the younger man's wife, Tae Ari, shared a love of fishing and married in 2020. They had been planning to start a family, and Ms. Tae's private math academy in the southwestern county of Haenam was doing well, Ms. Lee said.

The couple hadn't originally planned to visit Thailand. But a last-minute offer from a travel agency coincided with their wedding anniversary, Mr. Lee said.

Coming to the airport is a way for some families to find a sense of community when their homes are now defined by absence. Others stay away from the airport, fearing the memories will be too painful, or constrained by work.

The crash left Lee Bong-kyung with a struggling shipyard in the southwestern city of Mokpo that was founded by his father in 2015. Sales have dipped in recent years and Mr. Lee said it was his father's work ethic that kept the business alive. When Mr. Lee began working at the shipyard about six years ago, it gave his father more leisure time. His death has left his son crushed personally and professionally.

"We also have a lot of debt and loans to pay off, so I've thought about giving up a few times," he said.

The experience of many of the bereaved families — isolation from friends and colleagues, solidarity with relatives of other victims and a distrust of government — echoes the aftermath of other disasters in South Korea, including the 2014 Sewol ferry sinking and a crowd crush in Seoul in 2022.

Lee Jeong-bok and his wife, Jeong Hyeon-kyeong, were mourning another young victim. Their daughter, Min-in, had died after taking a trip with a high school friend. She was in her second year at her first job out of college.

Mr. Lee said he and his wife planned to stay at the airport until the cause of the crash came to light. "The investigation needs to be thorough and objective," he said. "There will need to be accountability and consequences."

At the airport one recent Saturday, Jo Mi-young was mourning an entire family. Ms. Jo's sister, Mr. Jo, was on board the jet with her daughter, the daughter's husband and their two children.

"Who else will remember this family?" Ms. Jo asked.

Her brother, Jo Hyo-seon, said that he and his sister had stayed at the airport almost every day since the crash, finding solace with other families.

"Only here can we cry, only here can we laugh," he said. "We're not leaving until the truth is told."

World

Lebanon must make changes to unlock aid

BEIRUT, LEBANON

Conditions may include overhauling governance and disarming Hezbollah

BY EUAN WARD

On his first day in office, Lebanon's new finance minister, Yassine Jaber, sat at his desk reading a color-coded report on the dire state of the ministry's operations. Nearly everything was marked in alarming red.

The computers were decades old — some still ran on Windows 98. Like much of the government, the ministry relied on mountains of paper records, allowing dysfunction and corruption to fester.

"Things cannot continue as they are," he sighed.

To fix how it's run, Lebanon needs money. But to attract money, it needs to fix how it's run: For years, it has failed to enact sweeping financial and governance overhauls required to unlock billions in international financial assistance that it has needed to address a debilitating economic crisis.

Now, that support is even more critical after the devastating 14-month war between Israel and Hezbollah, the Iran-backed militia that has long held political sway in this tiny Mediterranean country. A fragile truce is holding, but large parts of Lebanon are in ruins. Hezbollah has been left battered and cannot pay for reconstruction. Lebanon's new government is able to afford "frankly none" of the bill, Mr. Jaber said.

Foreign donors hold the key to Lebanon's recovery, but to meet their demands, the state must do what it has never done before: Undertake painful economic and structural changes, while confronting the thorny issue of Hezbollah's arms.

"The foreign aid is not just charity," said Paul Salem, the vice president for international engagement at the Middle East Institute in Washington. "They are not going to give billions and billions of dollars unless their position is respected."

The total damage and economic loss from the war is estimated to be \$14 billion, and Lebanon needs \$11 billion to rebuild, the World Bank said this month, making the conflict the country's most destructive since its long civil war ended in 1990.

"It's very important to move fast on reconstruction; people are sleeping in tents. You have a whole part of Lebanon paralyzed," said Mr. Jaber on that day in his office last month. "Everything today is in a hurry."

The devastation has compounded the country's economic woes, which began in 2019 when its financial system collapsed under the burden of state debt. That set off a sovereign default and weakened banks to impose informal capital controls, leaving many Lebanese people with their life savings frozen.

Lebanon reached a draft funding deal with the International Monetary Fund in 2022 that was billed as a lifeline, but it was conditioned on changes, including addressing the country's weak governance and restructuring its financial sector. The government failed to deliver, hindered by deadlock and vested interests of the country's political elite.



A damaged church in southern Lebanon. The recent 14-month war with Israel left large parts of Lebanon in ruins and displaced nearly 100,000 people. The World Bank estimates that the country needs \$11 billion to rebuild.

"Lebanon has to start by helping itself," Mr. Jaber said. "How do you do that? By starting to show real action."

Mr. Jaber spoke with The New York Times the day after Lebanon's new government received a vote of confidence that has sidelined Hezbollah politically. Mr. Jaber, now one of the country's most powerful figures, holds the reins to public spending and is responsible for reconstruction efforts and securing foreign aid.

Hezbollah's patron, Iran, contributed heavily to reconstruction after the group's last major conflict with Israel in 2006, but is now largely unwilling because of its own crises, analysts said. The group has been further isolated by the collapse of another ally, the Assad regime in neighboring Syria.

As a result, Hezbollah — so powerful before the war that it was widely considered a state within a state — cannot finance reconstruction, Mr. Jaber said.

"It's a different era," he said. Lebanon has so far secured a pledge of \$250 million in reconstruction aid

from the World Bank, said Mr. Jaber, an initial loan that is part of a broader \$1 billion fund to be provided by donor countries, but amounting to only 2 percent of what the World Bank says the country needs.

Some experts question how quickly the government can make systemic changes. President Joseph Aoun has said that he hopes the foreign aid can come "step by step" as new policies are enacted.

Adding to the uncertainty, international assistance may depend on more than just a financial overhaul. Under the terms of the truce deal that ended the war in November, Hezbollah must also disarm — a task that could risk violence between Hezbollah's largely Shiite supporters and domestic opponents. Experts said that the United States and Gulf Arab countries consider disarmament a prerequisite for large-scale assistance.

The Lebanese government has promised to bring all weapons under the state's control, but it remains unclear

how exactly it will achieve that, and if so, when. Mr. Jaber did not comment on disarming Hezbollah, but noted that the group was an established political party with popular support and that its political role was not a point of contention.

Hezbollah remains a potent military force, and some Lebanese officials have ruled out forcibly disarming it, hinting at a negotiated settlement. Earlier this month, the group's leader, Naim Qassem, implicitly rejected the idea that the "resistance" would lay down its weapons.

The government is "being bombarded by both demands: painful economic and financial reforms, and strangling Hezbollah's finances and presence," said Mohamad Hage Ali, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Middle East Center in Beirut. But, without funding first, "you are pushing a government and a president, with no juice, to meet the most challenging goals."

Hezbollah officials have insisted that reconstruction must not be linked to overhaul demands, fearing a loss of sup-

port if the rebuilding process is drawn out, experts said. Nearly 100,000 people are displaced in Lebanon, according to the United Nations, mostly from Hezbollah's heartlands in the south.

"Reform will take a hell of a long time," Mr. Hage Ali said.

Seeking to reassure Hezbollah's supporters, Mr. Qassem, the group's leader, has promised compensation for each af-

Without funding, "you are pushing a government and a president, with no juice, to meet the most challenging goals."

fect household of between \$12,000 and \$14,000, intended to cover rent costs and replace furniture. But the process has been marred by delays.

With Hezbollah largely sidelined, a flurry of diplomatic efforts are underway to reassure foreign donors. Lebanese officials met this month with an I.M.F. delegation in Beirut, which Mr.

Jaber said aimed to restart negotiations over the organization's long-awaited rescue package. A top European Union official said last month that Brussels would monitor the talks to assess whether Europe could offer its own financial aid.

An immediate priority, Mr. Jaber said, is appointing a central bank governor who can set about reviving the country's banking sector. Lebanon has failed to name a successor since Riad Salameh stepped down from the role in 2023, facing accusations that he ran the world's largest Ponzi scheme.

Lebanon's new leaders have also promised an external audit of all public institutions, part of a broader pledge to crack down on the corruption that has long plagued the country.

Mr. Jaber said he was hopeful but acknowledged the uncertainty ahead. "Where there is a will, there is a way," he said. The government faces a test "on the issue of their will."

Dayana Iwaza contributed reporting.

A stand-up mocks a politician. Then the mob descends.

NEW DELHI

Attack on a comedy club deepens concerns about free speech in India

BY MUJIB MASHAL

The joke was nothing too unusual for political comedy. But in India, where there is little room anymore to make fun of politicians without drawing court cases or mob violence, all hell quickly broke loose.

Just hours after video from a stand-up show in Mumbai was posted online on Sunday, supporters of a state political leader barged into the popular club where it had been taped. The vigilantes intimidated the crowd, which had gathered for an unrelated event, and vandalized the place as the police watched.

The state's chief minister called for legal action against the comic who performed the show, and the police filed charges, accusing him of defamation. The local municipality then sent government employees to batter the comedy club with hammers, a lighter version of what has become known as bulldozer justice, the tactic of razing homes and businesses as a form of retribution.

The comic, Kunal Kamra, who is among the last comedians still taking on politicians in India, issued a statement on Monday emphasizing that he would not be intimidated.

"Attacking a venue for a comedian's words is as senseless as overturning a lorry carrying tomatoes because you didn't like the butter chicken you were served," he said.

But the effect — the deepening chill on speech in India — was clear.

On Monday, the club, Habitat, announced that it had shut down, depriving India of one of the few places still willing to host shows of an edgy political nature. The police and the vigilantes remain on the hunt for Mr. Kamra, who is believed to be in a southern state.

The vigilantes, followers of Eknath Shinde, the second-in-command in the western state of Maharashtra, were offended by one word that Mr. Kamra used in a song: "gaddar" or traitor, an apparent reference to Mr. Shinde's defection from his party in 2022.

"Why would anyone take the chance if the mob can come in with the police just standing by and watching them?"

The kerfuffle has dominated discussions in the Maharashtra state assembly as well as national news headlines. Leaders of Mr. Shinde's party, the Shiv Sena, have doubled down with their threats.

"Shiv Sena will give answer in Shiv Sena's language," the party spokesman, Raju Waghmare, told a local news outlet, referring to the party's history of attacking those it disagrees with. He said that the emotions of party workers could not be controlled if a leader was insulted.

Punit Pania, a comic who had recently performed at Habitat, said it had become an important arts hub. Its closing will reverberate.

"Why would anyone take the chance if the mob can come in with the police just standing by and watching them?" Mr. Pania said.



Posters scattered outside Habitat, a comedy club in Mumbai, India, after an attack by supporters of Eknath Shinde, a state leader.

He said that many venues simply did not host comedy anymore, because "being offended has become like a sport" in India. The boundaries are clear: no jokes about politics, religion or sex.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared on a recent podcast, "I have a strong belief that criticism is the soul of

democracy." But as parties across the spectrum, including in opposition-run states like West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, have jailed people over political comments, it has become evident that speech is free only if you fall in line.

Comics often turn to joking about how hard it is to joke.

In announcing the house rules at a recent stand-up show, the comic Varun Grover asked the audience not to use their phones to record jokes because it would "meddle with the natural order" of how the business works these days.

"We write new content for three to four months, then it becomes a show,

then we go on tour," he said. "Once the tour is almost over, we record it, tape it, put it on YouTube — and then go to jail."

Mr. Shinde provided ample comedic material when he left his party in 2022 and took dozens of lawmakers with him, locking them up in hotels in other states until their own government collapsed.

Some lawmakers said they had been kidnapped, and even dragged. When Mr. Shinde came to power in a new coalition with the help of Mr. Modi's party, his allies danced on tables.

With repeated defections and breakups of parties in Maharashtra, "gaddar" became a routine label. The state's chief minister, Devendra Fadnis, himself used the word to describe the political opposition in a statement condemning the comic's joke.

In his song, Mr. Kamra did not mention Mr. Shinde by name, though he used identifying references.

The offense taken by Mr. Shinde's followers resurfaced online in an old joke by the poet Rabindranath Tagore.

In the 1970s, when India briefly plunged into dictatorship under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, Mr. Indori said at a poetry event that "the government is a thief."

He was called into a police station and asked about his comment.

"I said, 'Yes, I said the government is a thief,'" Mr. Indori recalled responding to the officer. "But I didn't say which government — India's government, Pakistan's government, the U.S. government or the British government."

The officer smiled. Mr. Indori said, then replied: "OK, so now you think we are fools, too? That we don't know which government is a thief?"

Pragati K.B. contributed reporting.

WORLD

For Pentagon chief, chat row extends a rocky start

WASHINGTON

Disclosure of war plans is the latest in a series of stumbles by Pete Hegseth

BY HELENE COOPER AND ERIC SCHMITT

Even before he disclosed secret battle plans for Yemen in a group chat, information that could have endangered American fighter pilots, it had been a rocky two months for U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth.

Mr. Hegseth, a former National Guard infantryman and Fox News weekend host, started his job at the Pentagon determined to out-Trump President Trump, Defense Department officials and aides said.

The president is skeptical about the value of NATO and European alliances, so the Pentagon under Mr. Hegseth considered plans in which the United States would give up its command role overseeing NATO troops. After Mr. Trump issued executive orders targeting transgender people, Mr. Hegseth ordered a ban on transgender troops.

Mr. Trump has embraced Elon Musk, the billionaire chief executive of SpaceX and Tesla. The Pentagon planned a sensitive briefing to give Mr. Musk a first-hand look at how the military would fight a war with China, a potentially valuable step for any businessman with interests there.

In all of those endeavors, Mr. Hegseth was pulled back, by congressional Republicans, the courts or even Mr. Trump.

The president made clear last Friday that he had been caught by surprise by a report in The New York Times on the Pentagon's briefing for Mr. Musk, who oversees an effort to shrink the government, but also denied that the meeting had been planned.

"I don't want to show that to anybody, but certainly you wouldn't show it to a businessman who is helping us so much," Mr. Trump said.

But Mr. Hegseth's latest mistake could have led to catastrophic consequences.

On Monday, the editor in chief of The Atlantic magazine, Jeffrey Goldberg, wrote that he had been inadvertently included in an encrypted group chat in which Mr. Hegseth discussed plans for targeting the Houthi militia in Yemen two hours before U.S. troops launched attacks against the group.

The White House confirmed Mr. Goldberg's account. But Mr. Hegseth later denied that he put war plans in the group chat, which apparently included other senior members of Mr. Trump's national security team.

In disclosing the aircraft, targets and timing for hitting Houthi militia sites in Yemen in the encrypted group chat, Mr. Hegseth risked the lives of American war fighters.

Across the military on Monday and Tuesday, current and retired troops and officers expressed dismay and anger in social media posts, secret chat groups and the hallways of the Pentagon.

"My father was killed in action flying



Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has struggled while trying to get ahead of his boss, President Trump, since taking office in January.

night-trail interdiction over the Ho Chi Minh Trail" after a North Vietnamese strike, said the retired Maj. Gen. Paul D. Eaton, who served in the Iraq war. "And now, you have Hegseth. He has released information that could have directly led to the death of an American fighter pilot."

It was unclear on Tuesday whether anyone involved in the Signal group

chat would lose their jobs. Republicans in Congress have been wary of turning afoot of Mr. Trump. But Senator Roger Wicker, Republican of Mississippi and the chairman of the Armed Services Committee, indicated on Monday that there would be an investigation.

John R. Bolton, a national security adviser in the first Trump administration, said on social media that he doubted

that "anyone will be held to account for events described by The Atlantic unless Donald Trump himself feels the heat."

In his article, Mr. Goldberg said he was added to the chat by Michael Waltz, Mr. Trump's current national security adviser.

On Tuesday, Mr. Trump defended Mr. Waltz. "Michael Waltz has learned a lesson, and he's a good man," Mr. Trump

said in an interview on NBC.

The president added that Mr. Goldberg's presence in the group chat had "no impact at all" and that the Houthi attacks were "perfectly successful."

To be sure, some of Mr. Hegseth's stumbles have been part of the learning process of a high-profile job leading a department with an \$850 billion annual budget.

Secretary Hegseth is trying to figure out where the president's headed, and to run there ahead of him," said Kori Schake, a national security expert at the American Enterprise Institute think tank. But, she added, "he's doing performative activities. He's not yet demonstrated that he's running the department."

Peter Feaver, a political science professor at Duke University in Durham, N.C. who has studied the military for decades, said the Signal chat disclosure "raises serious questions about how a new accountability standard might apply: How would he handle a situation like this if it involved one of his subordinates?"

"He's doing performative activities. He's not yet demonstrated that he's running the department."

On Monday, Mr. Hegseth left for Asia, his first trip abroad since a foray to Europe last month in which he was roundly criticized for going further on Ukraine than his boss had at the time. He posted a video on social media of himself guarded by two female airmen in full combat gear as he boarded the plane outside Washington. The show of security was remarkable. Not even the president is guarded that way as he boards Air Force One.

When he landed in Hawaii several hours later, Mr. Hegseth criticized Mr. Goldberg as a "so-called journalist" and asserted that "nobody was texting war plans, and that's all I have to say about that."

Mr. Hegseth's stumbles started soon after he was sworn in to lead the Pentagon on Jan. 25.

In his debut on the world stage in mid-February, he told NATO and Ukrainian ministers that a return to Ukraine's pre-2014 borders, before Russia's first invasion, was "an unrealistic objective" and ruled out NATO membership for Ukraine. A few hours later, Mr. Trump backed him up while announcing a phone call with President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia to begin peace negotiations.

Facing blowback the next day from European allies and President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine, Mr. Hegseth denied that either he or Mr. Trump had sold out Ukraine. "There is no betrayal there," Mr. Hegseth said.

That was not how even Republican supporters of Mr. Hegseth saw it. "He made a rookie mistake in Brussels," Mr. Wicker said about the secretary's comment on Ukraine's borders.

"I don't know who wrote the speech — it is the kind of thing Tucker Carlson could have written, and Carlson is a fool," Mr. Wicker said, referring to the

conservative media personality and former Fox News host.

Mr. Hegseth sought to recover later in the week, saying he had simply been trying to "introduce realism" into the expectations of our NATO allies." How much territory Ukraine may cede to Russia would be decided in talks between Mr. Trump and the presidents of the warring countries, he said.

Last week, Mr. Hegseth again got crosswise with Mr. Wicker over reports that the Trump administration was planning to withdraw from NATO's military command and reduce the number of troops deployed overseas in addition to other changes to the military's combatant commands.

Mr. Wicker and Representative Mike Rogers, Republican of Alabama and the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, said in a statement that they were concerned about reports that the Defense Department might be planning changes "absent coordination with the White House and Congress."

Other signs point to a dysfunctional Pentagon on Mr. Hegseth's watch.

Last week, the Defense Department removed an online article about the military background of Jackie Robinson, who became the first African American to play in Major League Baseball in 1947, after serving in the Army.

The article — which reappeared after a furor — was one in a series of government web pages on Black figures that have vanished under the Trump administration's efforts to purge government websites of references to diversity and inclusion.

In response to questions about the article, John Ulliot, a Pentagon spokesman, said in a statement that "D.E.I. is dead at the Defense Department," referring to diversity, equity and inclusion efforts. He added that he was pleased with the department's "rapid compliance" with a directive ordering that diversity-related content be removed from all platforms.

Mr. Ulliot was removed from his position shortly afterward.

Sean Parnell, the chief Pentagon spokesman, said in a video that the screening of Defense Department content for "D.E.I. content" was "an incredibly important undertaking," but he acknowledged mistakes were made.

The Pentagon leadership under Mr. Trump expressed its disdain for the military's decades-long efforts to diversify. Last month, Mr. Hegseth said that the "single dumbest phrase in military history is 'our diversity is our strength.'"

Mr. Hegseth also came under sharp critique from the federal judge handling a lawsuit against his efforts to ban transgender troops. "The military ban is soaked in animus and dripping with pretext," Judge Ana C. Reyes of U.S. District Court in Washington wrote in a scathing ruling last week.

Its language is unabashedly demeaning, its policy stigmatizes transgender persons as inherently unfit and its conclusions bear no relation to fact," she wrote in her decision temporarily blocking the ban. "Seriously? These were not off-the-cuff remarks at a cocktail party?"

Greg Jaffe contributed reporting.

Trump's team lays bare its distaste for Europe

TRUMP, FROM PAGE 1

There was no official request from European Union officials that America carry out the strike in Yemen — they were simply informed, said a European diplomat and a European official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss diplomatic conversations.

There have also been no conversations with high-level policymakers about remuneration, according to the diplomat.

The apparent disregard by administration officials of security protocols by having a discussion that included operational details on a consumer chat app, even an encrypted one, prompted concern that Russia and China could be listening in.

"Putin is now unemployed: No point in spying anymore," Nathalie Loiseau, a member of the European Parliament, wrote on X, saying the leaks now came from the Americans themselves. "No point in crushing Ukraine anymore, Trump will take care of it."

The commentary in the exchange is the latest blow to one of the world's most storied alliances, which took generations to build and strengthen but which the Trump administration has managed to weaken in mere weeks.

"It is clear that the trans-Atlantic relationship, as was, is over, and there is, at best, an indifferent, disdained relationship," said Nathalie Tocci, director of Italy's Institute of International Affairs, who formerly advised a top E.U. official. "And at worst, and closer to that, there is an active attempt to undermine Europe."

The European Union is, in many ways, the antithesis of the principles that Mr. Trump and his colleagues are championing. The bloc is built around an embrace of international trade based on rules. It has been at the forefront of climate-related regulation and social media user protections.

Europe has been on alert ever since Mr. Vance delivered a speech at a security conference in Munich last month that questioned European values and its democracy and shocked European leaders. He followed that up by warning that



Above, soldiers from the United States, Lithuania and other NATO countries training in Germany this month. Right, an international summit in London this month. President Trump has pivoted sharply away from Ukraine and repeatedly warned that Europe must pay much more for its own defense, threatening not to come to its aid.

Europe was at risk of "civilizational suicide."

If the relationship between the United States and Europe were merely transactional, it would be relatively easy for Europeans to spend more on the military and give Mr. Trump some sort of victory, said François Heisbourg, a French analyst and former defense official.

"It is clear that the trans-Atlantic relationship, as was, is over, and there is, at best, an indifferent disdained."

But in Mr. Vance's speech attacking European democracy in Munich, let alone in the newly public exchange, the distaste for Europe is about more than transactions.

"Vance was quite clear: We don't share the same values," Mr. Heisbourg said.

He and others, like Anna Sauerbre,

the foreign editor of Die Zeit, noted that the explicit demand for payment, rather than just political and military support, as in Iraq and Afghanistan, was new. And it ignored the fact that "the U.S. depends on global trade," she said, and that "France, Britain and the Netherlands have deployed ships to the region" for the same purpose. The Americans, she said, "are constantly overlooking European efforts."

China, for example, gets most of its oil imports through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait and does much of its export trade with Europe through the same sea route. But no one is asking China to pay, Ms. Tocci noted.

For months, Washington has been sending barbed statements and actions Europe's way.

Mr. Trump has made it clear that he wants to acquire Greenland, a semi-autonomous territory of Denmark, even as European leaders warn that they will defend territorial integrity. Usha Vance, Mr. Vance's wife, and Mike Waltz, the



national security adviser, are visiting the island this week, uninvited, its government says, and to an agitated response.

Mr. Trump has also repeatedly warned that Europe must pay much more for its own defense, threatening not to come to the aid of nations that do not pay up sufficiently, and has pivoted sharply away from Ukraine. He has simultaneously rolled out plans to slap hefty tariffs on Europe and argued that the European Union was created to "screw" America.

Christel Schaldemose, a Danish politician who is a center-left member of the European Parliament, said the way the United States has been talking about the European Union in general lately is "not helping."

"Could we start talking to each other as allies and not enemies?" she said.

Even as European leaders try to maintain the friendship, they are racing to try to bolster their defense expenditures, cognizant that it would be nearly impossible to replace American military capabilities overnight.

They were scheduled to meet on Thursday in Paris to discuss Ukraine, and NATO foreign ministers are meeting early next month to discuss progress.

They are also scrambling to strike a trade deal with the United States. On Tuesday, the E.U. trade commissioner visited Washington to talk with his American counterparts.

But with America's increasingly hostile attitude toward Europe, the continent's officials are contemplating a future where the prized relationship stretching across the Atlantic, a foundation upon which decades of relative

peace and prosperity have been built, might never be the same.

The international order is undergoing changes of a magnitude not seen since 1945," Kaja Kallas, the top E.U. diplomat, said last week.

The group chat leak underscores why a divorce may be necessary: The United States is not the reliable ally it once was, either rhetorically or practically.

It is highly unusual and possibly illegal for sensitive military plans to be discussed on a messaging app, rather than by a more secure means of communication.

That disregard for normal security procedures will "cause allies to be very reluctant to share analysis and intelligence," said Ben Hodges, former commander of U.S. forces in Europe. Barring major change, people "will assume America can't be trusted."



At a Stand Up for Science rally in Washington this month protesters demonstrated against Trump administration cuts to federal funding for mostly all fields of scientific research.

Europe recruits U.S. scientists

PARIS

As Trump policies tear into American academia, a welcome mat is offered

BY CATHERINE PORTER

Just hours after opening its new program for American researchers called Safe Place for Science in reaction to Trump administration policies, Aix-Marseille University received its first application.

Since then, the university, which is in the south of France and is known for its science programs, has received about a dozen applications per day from what the school considers “scientific asylum” seekers.

Other universities in France and elsewhere in Europe have also rushed to save American researchers fleeing drastic cuts to jobs and programs by the Trump administration, as well as perceived attacks on whole fields of research.

At stake are not just individual jobs, but the concept of free scientific inquiry, university presidents say.

They are also rushing to fill huge holes in collective research caused by the cuts, particularly in areas targeted by the Trump administration, including studies of climate change, public health, environmental science, gender and diversity.

If the movement becomes a trend, it could mean the reversal of the long-term brain drain that has seen generations of scientists move to the United States. And while at least some Europeans have noted that the changes in the United States provide a unique opportunity to build stronger European research centers, most academics say that competition is not the short-term motivation.

“This program is ultimately linked to indignation, to declare what is happening in the United States is not normal,” said Eric Berton, president of Aix-Marseille University, which has earmarked

15 million euros (nearly \$16.3 million) for 15 three-year positions.

He said the number of openings “wasn’t much,” but the goal was to “give them a little hope.”

In France, Aix-Marseille University is considered a leader in the push to bring in American researchers.

Since that program started, a cancer research foundation in Paris announced that it was immediately putting up 3.5 million euros to welcome American cancer researchers.

And last week, two universities in Paris announced that they were offering positions to American scientists whose work has been curtailed or halted by the Trump administration. “We are researchers — we want to continue to work at the highest level in these fields that are being attacked in the United States,” explained El Mouhoub Mouhoub, the president of Université Paris Sciences et Lettres.

“We are researchers — we want to continue to work at the highest level in these fields that are being attacked in the United States.”

The university plans to welcome 15 researchers who are already working on shared projects in targeted areas including climate science, health, humanities and gender studies, said Mr. Mouhoub. As a result, the projects would continue unfettered and the American researchers could enjoy “academic freedom to do their research,” he said.

“That’s good for everyone,” Mr. Mouhoub said.

The alarms at European scientific institutions began sounding as the Trump administration started slashing jobs and freezing science grants as part of its broad cost-cutting measures.

Firings at U.S. centers deemed the pinnacle of science have been announced week after week, including at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the National Science Foundation, the U.S. Geological Survey and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The National Institutes of Health, the world’s largest funder of biomedical research, fired 1,200 employees and put grant reviews on hold, essentially turning off the tap of government funding for research projects in labs across the country.

The cuts come as some federal agencies have removed terms from websites and grant applications that are deemed unacceptable to the Trump administration, which is seeking to purge the federal government of “woke” initiatives. Among the terms considered taboo: “climate science,” “diversity” and “gender.”

Taken together, the actions have sent a chill through academia and research institutes, with scientists worried not just for their jobs but the long-term viability of their research.

“What we see today is actually censorship, censorship of fundamental values,” said Yasmine Belkaid, president of the Pasteur Institute in Paris, who moved to France last year after 30 years in the United States, where she had led the National Institutes of Health’s Center for Human Immunology.

“We could lose a generation of science, a generation of scientists, something that we cannot recover from,” she added. “It is our duty collectively to make sure that science on the whole is protected.”

Philippe Baptiste, the French minister of higher education and research, has been among the most outspoken and active European leaders on the issue. Mr. Baptiste, who led the French National Center of Space Studies before joining the government, described the Trump administration’s decisions as “collective madness” that required a swift and robust response from around the world.

“They are making decisions” he said, “that call into question whole swaths of research not just in the United States, but the world because there are a huge number of programs that we do jointly with the United States — on earth observation, on climate, on ecology, on the environment, on health data, on space exploration. It’s incalculable.”

Mr. Baptiste has been working with

the presidents of French universities to come up with a government program. He has also pushed for a Europe-wide response, including drafting a letter, also signed by government ministers in 11 other European countries, which demands a coordinated effort and dedicated funding from the European Commission for start-ups, research and innovation.

More than 350 scientists signed a petition published this week in the French newspaper *Le Monde*, similarly calling on the European Commission to set up an emergency fund of 750 million euros to accommodate thousands of researchers working in the United States.

A European Commission spokesperson said a meeting was being planned to coordinate the most effective response to the Trump administration cuts to scientific research.

In Brussels, two sister universities — *Vrije Universiteit Brussel* and *Université Libre de Bruxelles* — said they planned to market to American students a program offering 36 postdoctoral positions open to international researchers from around the world.

The positions, largely funded by European Union money, will focus on research in climate, artificial intelligence and other areas the schools view as socially important.

In the Netherlands, the minister of education, culture and science, Eppo Bruins, wrote, “The geopolitical climate is changing, which is currently increasing the international mobility of scientists. Several European countries are responding to this and are going to attract international scientific talent. I want the Netherlands to continue to be at the forefront.”

Ulrike Malmendier, a German economist who is a member of Germany’s leading economic council, said, “The development in the U.S.A. is a huge opportunity for Germany and Europe. I know that a lot of people are thinking about leaving.”

Reporting was contributed by Jeanna Smialek from Brussels, Claire Moses from London, and Christopher F. Schuetz and Melissa Eddy from Berlin.

Moves for peace seen as a means to a prize

WHITE HOUSE MEMO
WASHINGTON

Trump’s desire for a Nobel is plain, but aligning with aggressors may cost him

BY TYLER PAGER

He has built lavish clubs and gold-encrusted skyscrapers. He won the White House not once but twice. He has leveraged his power to exact retribution on political opponents, corporate executives and world leaders.

And yet, one accolade has eluded President Trump, and the leader of the free world has made no secret about how irritated he is by what he sees as a snub.

“They will never give me a Nobel Peace Prize,” Mr. Trump said last month during a meeting with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel in the Oval Office. “It’s too bad. I deserve it, but they will never give it to me.”

For nearly a decade, Mr. Trump has publicly and privately complained that he has yet to win the prestigious prize. He has mentioned the award dozens of times in interviews and speeches and during campaign rallies dating back to his first term. And as he presses for cease-fire deals in Ukraine and the Middle East, current and former advisers say the award is looming large in his mind.

“The Nobel Peace Prize is illegitimate if President Trump — the ultimate peace president — is denied his rightful recognition of bringing harmony across the world,” Steven Cheung, the White House communications director, said in a statement.

In many ways, Mr. Trump’s public jockeying for the prize reflects his focus on accolades, praise and acceptance — and a burning desire to best his predecessors. President Barack Obama won the prize less than nine months after taking office in 2009 for confronting “the great climatic challenges,” a decision that elicited worldwide controversy.

In accepting the award, Mr. Obama noted that his “accomplishments are” compared with those of other winners. Mr. Trump has not forgotten that, and he is still waiting for his invitation to Norway.

“The center of his public life is the greater glory of Donald Trump, and the Nobel Peace Prize would be a nice thing to hang on the wall,” said John R. Bolton, Mr. Trump’s former national security adviser who had a falling-out with the president late in his first term.

“He said that Obama got the Nobel Peace Prize and felt if Obama got it for not doing anything, why should he not get it?” Mr. Bolton said of Mr. Trump. (Less than 12 hours after being sworn in for his second term, Mr. Trump revoked Mr. Bolton’s Secret Service protection.)

In the final months of his 2024 campaign, Mr. Trump repeatedly spoke of Mr. Obama’s Nobel Peace Prize, complaining that he did not deserve the award.

“If I were named Obama, I would have had the Nobel Prize given to me in 10 seconds,” Mr. Trump said during a speech at the Detroit Economic Club in October.

A spokeswoman for Mr. Obama declined to comment.

A wide variety of people can nominate someone for the prize, and Mr. Trump has received multiple nominations from supporters over the years. Last year, Representative Claudia Tenney, a Republican from New York, nominated Mr. Trump for his work on the Abraham Accords, which established ties between Israel and four Arab countries. This month, Representative Darrell Issa, a Republican from California, said he had nominated Mr. Trump for his work to secure peace in the Middle East.

Some of Mr. Trump’s top aides have also supported the president’s cam-

paign for the award, often bringing it up unprompted in venues where the president is likely to hear, like Fox News or the Conservative Political Action Conference.

In his inaugural address, Mr. Trump said his “proudest legacy will be that of a peacemaker and unifier.”

Amid the flurry of executive orders he has signed to dismantle federal agencies, speed up deportations and impose tariffs, the president has tried to bolster that legacy. He has negotiated the release of Americans in Russia, Belarus and Afghanistan, moved closer to a broader cease-fire between Russia and Ukraine and tried to work to end the conflict in the Middle East.

Last week, Mr. Trump helped broker an agreement between President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia and President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine for a mutual pause in attacks on energy targets for 30 days.

But critics say Mr. Trump’s effort to secure peace comes at a cost, arguing he is often aligning himself with aggressors. After a contentious meeting last month with Mr. Zelensky in the Oval Office, for example, Mr. Trump temporarily suspended the delivery of all U.S. military aid to Ukraine.



President Trump has complained for years that he hasn’t won a Nobel Peace Prize. “It’s too bad. I deserve it, but they will never give it to me,” he said.

“He saw that Obama got the Nobel Peace Prize and felt if Obama got it for not doing anything, why should he not?”

“I am very critical about what America is doing just now about Russia and Ukraine,” said Magnus Jacobsson, a member of the Swedish Parliament who nominated the government of the United States for the award in 2020, in an interview from Lviv, Ukraine. “He’s not working for peace between Russia and Ukraine. He’s working for more conflict, a more complicated situation, and we in Europe, probably nobody is really happy now.”

In 2020, Mr. Trump called Mr. Jacobsson to thank him for the nomination, which Mr. Jacobsson submitted for the United States, Kosovo and Serbia. The Trump administration had helped negotiate an economic mobilization deal between Kosovo and Serbia, two formerly warring countries. But Mr. Jacobsson said Mr. Trump’s approach to the war in Ukraine was not deserv-ing of the prize. Juan Manuel Santos, who won the Nobel Peace Prize as president of Colombia in 2016, seemed skeptical of Mr. Trump’s case for the award — at least right now.

“We still don’t have peace, so I don’t think right now there are many arguments in favor of this desire,” he said in an interview.

He added: “I don’t think he or anybody will win the Nobel Peace Prize simply by working to earn that prize. People throughout history have won the Nobel Peace Prize because of what they do and because of their real motivations to have peace. I hope that is the circumstance here. If he succeeds, then he might be a good candidate for the peace prize.”

Dylan Freedman contributed reporting.

Artist silent on portrait that is despised by its subject

BY DERRICK BRYSON TAYLOR

A relatively unknown artist living in Colorado was recently thrust into the spotlight when President Trump criticized her work, a portrait of himself that had been hanging in the State Capitol for about five years.

Mr. Trump said on social media that the oil painting, by Sarah Boardman, which depicts the president with softened features in a dark suit and red tie, was “truly the worst” and that it had been “purposefully distorted.”

“In any event, I would much prefer not having a picture than having this one, but many people from Colorado have called and written to complain,” he wrote on Sunday. “In fact, they are actually angry about it!”

A day later, the Colorado General Assembly, which is controlled by Democrats, removed the portrait that was hanging in the Gallery of Presidents in the building’s rotunda.

Ms. Boardman, who won a nationwide contest to paint the portraits of President Barack Obama and Mr. Trump that hung in the State Capitol, did not respond to a request for comment.

She has not spoken publicly since the

portrait was removed, but months before it was unveiled, she told *The Colorado Times Recorder* that she had chosen a reference photo that showed Mr. Trump with a “serious, nonconfrontational, thoughtful” expression.

Here is what we know about Ms. Boardman and that presidential portrait.

WHAT IS MS. BOARDMAN’S ARTISTIC BACKGROUND?

According to her website, Ms. Boardman was born in England and began studying painting 40 years ago in Germany under a master painter. She spent more than four years learning and practicing techniques used by old master painters, a term broadly used to describe prominent artists who worked between 1300 and 1800.

Before taking to painting, she worked in airline travel and business.

WHAT DOES MS. BOARDMAN PAINT?

Ms. Boardman’s portraits, which make up most of her work, are varied, but all use a combination of realism and painterly aesthetics.

She paints ordinary people in graceful or contemplative poses, public and mili-



HELEN H. RICHARDS/ANSA/NEWS GROUP/THE DENVER POST, VIA GETTY IMAGES

tary officials, and a variety of dogs.

According to her website, she is intrigued by the “depth” found in her subjects and is challenged to capture the “personality, character and soul” in each.

WHAT HAS SHE SAID ABOUT HER PORTRAIT OF MR. TRUMP?

In conversations with *The Times Recorder* in 2018 and 2019, Ms. Boardman said her personal feelings about Mr. Trump had not affected her work. “Any

Sarah Boardman’s portrait of President Trump. The painting had been hanging in the Colorado State Capitol for about five years before Mr. Trump complained.

personal feelings about any subject are not relevant and are left outside the studio per my training to leave those emotions at the door,” she said.

She said then that outrage over her portrait of Mr. Obama were because of how people felt about the politician, not the art itself, and that she expected the same of Mr. Trump’s portrait.

Ms. Boardman explained that the most supportive comment she had received at the time was in reference to Mr. Trump’s neutral expression and how it would appeal to everyone. “A portrait is not a political statement, but a representation of a human being,” she said.

HAVE PAST PRESIDENTS HATED THEIR PORTRAITS?

President Theodore Roosevelt was displeased with his first presidential portrait, which was painted by the French artist Théobald Chartrain in the early 1900s, and later became known as “The mewing cat.” Mr. Roosevelt eventually

commissioned John Singer Sargent to paint his official portrait.

President Lyndon B. Johnson turned down the official commissioned portrait of himself by Peter Hurd, calling it “the ugliest thing I ever saw.” Mr. Hurd called the comment “very damn rude.”

WHAT WAS THE RESPONSE TO MR. TRUMP’S CRITICISM?

While Mr. Trump said that Ms. Boardman’s portrait was “the worst,” he also better and speculated that the artist “had lost her talent as she got older,” the response from officials and the public has been mixed.

Supporters and critics have flocked to Ms. Boardman’s professional Facebook page, where some of her art is displayed, to share their opinions.

A spokesman for Gov. Jared Polis of Colorado told *9News*, a local television station, in a statement on Monday that the governor’s office was surprised by the appearance of the president’s attention to the artwork.

“We are always looking for any opportunity to improve our visitor experience and hope all the attention successfully attracts even more tourists to the Denver area,” he said.

WORLD

A city split over Trump’s immigration crackdown

AURORA, COLO.

Some wonder if his actions are inflicting more damage than the migrants ever did

BY JACK HEALY AND TIM ARANGO

The crumbling apartments in Aurora, Colo., that President Trump seized on to insist the city had been overrun by Venezuelan street gangs are now boarded up and nearly empty. But in one building, the smashed door of Apartment 300 captures the fresh divisions sown by Mr. Trump’s immigration crackdown.

On a recent spring morning, a crew of construction workers fixing up the apartments pointed to the door as evidence of the violence wrought by criminals let into the country by Democrats. “They allowed this sanctuary nonsense,” said Karl Baker, a contractor, who voted for Mr. Trump.

Jackelin Melendez, who lives nearby, had a different explanation. The door, she said, was kicked in during an immigration raid last month. The men inside were laborers, not gang members, she said. Law enforcement agents pounded on her door that morning too, terrifying her children.

“We’re caught in the middle,” Ms. Melendez, who is undocumented and from El Salvador, said in Spanish.

Just who is responsible for smashing the door remains unclear. What is clear is that Mr. Trump has made Aurora a national shorthand for migrant crime after declaring repeatedly that the vast Denver suburb, population 400,000 and Colorado’s third-largest city, had been taken over by the Venezuelan gang Tren de Aragua. He pointed to a viral video of armed men stalking the halls of one of three rundown complexes where hundreds of immigrants had settled.

Mr. Trump christened his plan to expel them Operation Aurora, even as the city’s conservative Republican mayor protested that Aurora had not been taken over by Tren de Aragua, and the police chief said that Aurora had arrested people suspected of gang activity and had the matter under control.

Now, as Mr. Trump ramps up his crackdown by invoking wartime powers to deport hundreds of Venezuelans without court hearings, Aurora is split over which poses a greater threat: undocumented immigrants, or Mr. Trump.

Aurora’s affordability and closeness to Denver have long made it an Ellis Island on the high plains, where 160 languages are spoken in the schools, and a city slogan declares that “Aurora is open to the world.” It has its rough spots, but Aurora has wealth too and the sparkling University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus — none of which has been overrun by Venezuelan gangs.

The suburb is also politically diverse. As the Denver area struggled to cope with 40,000 migrants who had arrived from the southern border, it wasn’t just wealthy white swing voters in Aurora’s gated cul-de-sacs and golf-course subdivisions who swung toward Mr. Trump. Several working-class Hispanic voters said they had been persuaded to support the Republican by his promises to go after gangs.

In the two months since Mr. Trump took office, a hardline, high-profile enforcement actions have cheered his conservative supporters in Aurora. But they have also sown fear in the city’s large immigrant population and misgivings among some Latinos who voted for Mr. Trump.

In early February, teams of federal agents, dressed in tactical gear and carrying smoke grenades, carried out day-long immigration raids that targeted homes and apartment buildings across



President Trump says that Aurora, Colorado’s third-largest city, is a migrant crime hub, menaced by the Venezuelan gang Tren de Aragua. Below left, a boarded-up apartment complex that Mr. Trump insisted had been taken over by the street gang. Below right, Jackelin Melendez, a migrant from El Salvador whose home was targeted in a raid.



metropolitan Denver. They entered two run-down complexes in Aurora where immigrants had lived without working plumbing or heat, in apartments infested with cockroaches and bedbugs. Immigration and Customs Enforcement declined to say how many people had been arrested that day — or if the agency had detained gang members.

Last week, an outspoken undocumented activist, Jeanette Vizguerra, was arrested outside a Target store where she worked in the Denver area. She was taken to an immigrant detention center in Aurora, where she is now fighting deportation.

Mr. Trump’s get-tough approach has thrilled voters like Robert Johnston, a Republican contractor who works in Aurora and has been repairing the now-empty apartment complexes, where city officials say an out-of-state property

owner exaggerated the story of a gang takeover to shirk his responsibilities to the tenants. The landlord, CBZ Management, denied the accusation, but the properties have been closed by the city or put into court-ordered receivership. Mr. Johnston said the raids showed that Mr. Trump was following through with his promises to root out criminal immigrants.

“He’s been doing the stuff he said he was going to do,” Mr. Johnston said.

Danielle Jurinsky, a conservative Aurora councilwoman who helped to publicize the claims about gang activity in the Aurora apartment buildings last summer, praised Mr. Trump and said she was thrilled by ICE social-media posts announcing the arrests of immigrants with criminal charges.

“I helped put them on the run from Colorado, specifically Aurora,” she said

in a social media post. “I’m happy to see them being arrested all over the country.”

But Andres Barron, a forklift driver who immigrated to Colorado from Mexico, said he believed that Mr. Trump’s actions were turning all immigrants into targets. He voted for Mr. Trump in November — his first vote as an American citizen — but said Mr. Trump had been too focused on indiscriminate immigration raids and had ignored high prices and weaknesses in the larger economy.

“I didn’t think he’d do this with immigration,” Mr. Barron said. “A lot of us are starting to feel a little regret about our votes.”

Mr. Barron said that even as he had lost hours at his warehouse job and seen no improvement in prices, the immigration case of his wife, Raquel, had stalled without any explanation. Since the raids



PHOTOGRAPHED BY MICHAEL CAGLIO FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

around Denver and the arrest of Ms. Vizguerra, his wife has become so worried about being picked up by immigration agents that she refuses to run errands alone.

“Before, I felt comfortable going out to the store without him,” Raquel said. “Now, no.”

School attendance and business at some of Aurora’s Hispanic grocery stores and food halls fell immediately after the raids, but the numbers have gradually rebounded, city officials said. Some undocumented immigrants said that they could not stop working or keep their children home from school indefinitely, and that they were now using WhatsApp chat groups to discuss the safest times or best routes to use when they ventured out.

Aurora leaders say they have worked to shut down the squalid apartments at



“But the city’s not being overrun. We’ve not been invaded.”

MIKE COFFMAN, mayor of Aurora, Colo.

the center of the controversy over Tren de Aragua’s presence in the city. Aid groups say many of the former residents are still living in subsidized motel rooms and have struggled to find new apartments in a region with a severe shortage of affordable housing.

“I still have mice and roaches,” said Javier Hidalgo, a Venezuelan immigrant who had to find new housing when the city closed his complex on Nome Street. “It’s been really hard. I thought this was a country that welcomed immigrants.”

The Aurora Police Department has announced the arrests of more than a dozen people suspected of being in the Tren de Aragua gang, including five armed men the police say were captured on video knocking on doors in one of the buildings minutes before a fatal shooting.

But Aurora and Colorado continue to face public scrutiny from the Trump administration.

In his joint address to Congress this month, Mr. Trump singled out Aurora and Springfield, Ohio, as cities that had been “destroyed” by immigration and had “buckled under the weight of migrant occupation.”

Last week, ICE accused Aurora of declining to help in the search for two migrants who had escaped the detention facility when a power outage enabled them to slip out a back door. Aurora rejected the criticism, saying the city had not been notified of the escape for nearly five hours.

The issue was so exaggerated by ICE,” said Mayor Mike Coffman, who has spent much of his time lately trying to do damage control for his city’s reputation.

On a recent visit to Colorado, the acting head of the Drug Enforcement Administration, Derek Maltz, said the “command and control” of the Tren de Aragua gang was in Colorado. He called the state “ground zero” for some of the country’s most violent criminals. Mr. Coffman disagreed. “I don’t see it,” he said.

Every new mention of an immigration case involving Aurora or Colorado brings a deluge of angry emails and social media messages, followed by another round of attempts by city officials to insist that their city is not overrun and they cooperate with federal law enforcement and immigration agents within the boundaries set by Colorado laws.

“The middle ground was a hard place to be, to acknowledge that there was a problem, and the problem was real,” Mr. Coffman said. “But the city’s not being overrun. We’ve not been invaded. Trump supporters were enraged by that. The president said it, so it had to be true.”

Therapy backed by U.S. health official makes some more ill

Measles patients show signs of liver damage after taking too much vitamin A

BY TEDDY ROSENBLUTH

Doctors in West Texas are seeing measles patients whose illnesses have been complicated by an alternative therapy endorsed by vaccine skeptics including Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the health secretary.

Parents in Gaines County, Texas, the center of a raging measles outbreak, have increasingly turned to supplements and unproven treatments to protect their children, many of whom are unvaccinated, against the virus.

One of those supplements is cod liver oil containing vitamin A, which Mr. Kennedy has promoted as a near-miraculous cure for measles. Physicians at Covenant Children’s Hospital in Lubbock, Texas, say they have now treated a handful of unvaccinated children who were given so much vitamin A that they had signs of liver damage.

Some of them had received unsafe doses of cod liver oil and other vitamin A supplements for several weeks in an attempt to prevent a measles infection, said Dr. Summer Davies, who cares for acutely ill children at the hospital.

“I had a patient that was only sick a couple of days, four or five days, but had been taking it for like three weeks,” Dr. Davies said.

While doctors sometimes administer high doses of vitamin A in a hospital to manage severe measles, experts do not recommend taking it without physician supervision. Vitamin A is not an effective way to prevent measles; however, two doses of the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine are about 97 percent effective.

At high doses, vitamin A can cause liver damage; dry, peeling skin; hair loss; and, in rare instances, seizures and coma. So far, doctors at West Texas hospitals have said they’ve seen patients with yellowed skin and high levels of liver enzymes in their blood work, both signs of a damaged liver.

Many of those patients had been in the hospital for a severe measles infection, doctors discovered the liver damage only after routine lab work.

As of Tuesday, the outbreak, which began in January, had spread to more than 320 people in Texas. Forty patients have been hospitalized, and one child has died.

In neighboring New Mexico counties, the virus has sickened 43 and hospitalized 20. Seven confirmed cases in Oklahoma have also been linked to the outbreak.

Local doctors and health officials have become increasingly concerned about the growing popularity of unproven remedies for preventing and treating measles, which they fear is causing people to delay critical medical treatment and to reject vaccination, the only proven way to prevent a measles infection.



A nurse practitioner administering a measles vaccine to a child at a hospital in West Texas last month. Vaccination is the only proven way to prevent a measles infection.

In Gaines County, alternative medicine has always been popular. Many in the area’s large Mennonite community, where most cases have been clustered, avoid interacting with the medical system and adhere to a long tradition of natural remedies.

Health officials said the recent popularity of vitamin A use for measles could be traced back to a Fox News interview with Mr. Kennedy, in which he said he had heard of “almost miraculous and instantaneous recovery” with treatments

like cod liver oil, which he said was “the safest application of vitamin A.”

In an opinion essay for The Washington Post on Tuesday afternoon, Kevin Griffiths, who was until last week the communications director at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, wrote that he had resigned in part because of Mr. Kennedy’s handling of the outbreak.

“In my final weeks at the C.D.C., I watched as career infectious-disease

experts were tasked with spending precious hours searching medical literature in vain for data to support Kennedy’s preferred treatments,” Mr. Griffiths wrote.

In the weeks after the Fox News interview, drugstores in West Texas struggled to keep vitamin A and cod liver oil supplements on their shelves. “I did not hear anything about vitamin A until he said it on television,” said Katherine Wells, the director of public health in Lubbock.

One local doctor — whom Mr. Kennedy named in the Fox News interview as one of the physicians who had told him “what is working on the ground” — opened a makeshift clinic in Gaines County and began doling out various treatments, including vitamin A supplements, to treat active measles cases and to prevent infection.

Dr. Davies said she suspected that a majority of the children she had treated had taken vitamin A supplements at home.

Experts say that vitamin A can play an important role in the “supportive care” that doctors provide to patients with severe measles infections.

It works by replenishing the bodily stores depleted by the virus, which bolsters the immune system, said Dr. William Schaffner, an infectious disease specialist at Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Tennessee.

In the hospital, physicians give only two doses of the vitamin to children with measles, usually over the course of two days, and “very carefully calibrate” the

amounts depending on age and weight, he said.

Dr. Schaffner emphasized that it is not a miracle treatment for the virus, and that there is no antiviral medication for measles. And there is no credible evidence that vitamin A helps prevent infection in children in the United States, where vitamin A deficiencies are rare.

In fact, giving children repeated, high doses of the vitamin is dangerous. Unlike other vitamins, which are flushed out of the body through urine, excess vitamin A accumulates in fat tissue, making it more likely to reach dangerous levels over time.

“I did not hear anything about vitamin A until he said it on television.”

“That kind of preventative use I think is especially concerning,” said Dr. Lara Johnson, another doctor at the Lubbock hospital.

“When we have kids taking it for weeks and weeks, then you do potentially have a cumulative impact of the toxicity,” she added.

Dr. Johnson added that local physicians were particularly concerned about parents’ relying on over-the-counter supplements — whose labels don’t always accurately reflect the amount of vitamin they contain — and accepting dosage recommendations from unverified sources.

Business

U.S. exporters vie to shape reciprocal tariffs

WASHINGTON

A variety of companies weigh the risks and payoffs of Trump's promised levies

BY ANA SWANSON

Ahead of President Trump's next big trade move, his administration invited companies to weigh in on the economic barriers they faced abroad.

The list of complaints was both sprawling and specific. In hundreds of letters submitted to the administration in recent weeks, producers of uranium, shrimp, T-shirts and steel highlighted the unfair trade treatment they faced, in hopes of bending the president's trade agenda in their favor. The complaints varied from Brazil's high tariffs on ethanol and pet food, to India's high levies on almonds and pecans, to Japan's longstanding barriers to American potatoes.

Mr. Trump has promised to overhaul the global trading system on April 2, when he plans to impose what he is calling "reciprocal tariffs" that will match the levies and other policies that countries impose on American exporters. The president has taken to calling this "liberation day," arguing that it will end years of other countries "ripping us off."

On Monday, Mr. Trump appeared to suggest a potential softening to the tariffs, saying, "I may give a lot of countries breaks." He added, "It's reciprocal, but we may be even nicer than that."

"They've charged us so much that I'm embarrassed to charge them what they've charged us," he said at an event at the White House. "But it'll be substantial."

Mr. Trump also signaled that the White House could finalize tariffs on foreign-made cars before April 2, teasing that an announcement could come "fairly soon, over the next few days probably."

Many details of Mr. Trump's reciprocal tariff plan remain unclear, but administration officials have indicated that it would likely add an additional fee to most or all products imported from specific countries.

It's not clear how many countries will be hit, but Trump officials have mentioned the "dirty 15," a reference to a group of countries that have tariffs on American products and run trade surpluses with the United States, presumably including most of America's largest trading partners.

The reciprocal tariff plan has created a tricky calculus for many companies, which want to see trade barriers erased but fear ending up at the center of a trade war that could make them worse off. That is because Mr. Trump's high-stakes approach could generate effects by other countries to make deals with the United States and drop their own tariffs, or it could invite retaliation that ends up closing off foreign markets to American products.

Some American companies see an opportunity in Mr. Trump's agenda. Many of the letters that companies have submitted to the Office of the United States



POTATOES Exporters angered by Japan's longstanding barriers to American potatoes have lodged complaints with the White House.



TESLAS Elon Musk's car company warned that earlier U.S. trade actions had led to increased tariffs on American electric vehicles.



SHRIMP The U.S. shrimp industry has issued nearly two dozen complaints saying the volume of cheap imports has depressed prices.

Trade Representative in recent weeks asked officials to fight for lower trade barriers on their behalf, highlighting the high levies, onerous inspections or other complications American exporters face in foreign markets.

But others appear hesitant to put themselves in the president's cross hairs. Some industry representatives say privately that companies have been nervous that raising their hands for help could put them at the center of coming trade spats, disrupting the export markets they depend on and potentially making them a target for retaliation.

Publicly, many of America's biggest exporters — like the trade groups that represent exporters of pork, soybeans and oil — tempered their filings with cautionary words about the harm that could come from disrupting export markets. Major business groups also continued to urge the administration to reduce trade barriers rather than raise them, and focus on striking new trade agreements that would open up foreign markets.

"The administration's work on reciprocity should result in the removal, not the creation, of barriers to trade," the Consumer Technology Association, which represents technology companies, said in its letter to the trade representative. The group said it was "deeply concerned" that tariff threats against Europe would "disincentivize global barriers to trade and dismantle the global trading system."

Other groups seemed to be aware that the information they were handing the Trump administration could become ammunition in a trade war in which they could be casualties. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce said the information it was submitting on trade barriers was "not intended to justify the application of broad-based tariffs but should help U.S. negotiators to focus on specific issues of importance to American businesses of all sizes."

It remains to be seen whether these submissions will have much influence over Mr. Trump, who has a history of basing trade policy on his impulses and intuition. But the quantity and variety of the responses highlight the enormous challenge for the Trump administration as it tries to figure out how to put its own imprint on the global trading system with just a few weeks of preparation. And it hints at the controversy that may be awaiting the administration once it finally reveals the details of a still-ill-defined trade policy.

Mr. Trump has suggested that his forthcoming tariffs could be sweeping and influential. But for now, the question of whether the administration's efforts will result in higher or lower barriers to trade remains unanswered.

The president has said his guiding principle is reciprocity. If countries charge the United States high tariffs or install other economic barriers, the United States will mirror that treatment for their exports, he said. Mr. Trump has often mentioned India's high tariffs on motorcycles, Europe's tariffs on cars and its value-added tax, and Canada's protections for its dairy market.

Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said last week that the administration

planned to come up with a tariff number for each country that it would impose on April 2. That number would represent the levies that foreign governments imposed on American products along with other barriers, like taxes.

Mr. Bessent said some countries might be able to pre-negotiate deals and not face additional tariffs. Officials in Britain, India, Mexico, the Europe Union and elsewhere have been angling for such an outcome, though some are also drawing up lists of retaliatory tariffs if Mr. Trump moves forward.

It also remains uncertain exactly what the president wants the reciprocal tariffs to accomplish. Mr. Trump's administration has cited a litany of reasons for his tariffs, including making trade more fair for American exporters, eliminating trade deficits with other nations and generating more tariff revenue to finance his tax cuts.

With these goals still unclear, some companies are trying to shape the agenda. Many of the submissions to the trade representative pointed to China as a primary threat, with companies highlighting the risk that cheap Chinese imports pose to various U.S. industries.

"The administration's work on reciprocity should result in the removal, not the creation, of barriers to trade."

Makers of American flags and Jaccuzzi complained that competition from China was threatening to put them out of business. American Christmas tree growers argued that tariffs on artificial Christmas trees from China would help U.S. tree farms. The poultry industry criticized Chinese barriers to the sale of U.S. chicken parts, including chicken feet and wing tips.

But plenty of other countries were mentioned as well. Corn growers cited Mexico's recent ban on genetically modified corn. J.M. Smucker called out Europe's tariffs on jam and jelly, while Chobani criticized Canada's barriers to yogurt imports.

Nearly two dozen entries highlighted the dire situation of the American shrimp industry. The Louisiana Shrimp Association called for a quota or other limits on shrimp imports, saying foreign shrimp had depressed prices so much that shrimpers could not even afford to fire up their boats.

Even Tesla, whose chief executive, Elon Musk, is helping to drive much of the president's strategy, warned of the negative effects that tariffs and retaliation could have on its business. The company noted that past U.S. trade actions had prompted increased levies on American electric vehicles.

The filings also contained a reminder that the legacy of trade wars can be long lasting. Some of the barriers that companies complained about — like China's high tariff on cranberries or a European tariff on peanut butter — were the result of Mr. Trump's first-term trade wars, in which countries retaliated against tariffs he had levied on them.

Tony Romm contributed reporting.

Firm targeted by president feared losing top lawyers

Competitors of Paul Weiss were poised to poach stars before its deal with Trump

BY MATTHEW GOLDSTEIN, MICHAEL S. SCHMIDT, JESSICA SILVER-GREENBERG, LEAH HIRSCH, ROB COPELAND AND BEN PROTSESS

President Trump's executive order attacking Paul Weiss and severely restricting that law firm's ability to represent its clients was widely seen by lawyers as a dangerous affront to the nation's legal system.

To rivals of Paul Weiss, it was an opportunity.

Within days of Mr. Trump's March 14 order, some of the biggest competitors were calling top lawyers at the beleaguered law firm — one of the most prestigious in the United States — asking if they wanted to jump ship along with their lucrative clients.

Several firms, including Sullivan & Cromwell and Kirkland & Ellis, were looking to exploit the moment, according to five lawyers with direct knowledge of the poaching. All the lawyers interviewed for this article spoke on the condition of anonymity in order to talk about discussions that were supposed to remain private.

The competitors took a soft approach with Paul Weiss's rainmakers, saying that they sympathized with the lawyers' plight but that if they wanted out of the turmoil they could name their price. Lawyers at another big firm, Wachtell, Lipton, Rosen & Katz, also mulled whether to try to lure partners away from Paul Weiss, four of the people said.

The outreach from other firms heightened the panic that had been rattling

Paul Weiss after Mr. Trump issued the executive order, which restricted the firm's lawyers from dealing with the government, including entering federal buildings. The order also said companies doing business with Paul Weiss, which has deep ties to the Democratic Party and its causes, could lose their government contracts.

Another law firm, Perkins Coie, received a similar order, but decided to challenge it in court. At first, Paul Weiss hoped to create a unified front with other big law firms to challenge the order issued against it, too. But the threat of losing its top lawyers compounded worries that clients would flee.

Some partners were particularly worried that Scott Barshay, the head of the corporate practice, might leave and that other lawyers would follow him, according to four of the people briefed on the firm's deliberations. Even if the firm successfully fought the order in court, it would be labeled an enemy of Mr. Trump and struggle to gain government approval for deals.

So Paul Weiss quickly cut a deal with Mr. Trump that requires the firm to do \$40 million in pro bono work for causes supported by the White House.

"We waited for firms to support us in the wake of the president's executive order," Paul Weiss's chairman, Brad Karp, wrote in an email to the firm on Sunday. "Disappointingly, far from support, we learned that certain other firms were seeking to exploit our vulnerabilities by aggressively soliciting our clients and recruiting our attorneys."

Jon Ballis, chairman of Kirkland & Ellis, said in a statement that his firm had not tried to recruit Paul Weiss attorneys. A Sullivan & Cromwell spokesman similarly denied trying to poach the firm's lawyers. A representative for Wachtell

Singapore's pricey permits have helped limit pollution, but some are willing to pay

BY ISABELLA KWAI AND NICHOLAS YONG

Andre Lee bought a used Kia Forte to boost his career as an insurance agent in Singapore. In his mind, he saw himself zipping across town in his black coupe, impressing potential clients.

"It's the same as being dressed in formal wear with leather shoes, or wearing a Rolex," Mr. Lee, 33, said of the two-door car he bought in 2020.

Mr. Lee paid \$24,000 for the 2010 model, about five times what the car would have been listed for in the United States. Why the markup?

Singapore, an island city-state that is smaller than New York City, charges drivers thousands of dollars just for the right to buy a vehicle. The price of the permits, which were introduced in 1990 to limit pollution and congestion, rises with a car's value.

The price Mr. Lee paid for his car, including the permit, was on the cheaper side. Some drivers pay as much \$84,000 for the 10-year document, known as a certificate of entitlement.

"I know of people who treat their vehicles better than their family because it costs more to maintain a car than a family sometimes," Mr. Lee said. (His family lent him money for the Kia.)

There is little reason for many Singaporeans to own a car. Most residents rely on an expanding and affordable public transportation system that stretches across the island. Even long journeys cost less than 2.50 Singapore dollars, or about \$2, and ride-hailing platforms such as Grab are plentiful.

Still, twice a month, aspiring car-owners and dealers bid for a fixed number of permits determined by the authorities.



Traffic flowing in Singapore's central business district. The city-state's efficient public transport system means that there is little reason for residents to own a vehicle.

"It's definitely not worth it when you weigh the cost against how often we actually use it."

The country's decades-long campaign to limit car ownership has worked: There are about 11 passenger vehicles per 100 people there, well below more than 80 cars and trucks in the United States and about 75 for similar vehicles in Italy.

Singapore is not the first to tax cars as part of efforts to tackle pollution and traffic. In 1969, Mexico City started regulating how many cars circulate daily. London and Stockholm later introduced congestion pricing. New York City followed this year, becoming the first in the United States to do so.

But none of those cities charge drivers as much to own a car.

The most expensive permit in Singapore rose about 18 percent to more than \$84,000 in March from a year earlier. But rising costs don't appear to have deterred sales. The government raised \$4.86 billion from permit sales in the 2024 fiscal year, almost 40 percent more than it had estimated.

For the wealthiest residents of Singapore, which is home to a rising number of billionaires, shelling out tens of thousands of dollars for a car permit is not a big deal.

So-Sanne Ching, who runs an import-export business, bought a Mercedes-Benz sedan so she could drive herself and her parents around. The permit alone cost her \$60,000, raising the overall price to about \$150,000. (A similar model in the United States would have run her \$48,450.)

"I am paying the price for convenience," she said.

But for the middle class, especially those who have children, the rising cost of the permit forces a difficult choice.

Joy Fong and her husband bought a used Hyundai Avante in 2022 for \$58,000, including the permit, to ferry their two children to school and day care. The price of the car — nearly twice the pre-permit price of a new model of that sedan — makes her paise.

"It's definitely not worth it when you weigh the cost against how often we actually use it," she said. Each month the couple pays about \$1,400, or more than 10 percent of their household budget, for the car, the permit, and other expenses like road taxes, fuel and parking. To offset the cost, they cut back on eating out and traveling.

But the thought of juggling a stroller, two children and assorted bags on public transportation makes her blanch.

"Honestly, I feel like we're caught in a bind," she said.

Confronted with the alternative of becoming more like other cities that are regularly choked with traffic, Singaporeans prefer quieter roads, said Chua Beng Huat, a professor of sociology at the National University of Singapore.

"We're not sitting in traffic for two or three hours just to get to work," he said. Having an efficient public transport system also makes it easier for Singaporeans to not use a car, and he takes it himself when he needs to go downtown.

But he still has a BYD SUV that he uses to take his grandchildren around town.

For other car owners, the math sometimes gets too hard to justify. Mr. Lee, the insurance agent, sold his Kia three years after he bought it. The costs of maintenance, parking and fuel were piling up, and he was convinced that it had translated to more business.

These days, Mr. Lee mostly takes public transport. If he needs to meet a client, he borrows his father's Nissan Qashqai. "I had other priorities, and didn't see the car being top of the list," he said.

BUSINESS



Outside the Golden Sun Sky Casino & Hotel in Sihanoukville, Cambodia, in March. The British and American authorities have linked the casino to online scammers and trafficking.

How scammers move illicit money

MONEY LAUNDERING, FROM PAGE 1
Once scammers persuade strangers to part with their savings, they need to quickly move money from one account to another, and one country to another, before their targets discover the ruse and alert their banks or the police.

In the end, the money arrives “clean” — with virtually no trace to the original scam.

So how does it get done?
Following the trail led us, surprisingly, to an established financial conglomerate in Cambodia called Huione Group.

This is not a back-alley shop with a side hustle in cleaning dirty money. Huione is an established firm that does brisk and legitimate business in Southeast Asia and has satellite companies in other parts of the world. Its QR codes are everywhere in Cambodia — customers use them to pay their bills in hotels, restaurants and supermarkets. Huione ads are plastered along major highways. Its suite of financial services include banking and insurance.

But Huione (pronounced Hu-Way-wahn) is a constellation of affiliates, and not all of them are legitimate. One arm offers bespoke money laundering services, according to the documents, which come from the company, and interviews with two people who are directly familiar with the operation. They spoke on the condition of anonymity out of fear for their safety. The company did not respond to requests for comment.

Another affiliate openly runs an online bazaar for criminals to find money launderers. The size of this marketplace is practically impossible to measure, but the analytics firm Elliptic has linked it to \$26.8 billion in cryptocurrency transactions since 2021. The industry is so opaque that it is difficult to separate legitimate transactions from illegal ones, but Elliptic says the bazaar is the world’s largest illicit internet market.

Hun To, a cousin of Cambodia’s prime minister, is a director of one Huione company.

Huione’s clients include large criminal enterprises, such as a group in Myanmar that exploits human trafficking victims, according to a scammer, a money launderer and examinations of their cryptocurrency trade by the analytics firms Elliptic and Chainalysis.

And yet, this money-laundering network operates with impunity. The group has never been targeted for sanctions by any government. The cryptocurrency company Tether has frozen some of the group’s accounts, at the behest of unspecified law enforcement officials, and the messaging app Telegram has shut down some of its channels. But neither measure made a lasting effect.

This is how it works.

MOVING BRICKS
Huione makes money at every step of the process.

First, one affiliate, which until recently was called Huione Guarantee, hosts the marketplace where scammers can find matchmakers. The matchmakers are essential to the system and their work is so repetitive that the Chinese name for it is “moving bricks,” according to Yanyu Chen, an anthropologist who studies money-laundering schemes in Cambodia.

The online bazaar is made up of thousands of chat groups on Telegram.

On these Telegram channels, anonymous users advertise money laundering services with the wink and nod of barely disguised language. The posts are public; anyone with the Telegram app can see them. Some merchants also sell stolen personal data, applications for impersonating others and other essential services to scammers.



According to internal documents and insiders, Huione International Pay in the Cambodian capital, Phnom Penh, above, is directly involved in money laundering.

not made a dent on the scamming and money-laundering industries.

While the matchmaker deals are worked out privately, one-on-one, the bazaar makes money, too. It sells ads on public groups, charges maintenance fees for private groups and takes small cuts from deals. Most of the transactions are denominated in the cryptocurrency Tether, but some are conducted in cash, gold and through bank transfers. (The bazaar even issued its own cryptocurrency last year.)

The bazaar denies any criminal association in disclaimers posted on its website and on Telegram channels. “All business in the public groups is provided by third-party merchants, which has nothing to do with Huione Guarantee,” one post says.

Third, another Huione affiliate, Huione International Pay, is more directly involved in laundering money. It is a matchmaker itself, according to internal company documents and two people familiar with its operations.

The documents and insiders indicate that Huione International Pay operates with the efficiency of a legitimate, professional bank. It is based inside the conglomerate’s headquarters in Phnom Penh, a glass and concrete building with two panda statues standing guard by the entrance.

Huione’s companies operate in a country with “very limited regulatory enforcement, if any.”

One company department handles customer relations for scammers and other illicit actors. Another monitors Telegram channels. A third department tracks money mule accounts in at least a dozen countries, according to internal documents we reviewed.

Huione’s companies operate with a veneer of legitimacy in a country with “very limited regulatory enforcement, if any at all,” said John Wojcik, a threat analyst with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. The conglomerate’s obscure ownership structure creates challenges for targeted law enforcement, he said.

But even if Huione were shut down, other operators would quickly replace it, according to Mr. Wojcik.

“We can already see competitors now positioning themselves,” he said.

The National Bank of Cambodia, which regulates financial institutions, said the government was committed to ensuring that “financial transactions

are safe and transparent.” It said the government was working to comply with international anti-money-laundering recommendations.

The national bank said that it had not renewed a license for Huione’s payment service (the one with the QR codes) to operate in Cambodia because it “did not meet the renewal requirements.” Huione quickly announced plans to register its business in Japan and Canada.

HUNTING MULES
Money mules are the people who run the bank accounts and wallets.

Some mules open these bank accounts using fake identities, which artificial intelligence has made easier to create, according to Elad Fouks, who monitors fraud for Chainalysis.

Mules spread out the deposits and withdrawals to make them less noticeable to banks. Transactions below \$10,000, for example, are less likely to draw attention. Most accounts and virtual wallets that are used for money laundering are active only for a few weeks or months.

Still, the mules run the highest risk of getting caught.

In one U.S. court case that outlines the mechanics of such operations, the lead defendant, Daren Li, ran a money mule syndicate that registered 74 U.S. shell companies to launder nearly \$80 million. The companies set up accounts at Bank of America and elsewhere.

When victims sent money to the accounts, the funds quickly moved to a bank in the Bahamas. From there, the money was used to purchase Tether cryptocurrency on the exchange Binance.

Within days, the money moved to another virtual wallet.

Mr. Li worked with Huione International Pay to launder money, according to records we reviewed. But both the F.B.I. and the Secret Service declined to confirm the link. Mr. Li pleaded guilty in November to conspiracy to commit money laundering.

PAYDAY
Imagine, once again, that you are a scam boss. Something has gone wrong: Your mule has been arrested; the bank froze his account; or maybe he ran off with your money.

In these cases, your matchmaker arbitrates disputes.

If the mule is at fault, the matchmaker will help retrieve the deposit from escrow and get it to you. If nobody is to blame, the losses are chalked up to the cost of doing business.

But, if all goes well, you will have your payday, usually in Tether, which you can convert to U.S. dollars at a casino or using Huione’s payment company.

You can use that money to pay your employees.

These days, scamming operations mimic professional institutions, employing thousands of people in marketing, sales and human resources departments. Many are victims of human trafficking who are coerced into scamming faraway targets.

Their wages enrich the restaurants, casinos and brothels that make a killing from captive employees who are often confined to fortified compounds.

Scammers, like everyone else, have to pay their landlords — for housing and, in their case, for protection.

Some of the money will go to dealerships that sell luxury cars. Some is used to buy property in places like London and Dubai.

And of course, some of it will go to fireworks.

Henry Huang and Tat Oudom contributed reporting.

Poachers and president left Paul Weiss in fear

PAUL WEISS, FROM PAGE 7

Lipton said the firm had never approached any Paul Weiss attorneys.

Mr. Trump’s executive order exposed a vulnerability at Paul Weiss. The firm is known for its pugnacious litigators. But the litigation attorneys in recent years have taken a back seat to corporate deal makers. The firm now relies increasingly on keeping corporate lawyers happy and bringing in business.

Large law firms are locked in an escalating battle for legal talent. Big firms are regularly poaching top lawyers to bolster their practices and bring in clients who can generate more fees. Top performers at big firms can take home more than \$20 million a year. At Paul Weiss, which operates around the world and employs more than 2,000 people, the corporate practice is now the major source of revenue. The firm took in about \$2.6 billion in total revenue in 2024, up from about \$2 billion the year before, according to Law.com.

This year has gotten off to a slow start for many big law firms as uncertainty around tariffs and federal job cuts has chilled corporate merger activity.

Losing top lawyers when deals are scarce would be particularly hard. When lawyers move firms, they usually take their clients with them.

Over the last several years, Paul Weiss has done its own share of poaching, luring corporate lawyers away from rivals with huge pay packages.

One of the biggest hires was Mr. Barshay, a rainmaker at Cravath, Swaine & Moore who went to Paul Weiss in 2016 and is now chair of its corporate department, which advises companies on mergers and other transactions. Mr. Barshay’s clients include IBM, Qualcomm, General Electric and Chevron.

While top lawyers, including Mr. Barshay, assured Mr. Karp and others that they had no plans to leave, the leadership still worried that there could be an exodus, three of the people briefed on the conversations said.

As Paul Weiss debased its next move, Mr. Karp regularly assembled a small group of its top brass, including Mr. Barshay; Paul Basta, co-chair of the restructuring department; Matthew Abbott, global co-chair of the mergers and acquisitions group; and Angelo Bonivini, global co-head of the trust group.

Across the firm, there was a mix of opinions about how to respond, four people inside Paul Weiss said. Some partners wanted to fight Mr. Trump’s executive order in court. Some associates, lawyers typically at the beginning of their careers, also wanted to resist.

But among the leadership, there was deep concern about how many of the firm’s lawyers would be able to keep doing their jobs. Federal agencies often have to sign off on corporate mergers and other deals.

Even if a judge stayed the executive order, Paul Weiss would be tarred as being on Mr. Trump’s bad side. Clients, these senior partners argued, would eventually look to hire a law firm with a more favorable standing in Washington.

Mr. Barshay supported making a deal with Mr. Trump, and ultimately the lawyers heading the firm’s other business lines were supportive of a resolution, three people briefed on the decision-making said.

But some lawyers, led by Kannon Shanmugam, a top litigator, had prepared a legal challenge in case no deal could be made, the people said.

Mr. Karp boarded a private jet on March 18 for his meeting at the White House the next day. He went to the Oval Office alone. Mr. Trump was accompanied by his chief of staff, Susie Wiles; his adviser Steve Witkoff; and his personal legal adviser, Boris Epshteyn.

And there was one more person Mr. Trump told the group he wanted to dial in to the meeting — Robert Giuffra, co-chair of Sullivan & Cromwell, according to two people familiar with what took place. Mr. Giuffra, who has known Mr. Trump for many years, recently agreed to handle Mr. Trump’s appeal of his conviction in New York on charges that he covered up a hush-money deal with the porn star Stormy Daniels.

Initially the conversation focused on golf, the people said. Then the discussion turned to Mr. Trump’s concerns about Paul Weiss’s long association with Democratic politics.

Law firms are sometimes aligned with a political party. But Paul Weiss’s involvement in litigation against the first Trump administration on issues like immigration policy stood out. Also, when the Manhattan district attorney’s

office investigated some of Mr. Trump’s dealings, Paul Weiss lent out two associates to the office to help build a potential case.

Mr. Giuffra was brought in by Mr. Trump to work with Mr. Epshteyn, Mr. Karp and Bill Burk, a lawyer who was advising Mr. Karp, on the details of the agreement. Mr. Giuffra’s involvement was awkward, given that his firm competes with Paul Weiss.

Also involved behind the scenes was the president’s adviser Stephen Miller, a polarizing figure from the first Trump administration, two people briefed on the matter said.

Asked about the meeting and Mr. Miller’s involvement, a White House spokesman did not address the question and instead praised Mr. Trump for his pressure on major law firms to work with his government.

The meeting resulted in a deal, and by last Thursday evening Mr. Trump had announced that he was lifting the executive order. Mr. Karp sought to assure his firm that the deal was consistent with Paul Weiss’s values.

But he has faced public condemnation for making the deal, and many critics said it would only embolden the president to seek retribution against more law firms. Some of the criticism came from a group of roughly 140 Paul Weiss alumni who signed a letter to Mr. Karp, calling the decision to settle “cowardly.”

“It is a permanent stain on the face of a great firm that sought to gain a profit by forfeiting its soul,” the lawyers wrote in the letter, which was released publicly by Common Cause, a nonpartisan government watchdog.

So far, Paul Weiss appears not to have lost any partners or big clients.



KATHLEEN FLYNN/REUTERS



JEREMIAH MOON/REUTERS

Paul Weiss feared losing Scott Barshay, top, the head of its corporate practice. President Trump’s personal legal adviser, Boris Epshteyn, above, joined talks to agree to a deal with the law firm.

One client who wanted to leave was Steven Schwartz, a lawyer facing federal foreign bribery charges in New Jersey. Mr. Schwartz hired lawyers from Sullivan & Cromwell out of concern that Mr. Trump’s order would make it impossible for Paul Weiss to represent him.

But since the executive order was lifted last week, Mr. Schwartz has indicated that he may have second thoughts about changing counsel, according to court filings in the case.

On Sunday, Mr. Karp insisted in his email to the firm that the deal was necessary for Paul Weiss’s survival.

“No one in the wider world can appreciate how stressful it is to confront an executive order like this until one is directed at you,” he wrote.

By Tuesday, another law firm was in the president’s cross hairs.

Mr. Trump issued an executive order against Jenner & Block, which had employed a top lawyer who worked with the special counsel Robert Mueller on the investigation into whether Mr. Trump had invited Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election.

The White House said, in a statement announcing the order, “President Trump is delivering on his promise to end the weaponization of government.”

Maggie Haberman and Maureen Farrell contributed reporting.



CARL ZANKER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Brad Karp, the chairman of Paul Weiss, said that “certain other firms were seeking to exploit our vulnerabilities” after Mr. Trump’s executive order against the firm.

Opinion

Trump and Xi need a shared trust on A.I. now

Two superpowers risk a destabilizing competition. Cue the humanoid robots.



Thomas L. Friedman

There is a lot of talk in Beijing this week over when President Trump and President Xi Jinping of China will meet face to face. Some Chinese experts say the two leaders need to wait a few months until Trump decides exactly what tariffs he is going to impose on China — and sees what China will do in response.

Can I just butt in and say: “Excuse me, Mr. Presidents, but you two need to get together, like, tomorrow. But it’s not to discuss the golden oldies — tariffs, trade and Taiwan.

“There is an earthshaking event coming — the birth of artificial general intelligence. The United States and China are the two superpowers closing in on A.G.I. — systems that will be as smart or smarter than the smartest human and able to learn and act on their own. Whatever you both may think you’ll be judged on by history, I assure you that whether you collaborate to create a global architecture of trust and governance over these emerging super-intelligent computers, so humanity gets the best out of them and cushions their worst, will be at the top.”

I realize many will consider this wasted breath with all the turmoil unleashed by the new administration in Washington, but that will not deter me from making the point as loudly as I can. Because what Soviet-American nuclear arms control was to world stability since the 1970s, U.S.-Chinese A.I. collaboration to make sure we effectively control these rapidly advancing A.I. systems will be for the stability of tomorrow’s world.

A.I. systems and humanoid robots offer so much potential benefit to humanity, but they could be hugely destructive and destabilizing if not embedded with the right values and controls. In addition, this new age must be defined by a lot of planning about what humans will do for work, and how to preserve the dignity they derive from work, when machines will be able to do so many things better than people. Millions of people possibly losing their jobs and dignity at the same time is a prescription for disorder.

A veteran Chinese economist made clear to me that China is very alive to these risks: “Today, a lot of Chinese cannot find jobs. With A.I. they will not be able to find jobs forever. What happens if they cannot find appropriate jobs” because “70 percent of civil servants are robots? That will be super risky.”

There is no time to lose in thinking about how we adapt, and yet we can be so nearsighted when it comes to the signs and the warnings. A decade from now, what will journalists say was the most important news story in the fall of 2024 that should have received more attention, given the long-term consequences?

Will they say it was the second election of Donald Trump as president in November 2024? Or will they say it was Uber’s decision in September 2024 to go beyond its pilot project in Phoenix and start offering driverless, all-electric Waymo cars on its ride-hailing app in Austin and Atlanta — replacing human Uber drivers?

At this point I’d vote for Uber going driverless.

Will they say it was Trump’s election in November? Or maybe they will say it was the December 2024 battle in a snowy forest near Kharkiv, Ukraine, reported by The Wall Street Journal, in which Ukrainian forces attacked a Russian bunker with four wheeled robot drones — some mounted with machine guns or packed with explosives and backed by aerial drones from above — in a “coordinated unmanned” land and air

assault “on a scale that hadn’t previously been done, marking a new chapter of warfare where humans are largely removed from the front line of the battlefield, at least in the opening stages.”

I’ll go with all-robot-no-humans Ukrainian air and land assault.

How about one more — something on my mind, since I am attending a conference in China: Will they say it was Trump’s November 2024 election, or will they say it was the fact that China’s televised Lunar New Year gala this year, watched by over a billion people, featured “16 humanoid robots” taking the stage. “Clad in vibrant floral print jackets, they took part in a signature . . . dance, twirling red handkerchiefs in unison with human dancers,” M.I.T. Technology Review reported. In their day job, these robots work assembling electric vehicles. Dancing was just their hobby.

I can see a case for humanoid robot dancers.

All three examples reflect the now growing consensus, as the Times technology writer Kevin Roose recently observed, that full-on A.G.I. is coming faster than most anyone thought — “very soon — probably in 2026 or 2027 but possibly as soon as this year.”

A.G.I. is the holy grail of A.I. — single systems that can master math, physics, biology, chemistry, material science, Shakespeare, poetry and literature as well as the smartest humans but that can also reason across all of them and see

connections no human polymath ever could. As Craig Mundie, a former chief research and strategy officer for Microsoft, put it to me: “Probably before the end of Trump’s presidency, we will have not just birthed a new computer tool; ‘we will have birthed a new species — the superintelligent machine.’”

“Our species is carbon-based. This new one is silicon-based. Therefore, we need to immediately begin to chart a path to coexist with this new super-intelligent species and ultimately co-evolve with it.”

carbon-based. This new one is silicon-based,” Mundie explained. “Therefore, we need to immediately begin to chart a path to coexist with this new superintelligent species and ultimately coevolve with it.”

We humans have lived alongside a lot of other species on this planet for a long time, “but we were always smarter than all of them,” he added. “Soon there is going to be a new one that will be smarter than we are and steadily getting smarter. We are expanding what is the highest level of intelligence on the planet — from what humans could imagine and program into computers to what computers can begin to learn themselves, which is virtually boundless.”

The advances that China has made on A.I. in just the past year have made it absolutely clear that Beijing and Washington are now the world’s two A.I. superpowers.

And if you thought otherwise, China’s premier, Li Qiang, opened the China Development Forum, the event that drew me to Beijing, by proudly noting how China’s recently unveiled DeepSeek A.I. system “burst onto the scene,” highlighting “the huge power of innovation and creativity of the Chinese people.”

On top of that, he added, “2025 could be the year of mass production of humanoid robots in China.” A recent report by Morgan Stanley described China’s dominance over the West in the humanoid robot industry, controlling a majority of the top-listed companies. These are A.I.-infused robots that move and speak remarkably like humans.

Before these A.G.I. systems take hold and scale up, we need the two superpowers to get serious about devising a regulatory and technological framework that ensures an agreement for imbuing these systems with some kind of moral reasoning and embedded usage controls so they are prevented



VEU/GETTY IMAGES

from being used by rogue actors for globally destabilizing activities or going rogue themselves. We need a system of governance that ensures that A.I. systems always operate and police themselves in alignment with both human and machine well-being.

There was a time when many people thought that such a project was something only a coalition of democracies could do — and then present it to the world. Sorry, too late. China has greatly narrowed the gap with us and surpassed the other democracies. This can’t be done without Beijing. So guess who’s coming to dinner. It’s a table for two now. Mr. Trump, Mr. Xi please step this way. History has its eyes on you both.

Alas, though, generating the conditions to allow for Beijing and Washington to collaborate on a uniform system for A.I. trust and governance will be no easy matter for the leaders of China and America.

Nevertheless, listening to Chinese experts and officials at this conference, I sense that the Chinese are a lot like Americans: still trying to get their minds around what new capabilities these new A.I. systems will offer. They are torn between wanting to do everything to make sure their companies win the A.I. race against American ones —

so they can dominate the market — and wanting to make sure these technologies don’t destabilize their own country.

I am hardly naïve about the level of mistrust in U.S.-China relations today — having spent the last week in both capitals — I can attest it is off the charts. So I am fully aware of how absurd it can sound calling on the two of them to trust each other to collaborate on a system of moral reasoning to ensure we get the best and cushion the worst of A.I.

But our leaders should take a lesson from how software technology companies used “coopetition” (cooperation between competitors). Apple, Microsoft, Google and Meta all wanted to destroy one another in business, but they eventually realized that if they cooperated on some basic standards, rather than each going its own way, they could massively expand the markets for their otherwise independent products and services.

Once A.G.I. arrives, if we are not assured that these systems will be embedded with common trust standards, the United States and China will not be able to do anything together. Neither side will trust anything it exports or imports to the other, because A.I. will be in everything that is digital and connected. That is your car, your

watch, your toaster, your favorite chair, your implant, your notepad. So if there is no trust between us and China and each of us has our own A.I. systems, it will be the TikTok problem on steroids. A lot of trade will just grind to a halt. We’ll just be able to sell each other soybeans for soy sauce. It will be a world of high-tech feudalism.

I was taken with how the Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harari, who addressed a packed audience of mostly Chinese people at the forum’s session on A.I., put it.

“We should build more trust between humans before we develop truly super-intelligent A.I. agents,” Harari said. “But we are now doing exactly the opposite. All over the world, trust between humans is collapsing. Too many countries think that to be strong is to trust no one and be completely separated from others. If we forget our shared human legacies and lose trust with everyone outside us, that will leave us easy prey for an out-of-control A.I.”

Together humans can control A.I., he added, “but if we fight one another, A.I. will control us.”

In this specific endeavor of creating trusted A.I., I don’t hesitate to say I wish President Xi and President Trump much success — and fast.

An intelligent humanoid robot at a conference in Beijing this week.

The Houthi strike group chat breach is staggering

A defense secretary intentionally using a civilian app to share sensitive war plans would be egregious.



David French

I don’t know how Pete Hegseth, the U.S. secretary of defense, can look service members in the eye. He’s just blown his credibility as a military leader.

On Monday, The Atlantic’s Jeffrey Goldberg published one of the most extraordinary stories I’ve ever read. President Trump’s national security adviser, Michael Waltz, apparently inadvertently invited Goldberg to join a Signal group chat (Signal is an encrypted messaging app) that seemed to

include several senior Trump officials, including Stephen Miller, JD Vance, Marco Rubio and Pete Hegseth. A National Security Council spokesman told The Atlantic that the chat “appears to be authentic.”

No one apparently noticed Goldberg’s presence, and he had a front-row seat as they debated Trump’s decision to attack the Houthis, an Iran-backed militia that had been firing on civilian shipping in the Red Sea.

Then, at 11:44 a.m. on March 15, the account labeled “Pete Hegseth” sent a message that contained “operational details of forthcoming strikes on Yemen, including information about targets, weapons the U.S. would be deploying and attack sequencing.”

This would be a stunning breach of security. I’m a former Army JAG officer (an Army lawyer). I’ve helped investigate numerous allegations of

classified information spillages, and I’ve never even heard of anything this egregious — a secretary of defense intentionally using a civilian messaging app to share sensitive war plans with out even apparently noticing a journalist was in the chat.

There is not an officer alive whose career would survive a security breach like this. It would utterly result in instant consequences (relied from command, for example) followed by a comprehensive investigation and, potentially, criminal charges.

Federal law makes it a crime when a person — through gross negligence — removes information “relating to the national defense” from “its proper place of custody or delivered to anyone in violation of his trust, or to be lost, stolen, abstracted or destroyed.”

It’s way too soon to say whether Hegseth’s incompetence is also criminal, but I raise the possibility to demon-

strate the sheer magnitude of the reported mistake. A security breach that significant requires a thorough investigation, which several Republicans have asked for. Democrats are calling for Hegseth and Waltz to resign.

Nothing destroys a leader’s credibility with soldiers more thoroughly than hypocrisy or double standards. When leaders break the rules that they impose on soldiers, they break the bond of trust between soldiers and commanders. The best commanders I knew did not ask a soldier to comply with a rule that didn’t also apply to them. The best commanders led by example.

What example has Hegseth set? That he’s careless, and when you’re careless in the military, people can die. If he had any honor at all, he would resign.

This is an excerpt from *The Point*, the Times Opinion blog.



ANNA MONTAGNA/GETTY IMAGES

Democrats are calling for Pete Hegseth, the U.S. secretary of defense, to step down.

OPINION

The New York Times

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The world has been lucky on bird flu — for now

Caitlin Rivers

Bird flu has long been a top contender for starting the next pandemic. Between 2003 and 2023, there were 882 cases reported in humans worldwide, resulting in 461 deaths. This suggested a staggering mortality rate, around 50 percent — a warning of H5N1's deadly potential.

The vast majority of infections and deaths were before 2020. But a few years of quiet ended in 2024, when America became the epicenter for the world's human infections. And there was something else about the U.S. cases: They were nowhere near as severe as before.

The virus had been mostly tied to poultry, but in America last year it began circulating in dairy cows as well. Dozens of farmworkers have become infected. And yet, of the 70 human H5N1 cases reported over the last year in the United States, there was only one death. All but a few of the other U.S. cases have been mild, with most

The death rate in the U.S. — the epicenter of the outbreak — has been much lower than expected.

allow the virus to run through the flocks" rather than cull and control outbreaks in poultry. That proposal invites disaster. The United States has gotten lucky so far, but that luck might not last.

The one fatality over the last year was in January, when an older adult in Louisiana died after contracting the virus from a backyard flock. Last month, two people with exposure to poultry were hospitalized. And in Canada, which has also experienced outbreaks in birds, a teenager spent weeks in intensive care. These cases are a sharp reminder that the virus hasn't lost its lethal potential.

Epidemiologists like me are wary of drawing premature conclusions about severity. Small samples can be misleading, and most of the recent cases occurred in dairy farmers. If the virus reaches infants, older adults or people with serious health conditions, it may be more deadly.

But let's assume that today's H5N1 is in fact milder compared with past outbreaks in the Middle East and Asia. Why might that be?

One theory centers on how people are infected. While previous cases of severe H5N1 infections typically began with respiratory symptoms, patients with recent cases have frequently reported eye redness. This pattern suggests that many infections may have occurred through eye exposure — perhaps through splashes of contaminated milk during routine farm operations — rather than through inhalation.

Another theory has to do with the



A lab in New York prepares milk samples for testing of the H5N1 avian flu. New cases in North America are a sharp reminder that the virus hasn't lost its lethal potential.

Columbia's capitulation will hurt us all

Jonathan R. Cole

When most Americans think about our great universities, they probably don't think about the origins of lasers, FM radio or bar codes; they don't think about the Google algorithm, the invention of the computer and the iPhone, cures for childhood leukemia, the Pap smear, scientific agriculture or the discovery of mRNA vaccines. They almost certainly don't think about the CRISPR technology that may lead to cures of many genetic-based diseases. And they definitely don't think about the electric toothbrush, Gatorade, the Heimlich maneuver or Viagra.

Yet all these discoveries and inventions — and tens of thousands more — have their origins at American public and private research universities. For over a half-century, these institutions have housed the best and most innovative sites of learning in the world. During World War II, university researchers, often at government-sponsored laboratories, developed enhanced radar technology, found a way to mass-produce penicillin, developed the jet engine and mastered techniques for blood plasma transfusions. Each of these discoveries helped the Allies defeat authoritarian aggression.

Today, the pre-eminence of the American research university is under severe attack from the federal government. It must be defended.

Again and again, basic research has led to fantastically lucrative private development. Stanford graduates spawned Cisco Systems, Hewlett-Packard, Instagram, Netflix and a thousand more businesses. The University of California, Berkeley, produced companies, including many A.I. start-ups, that are developing better medical treatment for Americans. M.I.T., Harvard, Arizona State, the University of Wisconsin and the University of Texas, among others, have been the origin for many private enterprises supporting the American economy.

The Trump administration has sought to tighten federal education by withdrawing more than a billion dollars of funding from some universities and threatening others with similar punishment. It has sought to deport student protesters who are legal residents. All this is a fundamental assault on the values and functioning of our university system. Columbia and Johns Hopkins, founded in 1876 and America's first true research university, may be only the first to feel the effects of this needless use of a sledgehammer.

Columbia's capitulation last week to the Trump administration, in which it agreed to a number of demands in order to restore federal funding, obliterates its leadership in defending free inquiry. If Columbia allows authoritarian-minded leaders to dictate what we can teach, then the federal government will dictate what we can read, what books we may have in our libraries, what art we can display, what problems

scientists can explore. Then we are no longer a free university.

Most people think of universities in terms of undergraduate and professional education — of teaching and the transmission of knowledge, as well as football and basketball. This makes perfect sense. Teaching is higher education's first calling, and it occurs at all levels at pre-eminent universities. What has made our universities the greatest in the world, however, is not just the quality of our undergraduate education but also our ability to fulfill one of the central quests of modern life: the production of knowledge through discoveries that change the world. The

As developed by Mr. Bush, the compact between the American government and the universities created the National Science Foundation and reorganized the National Institutes of Health. The central message of the compact was this: The United States would commit taxpayer dollars to fund research primarily through its universities, not through government-controlled laboratories. The universities would be given intellectual autonomy to conduct research deemed by peer scientists and engineers to be of the highest potential to advance the country. The government would not invade the space of free inquiry and academic

lose: America as leader in the development of quantum computing, America as leader in the development of useful artificial intelligence and hydrogen and fusion power, America as leader in discovering cures for various forms of cancer and Parkinson's and Alzheimer's disease.

Maintaining a laboratory and preparing for discovery is not something you can easily turn on or off. If a lab has its funding suddenly taken away, it will shut down. If you cut off researchers working on a cure for, say, pancreatic cancer, the work that their lab has done may be irreparably damaged and the knowledge lost. Moreover, if young people in the

United States or abroad feel great uncertainty in university research here, they are more than likely to turn to other occupations and away from the country.

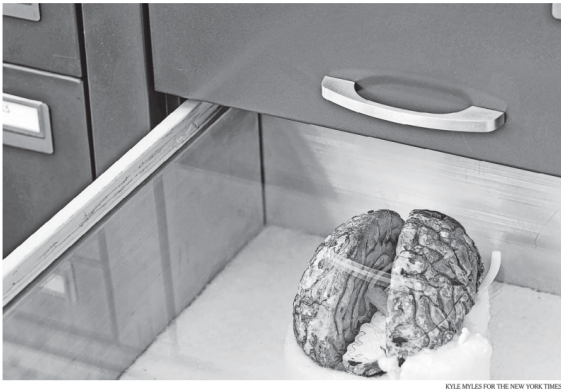
We tend to think that humans are at the top of the food chain. That is not true. We almost certainly share that position with bacteria and viruses, many of which can cause us great harm. To prevent the next pandemic and a host of other diseases, support of science and engineering at our universities is an imperative.

We should renew and update the terms of the 1945 compact to reinforce the basic principles and values that have served us so well for decades and could do so for decades more. Academic freedom and free inquiry are the backbone of that compact. Where there are opportunities for reform, it is incumbent on research universities to take those tasks without political interference.

I have spent almost 65 years at Columbia. I entered as an undergraduate in 1960, received my doctorate there and never left. Yes, universities are contentious places, but they are supposed to be places where criticism takes place — whether political, humanistic or scientific disputes. When I became provost and dean of faculties, serving 14 years as Columbia's chief academic officer, I dealt, alongside my colleagues, with student protests almost every year. When the federal government threatened Columbia with arrests or withdrawal of federal funds after the passage of the USA Patriot Act in 2001, we defended academic freedom and free inquiry.

Today the stakes are higher. We are in a fight for survival, and appeasement never works. Despite platitudes to the contrary, Columbia's leaders have weakened our community and our leadership among the greatest educational institutions in the world. This is not the way to fight Mr. Trump's efforts at silencing our great American universities. If we don't resist collectively by all legal means and by social influence and legislative pressure, we are apt to see the destruction of our most revered institutions and the enormous benefits they accrue to America.

JONATHAN R. COLE is a professor of the university at Columbia and a former provost and dean of faculties. He is working on a book about the future of American universities.



KYLE MOYLES FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Nobel economist Robert Solow and others have estimated that such university-based discoveries are responsible for a large share of our nation's productivity growth.

It is the United States — not Europe, Russia or China — that has dominated the last several waves of fundamental discovery, findings that have made us the wealthiest nation in the world. Since their inception, about 40 percent of Nobel Prizes have gone to Americans.

And about 35 percent of American Nobel laureates have been immigrants to the United States. This is but one small indicator of American research accomplishments. This leadership has strengthened our democracy.

The agreement between the federal government and the universities took hold during World War II. In 1944, when it became clear that the Allies would prevail, President Franklin Roosevelt asked his closest science adviser, Vannevar Bush, how the United States could advance its science and technology leadership after the war. It was a time when scientists were exhausted by their wartime work and many wanted to return to quieter lives at universities. But Mr. Bush, sharing the dying president's belief in the need for a manifesto that would articulate both values and policy, set to work on what would become the policy document "Science: The Endless Frontier."

The compact between the American government and the universities created the National Science Foundation and reorganized the National Institutes of Health. The central message of the compact was this: The United States would commit taxpayer dollars to fund research primarily through its universities, not through government-controlled laboratories. The universities would be given intellectual autonomy to conduct research deemed by peer scientists and engineers to be of the highest potential to advance the country. The government would not invade the space of free inquiry and academic

freedom, because that would limit the ability of scientists to be fully creative.

By 1950, the model was largely adopted by Congress. Thus began American supremacy in scientific and technological discovery, as well as the economic and military dominance that has lasted for three-quarters of a century.

Recently, Arizona State University's president, Michael Crow, one of the most innovative leaders in American higher education today, used the iPhone 16 as an example of universities' unheralded contributions. Almost all parts of the device, from the chips used to power it to the glass covering it — the culmination of thousands of discoveries — had their origins at research universities, mostly in the United States. Such contributions are the invisible hand behind the creation of much American wealth. Now the Trump administration, for vindictive reasons, has placed that superiority and leadership under threat.

If we in America look over our shoulder, we can see China catching up to our investments in research and development. In the past quarter-century, investments by China in higher education have become similar to those in the United States, and it has increased the building of new research-oriented universities to compete with us in STEM fields.

This is hardly the time to cripple our universities. Apart from the competition with China, we are on the cusp of thousands of transformative discoveries, and each could be hurt by Mr. Trump's actions. Here are a few competitive battles that we could easily

Trump is dismantling the West, piece by piece

KUIZS, FROM PAGE 1

2023 — but the overall direction of travel always seemed clear: The small democracies of Eastern Europe would modernize and democratize and, by forging the strongest possible ties with the world's premier democratic superpower, become more wealthy and secure. (Keeping the differences in mind, much the same can be said in Asia about South Korea and Taiwan.)

This faith in the idea of the West required some degree of diplomatic forgetting of earlier betrayals. Neville Chamberlain, the British prime minister, responded to Nazi Germany's annexation of the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia in 1938 by saying that was part of a "quarrel in a faraway country, between people of whom we know nothing." In the 1930s, it seemed easy for Mr. Chamberlain to overlook that a totalitarian country was seizing land from a democratic one, but those countries did not forget. Many small nations also carry scars of the betrayal of the meeting in 1945 at Yalta, where the leaders of the great powers decided their fate without consultation, and the redrawn borders tore families apart.

Yalta consigned Eastern Europe to brutal decades behind the Iron Curtain. But in the early 1990s, after the fall of Communism, fledgling democracies chose to again believe that an association with the West — its image freshly burnished and shining —

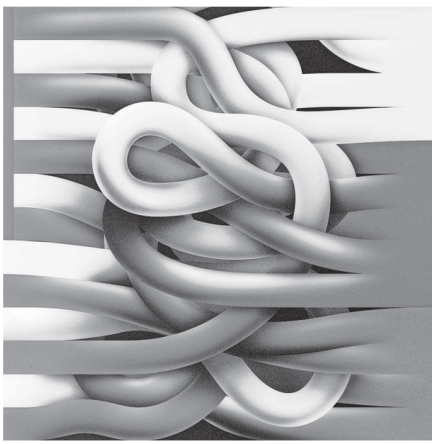
would bring freedom, wealth and stability.

Now that idea of the West has been broken in two. One half belongs to Mr. Trump and other predatory populists. The other is composed of those who still believe in liberal democracy, respect for international agreements and the right of nations to self-determination.

For now, small countries that have thrown their lot in with America find themselves in a geopolitical trap. For Ukraine in particular, Mr. Trump's words and actions have triggered something close to an existential panic. But the rest of the direct neighbors of Russia need a new plan, too: alliances of democratic values.

The European Union seems to be fundamental to this effort. For those countries that are already members, including Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Romania and Estonia, the question of how to move forward is simpler. The E.U. is also an aspirer for those countries which aren't yet members, but have candidate status. As in the '90s, integration will require adaptation and change — first and foremost, perhaps, in military spending, as the bloc embarks on a plan to spend hundreds of billions to rearm the continent. (Here, Poland is already a model.)

But Europe is only part of the answer to Mr. Trump's foreign policy of betrayal. Countries like Canada and



NEC PHAI

South Korea cannot join the E.U., but will still seek security alliances with those countries that still share their democratic values — Canada is already moving closer and is in talks to join the bloc's military expansion.

It is the end of a chapter. But in alliances of security and values, there will be another: Strange as it may sound, for maybe the first time in history there are two Wests.

JAROSLAW KUIZS is the author of "The New Politics of Poland: A Case of Post-Traumatic Sovereignty" and editor in chief of *Kultura Liberalna*, a Polish weekly. KAROLINA WIGURA is a professor at the University of Warsaw. They are research associates at the Oxford School of Global and Area Studies and senior fellows at the Center for Liberal Modernity in Berlin.

STYLE

What's French for 'charge it'?

The Parisian department store Printemps expands its luxury reach into Manhattan

BY MISTY WHITE SIDELL

Printemps, a French department store that just opened its first New York outpost in Lower Manhattan, is aiming to do what few stores of its ilk have lately done in that area: stay in business.

The store, at 1 Wall Street, about a five-minute walk from the New York Stock Exchange, is in a part of Manhattan that recently has had a poor track record with luxury retail. That may be why a marketing campaign emphasizes that Printemps is “not a department store.”

Saks Fifth Avenue's store in the Brookfield Place mall was open for little more than two years before it closed in 2019.

A South Street Seaport location of 10 Corso Como, the Milanese concept store beloved for its selection of clothes, art, furniture and books, came and went even faster: It closed in 2020, about 18 months after it opened.

Printemps's store in New York is a second coming: A location in Denver lasted about two years after opening in the late '80s. It comes at a time when department stores, once a bedrock of the American shopping experience, have been closing at a rapid clip across the country.

In February 2024, Macy's announced that it would shutter about 150 locations over a three-year period (while opening some 15 new locations of Bloomingdale's, which Macy's also owns). In December, Neiman Marcus, one of the country's most illustrious names in retail, was acquired by the company that also owns Saks Fifth Avenue. Soon afterward came announcements that certain Saks and Neiman Marcus locations would be closing.

Printemps — the French word for spring — is hoping to buck these trends by offering New Yorkers and tourists a two-story bazaar with Murano light fixtures, mosaic walls, spa treatment pods, bars and restaurants, marble and par-



PHOTOGRAPHS BY LAINA ABRAMS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

quet floors, exhibitions of archival haute couture and Champagne to go.

Browsing the store's maze of corridors — which are filled with French goods such as Jacquemus handbags, Avène thermal water spray, Courrèges minidresses, Mary Janes by Carel, vintage Yves Saint Laurent suits and Embryolisse moisturizer — can feel like a decadent Easter egg hunt.

“The French have good taste; they know what's beautiful — they have the level of sophistication,” Jean-Marc Bellaiche, the global chief executive of Printemps, said at a party for the store's opening last week.

About a quarter of the brands it carries are not sold elsewhere in the United States, he added. But the store's hospitality will have a distinctly American flavor: “Americans are better when it comes to saying, ‘Welcome,’” Mr. Bellaiche said. “They are warmer. The French are a bit aloof!”

The store's offerings are a reason he



An opening party for the new Printemps store in Lower Manhattan allowed guests to browse its selection of luxury goods. About a quarter of the brands it carries are not sold elsewhere in the United States.

His first career: Making hats

Auction offers eight styles by William J., later the photographer Bill Cunningham

BY ROSALIE R. RADOMSKY

Before Bill Cunningham rode his bicycle around the city to take photos of fashionable New Yorkers for The New York Times, he helped dress some of them as William J., the milliner.

Along with socialites and Old Hollywood stars — including Doris, Duke, Joan Crawford, Marilyn Monroe and Ginger Rogers — his fans included people such as Venera Macaluso of Queens, who died in 2018 and went by Netty. Eight of her one-of-a-kind hats designed by Mr. Cunningham were sold last week in an auction.

Styles on the block included a hat resembling a small purple pancake with silk lilies of the valley sprouting from it, a fascinator with stars in gold sequins and black velvet, and a hat with a grasshopper-like bug perched atop floppy layers of neutral silk chiffon.

At the time Mr. Cunningham was making the hats, some sold for \$35 and others for \$65, he wrote in his memoir, “Fashion Climbing.” In the auction, prices ranged from \$768 to \$15,360.

After Mrs. Macaluso died at 93, her son Robert J. Macaluso found the hats on a shelf in her closet. Mr. Macaluso, 72, a retired salesman at the textile house Scalamanàre who is now a deacon at St. Margaret Church in Madison, Conn., then stored them in tissue paper in his garage.

He explained that his mother's initial connection to Mr. Cunningham was through her brother-in-law and his wife, who ran in the same social circle as Mr. Cunningham. They invited him to parties and to Sunday dinners at Mr. Macaluso's grandmother's house in Queens.

“My grandmother served pasta with veal cutlets,” said Mr. Macaluso, whose father, a New York Times photographic printer from 1965 to 1990, sometimes worked with Mr. Cunningham. “Bill would come over. He was so charming and upbeat.”

Mr. Macaluso said his mother liked to go out with his father or friends to places such as Sign of the Dove and Roma di Notte, two Manhattan restaurants that are now closed, as well as to Tavern on the Green and the Plaza Hotel.

“Bill was intrigued with my mother's sense of fashion,” Mr. Macaluso recalled.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY FREEMAN'S HINDMAN

Hats by William J.: Above, a space-age black style with net and, below, a fascinator in gold sequins and black velvet.



“Because of Bill's enthusiasm, he would sometimes say, ‘Netty, this would look marvelous on you.’”

Mr. Macaluso's cousin Barbara Starace, now 80, who was also Mrs. Macaluso's goddaughter, said she “always looked like a movie star.”

Ms. Starace recalled Mrs. Macaluso wearing the fascinator with stars designed by Mr. Cunningham one New Year's Eve. Ms. Starace was given an answer of Mrs. Macaluso's William J. hats — a pink velvet corkscrew style — after she died.

“I put it on a stuffed toy pig on my bed,” said Ms. Starace, adding that she had never liked wearing hats. “It reminds me of my Aunt Netty.” Mrs. Macaluso also wore a William J. hat, which was very tall and had feathers, to Ms. Starace's wedding in 1960.

Of the hats that were auctioned, that hat — a 13½-inch-high (34-centimeter) confection of purple silk velvet topped with rooster feathers — is the favorite of Tanner C. Branson, the head of sale for

luxury handbags and couture at Freeman's Hindman, which held the auction. He described it as “quintessential William J.” And it fetched the hats' highest price: \$15,360.

Others included a black velvet fez with rooster feathers, a space-agey black style with netting and a pink raffia hat accented with netting and two birds made of feathers, facing each other, beak to beak.

“People wearing these are very interested in fashion,” Mr. Branson said. “They are interested in being seen, and make a statement.”

When Mrs. Macaluso's hats arrived at Freeman's Hindman in Chicago, he added, it was “a bit like Christmas to a fashion history lover.”

Sometimes, a little rhinestone was embedded as a period on the labels of William J. hats. Other labels were folded down at the corners. Mr. Branson explained, in the style of certain couture garments. “Balenciaga did the same thing,” he said. “Coco Chanel did the same thing.”

Like items by high fashion brands, William J. hats are now owned by museums and other institutions, including the New York Historical and the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

“He had a sense of perfectionism and sense and style,” said Valerie Paley, a senior vice president and director of the library at the New York Historical, which also has a William J. printing plate and label in its collection.

Mr. Cunningham's hats have been sold on websites such as eBay. That site was where Carol Dietz, a retired New York Times art director who worked closely with him, paid \$135 for a William J. cloche hat with a grosgrain ribbon bow in 2020.

Ms. Dietz also has several feathers from a collection kept by Mr. Cunningham. “He loved feathers in hats,” she said, noting hers are “wrapped in paper so they don't crumble.”

Steven Stolman, a fashion designer and author, said that at the height of Mr. Cunningham's millinery career in the 1950s and '60s, he called himself “the mad, mad hatter.”

“Every hat had a little wink,” said Mr. Stolman, who wrote the book “Bill Cunningham Was There” with John Kurdean, a New York Times production artist who worked closely with Mr. Cunningham. Mr. Stolman, a former president at Scalamanàre, had worked with Mr. Macaluso at the textile company and helped facilitate the sale of Mrs. Macaluso's hats by Freeman's Hindman.

Mr. Stolman said he could hear Mr. Cunningham, who died in 2016, saying “how marvelous” it was that some of his hats were up for auction. “But then, in a typical self-deprecating way,” he added, “Bill would say, ‘Who would be interested in a bunch of old hats?’”

The numbers game in merchandising

Vanessa Friedman, The New York Times's fashion director, answers readers' fashion-related questions. You can send her a question at openthread@nytimes.com or via X: [@vvfriedman](https://twitter.com/vvfriedman). Questions are edited and condensed.

I'm curious how much clothing is marked up over cost. Does it really have to do with quality, or can a popular or fancy brand mark up more than average? And what does the threat of tariffs mean? — Jane, Boston

Back in 2012, a designer named Bruno Pieters, who had been the main guy at Hugo Boss, had an epiphany: It was time for fashion to try radical transparency. Not in clothing (naked dressing has long been a thing), but in what went into the manufacturing of clothing.

So he started a new line called Honest By, and on its website he included information about where each part of a garment was made, down to the buttons and zippers, as well as the factories that made them — and, even more radically, the cost of the garments. Including the markups between what they cost to make and their sale prices.

I say “radically” because, as Millard Drexler, a founder of the fashion brand Alex Mill and the former chief executive of the Gap and J. Crew, told me, “No one wants to talk about it.”

Indeed, there is so much obfuscation around price at this point, and some prices are so stratospheric, it is hard not to feel as if you are being duped every time you walk into a store. But it

thinks it will succeed. Mr. Bellaiche did not consider opening it in another part of New York, he said.

The actresses Parker Posey and Katie Holmes were among the party's most notable guests. Ms. Holmes, 46, said she thought Printemps had the allure to become a shopping destination. “It has this museum quality to it,” she said. “It feels like something to do; it's more entertaining than anything.”

Coco Baudelle, 35, a filmmaker in Manhattan who worked at a department store as a teenager, described Printemps as more inviting than its peers. “It doesn't have the neon bright lights that put you in the mind-set that you are there to shop and receive the sales pitch,” she said, calling the space “warm.”

Ms. Baudelle added that places such as the nearby office tower known as the WSA Building have brought new buzz to the financial district. “So many brands and young people are there,” she said of the building, where Ms. Baudelle had been just before the Printemps party.

“It's relevant and exciting.”

Some have characterized Printemps as filling a gap that has existed in New York's retail landscape since the closure of Barneys New York in 2020. Kelly Ben-

simon, 56, a former model and star of “The Real Housewives of New York City,” said as much at the party, echoing social media posts by publications such as Air Mail.

Founded in Paris in 1865, Printemps has 19 locations in France, including an outlet in Giverny and a Tudor-style corner store in the seaside town of Deauville. Its flagship store on Boulevard Haussmann in Paris is a network of three buildings containing products from some 3,000 brands. There is also a location in Doha, Qatar.

The company was founded around the same time as other famous French stores such as Le Bon Marché (1852) and La Samaritaine (1870), both of which, like Printemps, catered to the country's growing bourgeoisie.

“Being French and having an exotic appeal” might help Printemps succeed, said Hunter Abrams, a 33-year-old photographer in Manhattan. “There's nothing filling that in-between of fashionable things that are also wearable and maybe push the boundary a bit.”

But Mr. Abrams wondered how recent economic events could affect the store's prospects. “We are in a very precarious financial situation and it does feel like we are on the edge of a cliff,” Mr. Abrams said. “So who knows. I want it to work.”

also is true that the calculations have gotten more complicated over time.

The general rule is: The cost of a garment to the manufacturer or brand includes materials, labor, overhead and shipping of the materials and samples. Sometimes the cost includes the taxes involved with “landing” a garment, or taking it into a foreign country.

That cost is then marked up about 30 percent for wholesale because you have to add in more shipping, profit and brand equity — that is, the reputation and worth of the brand name itself and the way it may hold its value over time.

Next, retailers multiply that number between 2.1 and three times to get the store price, which includes their costs (labor, rent, marketing), as well as (and this is crucial) gamesmanship about discounting. Which is to say, they have to build in a profit margin assuming a certain percentage of garments will go on sale.

Yes, they mark it up in part to mark it down.

This process has been further complicated by globalization, tax differentials and currency fluctuations, since one brand doesn't want its products priced in completely different ways in different regions. That happens, but there has been a coordinated effort to normalize prices around the world — which pretty much means at the highest end.

The calculations are slightly different for mass market and fast-fashion brands, where profits are driven by volume, rather than margins, but you get the idea.

In any case, this exercise implies that the higher the cost, the better the labor conditions, the more skilled the craftspeople and the higher quality the materials. That is not incorrect. Generally, when a price is so low it is unbelievable, it is: You should assume the bottom of the supply chain is being unfairly squeezed.

At the same time, the escalation in luxury pricing over the last few years has been so extreme that most insiders acknowledge that some of it cannot simply be ascribed to rising costs.

Some of it is a because-they-can play on elitism and aspiration that has as much to do with psychology and revenue growth as anything else.

This is also why tariffs have the fashion world so nervous, as they obviously would affect the markup, potentially pricing some goods out of the market and, perhaps, prompting a reconsideration of who, exactly, pays what.

And in case you were wondering about Honest By: It lasted not quite seven years. Apparently there was less demand for radical transparency than we may have assumed.



GETTY IMAGES

Sports

An exclusive 16, where underdogs are not invited

Commentary

BY JOE REXRODE
THE ATHLETIC

We had gobs of chalk, a dominant conference being a dominant conference, nothing resembling a Cinderella and just one finish that might qualify for future men's N.C.A.A. tournament montages — but what a finish, with Maryland's Derik Queen banking one in at the buzzer to keep the "Crab Five" alive and send home Colorado State, the lowest remaining seed.

It was not a vintage first weekend, yet it was nonstop fun, the mark of an untouchable sporting event. A nontraditional star helped. Players and coaches rule March, but occasionally we get Bill Murray or Julia Louis-Dreyfus cheering on a child. Or a Kate Upton/Spike Albrecht social media interaction. Or a tearful Villanova piccolo player soldiering through in the wake of a loss. Or Sister Jean.

The McNeese team manager Amir Khan might have been the face of this tournament — the way Sister Jean Dolores Schmidt was seven years ago, cheering on her Loyola Chicago Ramblers to the Final Four — had McNeese followed up an upset of Clemson with another of Purdue. We would have a Cinderella, too. As is, Khan and his boombox should have a "One Shining Moment" cameo to go with all his marketing deals.

He wasn't the only big personality to leave before the round of 16. His coach, Will Wade, a college basketball villain redeemed, basically told everyone he was taking the North Carolina State job last week, and then got his team to stifle and shock Clemson anyway. Omaha's trash can smashes had a short stay. The star guards Kam Jones, Tre Johnson, Kadary Richmond, Jeremiah Fears, John Tonje and Nique Clifford could have done big things, but they are out.

So is Rick Pitino. And Bill Self. And Danny Hurley. That represents six national championships, two apiece, the last two won by Hurley's Connecticut Huskies. This team of his, which performed below expectations all season, almost took out No. 1-seeded Florida on Sunday in Raleigh, N.C. When UConn came up short, we saw two sides of Hurley — emotion pouring out in appreciation of his seniors, profane rant filling the air in response to perceived officiating slights.

It was a bad weekend for the Big East. All five teams are gone. The Atlantic Coast Conference lived up to its poor performance all season. Only Duke is left. Duke, at least, has been the most dominant team in the field through two games.

The Mountain West got close twice on Sunday, with No. 12-seeded Colorado State's Clifford making the brilliant pass to set up a Jalen Lake 3-pointer with six seconds left that could have beaten the fourth-seeded Maryland. Queen had other ideas. Tenth-seeded New Mexico pushed Michigan State, a No. 2 seed, but ran out of gas. Neither would have qualified fully for Cinderella status. We're not taking St. Peter's here. But midmajors with double-digit seeds are worth enjoying on occasion.

Instead, this is the first round 16 since 2007 with zero teams seeded No. 12 or lower. Per the National Collegiate Athletic Association, this was the sixth time since the bracket expanded to 64 teams in 1985 that the top 16 seeds in the tournament all won their first-round games. The last time it happened was in 2017.

This is the second year in a row with high seeds dominating, and it's hard to look at the way teams in the power leagues plunder talent from lower levels and not make the connection. Tennessee's Chaz Lanier (previously at North Florida), Auburn's Johni Broome (Morehead State), Michigan's Danny Wolf (Yale), Maryland's Ja'Kobi Gillespie (Belmont) and Texas Tech's Elijah Hawkins (Howard) are among several players excelling who in eras past might be leading their initial teams on runs.

We aren't just lacking a Cinderella — we're looking differently at Cinderellas past. Remember Florida Atlantic's Final Four journey from two years ago? Turns out that wasn't some cheeky bunch of overachievers. Aljah Martin (starring for Florida), Johnell Davis (starring for Arkansas) and Vladislav Goldin (starring for Michigan) are stars who remain very hard to beat in this tournament.

Turns out that Dusty May can put together and coach a team. Florida Atlantic's former coach has his new team, No. 5-seeded Michigan, leading on the Wolf-Goldin tandem to give teams matchup issues. Auburn, the No. 1 overall seed, will try to figure it out and get Wolf back for leading Yale's first-round upset of Auburn a year ago. Michigan point guard Tre Donaldson was Auburn's point guard then. On the other side is No. 2-seeded



KEVIN MAZUR/GETTY IMAGES

Only three leagues and Duke are left in the N.C.A.A. tournament, but no worries, most of the fun is just beginning.

Michigan State and No. 6-seeded Mississippi. That means Auburn Coach Bruce Pearl could get revenge on Michigan State Coach Tom Izzo — who is in the round of 16 for the 16th time — for a round of Eight loss to the Spartans 15 years ago when Pearl was at Tennessee.

Or May could get revenge on Izzo after losing both games and the Big Ten championship to him this season. First, Izzo would have to get revenge on Mississippi Coach Chris Beard, who beat Izzo in the 2019 Final Four as Texas Tech's coach. That was Izzo's last Final Four.

Last weekend was big for the Big Ten, a 12-4 record and four teams in the round of 16. And it was big for the Big 12, a 10-3 record and four teams that made it to the second week.

There was more history for the Southeastern Conference, which demonstrated its superiority in November and has backed it up. The SEC lost



JAMIE C. TELSON/GETTY IMAGES

several of its record 14 teams in the tournament early. But its best teams advanced, it ended up with a 15-7 record, and it has a whopping seven teams in the regional semifinals. That tops the record of six, set by the A.C.C. in 2016.

And that's it. The SEC, the Big Ten, the Big 12. And Duke. There's your

round of 16. Four leagues represented is a record low — the previous low was seven. The lack of variety isn't ideal. Of course, a year ago the same teams would mean a fifth league involved, the old Pac-12. Two years ago, Brigham Young was representing the West Coast Conference.

And the matchups are glorious.

Above, Derik Queen's bank shot saved fourth-seeded Maryland from being upended by Colorado State. Left, Connecticut Coach Dan Hurley was emotional after his Huskies were denied a chance for a three-peat after losing to Florida.

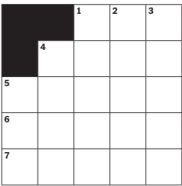
Arizona-Duke? Kentucky-Tennessee? Florida-Maryland? Alabama-B.Y.U., first one to 110 points wins? Please.

The seed total this year (pleading up all the seed numbers of the 16 teams) is 55. That's one of the lowest on record, a tad higher than last year's total of 53. The low is 49, set in 2009 and matched in 2019. In other words, that word again: chalk. We have exactly one double-digit seed left.

That would be Arkansas, a team loaded with talent, hampered this season by injuries, and coached by John Calipari. He beat Self and Kansas. He stunned his old "friend" Pitino and St. John's. He is in the round of 16 for the first time since 2019, and the cool thing is, the same is true of Kentucky in the successful debut of Mark Pope as Calipari's replacement.

There are good feelings all around. So good, in fact... is John Calipari our Cinderella?

The Mini Crossword



3/27/2025 BY SAM ZIESECKY
EDITED BY JEFF FENGLAND

- ACROSS**
- 1 Something from pumping
 - 4 Journey's "Stop Believin'"
 - 5 With 7-Across, it often falls to pieces
 - 6 Bacterium that can prompt a food recall
 - 7 See 5-Across

- DOWN**
- 1 "Leave this instant!"
 - 2 Perspective
 - 3 One of 354 to reach the crown inside the Statue of Liberty
 - 4 Art ___ (architectural style)
 - 5 Boeing 757 or Airbus A350

ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE

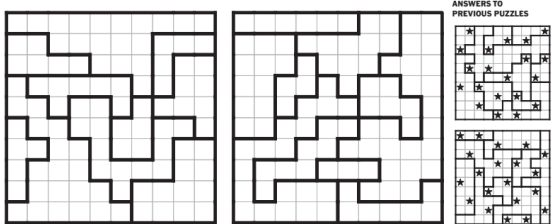
T A B
P A R I S
B R O T H
J A Z Z Y

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Two Not Touch



Put two stars in each row, column and region of the grid. No two stars may touch, not even diagonally.

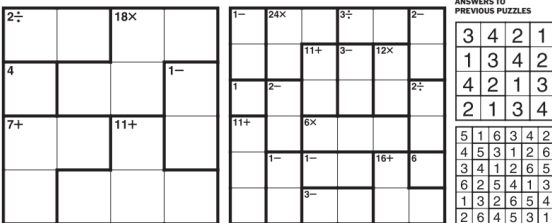
Cryptogram

FTXPG, PHI LQT OBXIG QS OBV QJL JVOOVA IQO SQTIZ
XI OBV IHUV QS H T.K. KOHOV? (XO'K F.)

PUZZLE BY BEN BASS

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER 1. Ref 2. Rig 3. Era 4. Tor --> Refrigerator

KenKen



Fill the grid with digits so as not to repeat a digit in any row or column, and so that the digits within each heavily outlined box will produce the target number shown, by using addition, subtraction, multiplication or division, as indicated in the box. A 4x4 grid will use the digits 1-4. A 6x6 grid will use 1-6.

For more games: www.nytimes.com/games

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Crossword Edited by Will Shortz



PUZZLE BY BRAD LIVELY 3/27/25

- ACROSS**
- 1 The "House of Mouse"
 - 7 Passing remark?
 - 13 If
 - 14 Onetime talk show whose studio audience was known as the "Dog Pound," familiarly
 - 15 Expressions of contempt
 - 16 More than just flirting
 - 17 Event in a tent
 - 19 Minty Cuban cocktail ... Pass it back
 - 20 Grok
 - 21 Figure for the prosecution, for short
 - 22 First name on the Supreme Court
 - 24 Provide a brief glimpse?
 - 26 Sir Isaac Newton wrote about this ... Pass it on
 - 28 Covers for a rainy day
 - 33 Give credit?
 - 34 Writing without verse
 - 36 "Comin' Thro' the Rye" (poem misremembered by Holden Caulfield)
 - 37 Gluten-free grain
 - 38 Folded pancake
 - 39 Electronic device from which users take "tips"
 - 40 Smart sort
 - 42 One signing a guestbook ... Pass it back
 - 43 (Can't talk, eating)
 - 46 Move (verb)
 - 48 Sun en Sevilla
 - 49 Migratory fish
 - 52 What some toothpastes do ... Pass it on
 - 53 Not obvious
 - 55 Video game navigation aid
 - 58 Pay-to-play business
 - 59 "Son of the Dragon," in a medieval Romanian sobriquet
 - 60 "At the Movies with Ebert and ..."
 - 61 Leave the country?
 - 62 Expressions of contempt
- DOWN**
- 1 Lumbar supports
 - 2 Result of some cord-cutting, informally
 - 3 Make a point, say
 - 4 Man on wire?
 - 5 Long Island Sound, e.g.
 - 6 Affirmative reply to "Sprechen Sie Englisch?"
 - 7 Test for a future Ed.D.
 - 8 Mac platform renamed in 2016
 - 9 Request made through a downstairs intercom
 - 10 Publication with the 1997 headline "Supreme Court Rules," with "The"
 - 11 Fabled figure in feudal Japan
 - 12 ___ boots
 - 14 Nincompoop
 - 18 Water source
 - 22 Undo
 - 23 Myrhor
 - 24 player
 - 25 Sporty auto roof
 - 26 Hunk of gunk
 - 27 Bottom
 - 28 Prefix with body or matter
 - 30 Some investments, for short
 - 31 One on a sic list?
 - 32 Visionary
 - 34 Not an original
 - 35 Nevada city that's farther west than Los Angeles
 - 38 Pattern based on nature, informally
 - 39 Pizzazz
 - 41 Like a doormat, say
 - 42 Cartoon series about a super robot
 - 44 East Lansing sch.
 - 45 Sign of terrible service
 - 46 "Do you remember the ___ Mr. Frodo?" Sam Gamgee
 - 47 Commander Wyatt
 - 48 Tour de France stage
 - 50 Respected figure
 - 51 Creepy looks
 - 52 Disarmament concerns, for short
 - 53 Reflexology setting
 - 54 Drink with a domed lid, perhaps
 - 56 Feature of some outdoor obstacle courses
 - 57 Stout, for one

Culture

Animal memoirs are going wild

A popular subgenre focuses on writers' relationships with untamed creatures

BY ALEXANDRA ALTER

For much of her life, Catherine Raven felt worthless. Then she befriended a fox.

After growing up in an abusive home where she felt unwanted, Raven moved out at 15, and never quite felt comfortable around other people. In 2003, she was living in a cottage in a remote valley in Montana, working as a field guide, when a fox showed up one afternoon.

He returned day after day. Sometimes he brought her dead mice as presents; sometimes they played a game of chicken, with him inching closer until she backed down. He listened as she read him "The Little Prince." If Raven wasn't outside, the fox would peer into her windows, looking for her.

One night he brought his kits to her porch, then fell asleep, leaving her to babysit several rambunctious young foxes. The show of trust changed Raven's life.

"That was a turning point in how I felt about myself," Raven told me during a phone call from her home in southwest Montana. "I felt like, wow, I am somebody that a fox trusts."

Raven recounts the story of their relationship in her 2021 memoir, "Fox and I." An instant best seller, the book belongs to a booming subgenre of autobiography: memoirs about the surprising bonds between humans and wild animals.

Books about writers' dogs and cats have long been a literary staple, with popular and critical hits like John Grogan's best seller about his unruly Labrador, "Marley and Me," and Caleb Carr's love letter to his cat, "My Beloved Monster." In recent years, the pet memoir category has expanded to include an array of other domesticated species — including chickens, goats, pigs, alpacas and donkeys, which feature in a surprising number of autobiographies.

As a lifelong animal lover, I've lately been absorbed by the popular and growing subset of animal memoirs — stories that explore what it means to connect with an untamed creature, and why such relationships can be so exhilarating and transformative.

Unlike sweeping nature narratives about an entire species, ecosystem or part of the planet, these memoirs focus on individual animals and paint them as fully formed characters with complex personalities and their own quirks. Animals are typically the protagonists, with humans serving as narrators. Often, the animals arrive unexpectedly in the writers' lives and lead them on a path of self-discovery.

In a new addition to the canon, "Raising Hare," Chloe Dalton details how her life took an unlikely turn after a chance encounter with a baby hare led to a profound and lasting relationship. Other recent classics of the genre include "H Is for Hawk," Helen Macdonald's moving story about coping with grief through training a goshawk named Mabel, "Alfie and Me," the ecologist Carl Safina's memoir about finding a sickly baby screech owl and raising it, and "George," Frieda Hughes's book about living with a mischievous magpie.

An older but widely beloved memoir — and a rare example of one starting with a mollusk — is Elisabeth Tova Bailey's "The Sound of a Wild Snail Eating," which recounts how she took comfort in the presence of a snail that occupied a plant on her night stand while she was bedridden with debilitating illness.

While the nature of the relationships vary — some animals become the writers' housemates, others remain truly wild — these memoirs share common threads. Often, the authors are wrestling with grief, loss, and find solace in the company of an animal



VIA HELEN MACDONALD

Wild places across the planet are shrinking; most of us are cut off from the natural world and its inhabitants.

who isn't forced to be their companion, and doesn't pity or judge them. Many of the writers describe how forming a connection with another creature, one that wasn't burdened by ownership, changed their understanding of themselves and their humanity, and broadened their capacity for compassion and empathy.

"One of the things that living with animals has done for me is it's allowed me to see the world through other eyes, it's made the world bigger to me," said Macdonald, whose memoir "H Is for Hawk" has sold more than 500,000 copies in the United States alone. "There is a human hunger for a much more intimate close contact with animals."

As someone who grew up with an abundance of pets thanks to an indulgent, animal-loving father, I'm enchanted by the nonhuman protagonists in these memoirs, which remind me of the joyful, unpredictable chaos of living with animals.

Our menagerie included the usual dogs, cats, rabbits, budgies, canaries, finches, guinea pigs and hamsters, but also a tortoise, a frog, a crawfish and a rotating cast of rescued doves and sparrows that we raised and released. For a while, we kept a baby parrot my father found struggling on the ground. The tiny featherless bird blossomed into a big, squawking, fruit-pulp-spewing diva named Sally who frequently defaced our kitchen, and some of us were relieved when she flew off one day. (Our mother drew the line at jerboas — jumping rodents with oversized ears and long spindly legs — which my father, in his bachelor days, kept in a giant sand-filled aquarium in his bedroom.)

Still, even with enough animals at home to fill a petting zoo, I wanted to be near wilder ones. I occasionally got to, while snorkeling around coral reefs (a



VIA CARL SAFINA

Carl Safina and Alfie, a screech owl he raised after finding it when it was young and sickly.

pilot fish I named Herman once followed me all the way to shore) or during family excursions to the desert, which was host to fascinating creatures — dung beetles, locusts, geckos, camel spiders, the elusive jerboas. But more often I had to settle for secondhand experiences through books like "White Fang" and "Island of the Blue Dolphins."

The recent cluster of memoirs about wild creatures has granted me a window into the daily lives, behaviors and personalities of animals that most of us are unlikely to ever encounter at close range. Wild places across the planet are shrinking; most of us are cut off from the natural world and its inhabitants.

Our collective longing to connect with animals is evident in the viral popularity of animal celebrities on social media — who can resist Pesto the chubby baby king penguin, Hua Hua the panda or Moo Deng, the ornery baby pygmy hippo? It's also captured in films like the documentary "My Octopus Teacher" and the feature film "The Penguin

Lessons," which was adapted from Tom Mitchell's memoir about rescuing an oil-slicked penguin he found on a beach in Uruguay.

"It's a very old yearning that our kind has," said the naturalist Sy Montgomery, who has written dozens of books about animals, including "How to Be a Good Creature," which chronicles her relationships with 13 animals, among them an octopus named Octavia.

As children, most of us feel an instinctive connection with other creatures. And some of the oldest forms of human art and literature — cave paintings, myths, fables — center on animals.

"It has helped us survive," Montgomery said of this connection. "Until 10 minutes ago we were all hunter gatherers, and if you didn't pay attention to the natural world a smilodon came and ate you."

In the best seller "Raising Hare," Dalton describes how the rhythm of her life and her sense of self changed when she brought home a baby hare.



VIA FRIEDA HUGHES



CHLOE DALTON

Clockwise from top left: Helen Macdonald, the author of "H Is for Hawk," with Mabel, a goshawk; Frieda Hughes with George, a magpie, on her knee; and the leveret, or baby hare, whose companionship shifted Chloe Dalton's sense of self.

Before the leveret came into her life, Dalton's existence revolved around work. A global political consultant, she ran on adrenaline, traveling the world in response to geopolitical crises. During the pandemic, Dalton retreated to her home in the English countryside, where, walking in a field one afternoon, she found a tiny hare that had been chased by a dog. Dalton brought the leveret home, bottle fed it and eventually gave it the run of her house and garden, imagining it would one day return to the wild.

Once mature, the hare began venturing outside of the garden walls, disappearing for stretches, sometimes weeks at a time. But to Dalton's astonishment, she always returned, waiting patiently by the door to be let in.

Her quiet presence had a profound effect on Dalton.

"Her behavior stilled me and calmed me and made me feel differently about my life," Dalton said in an interview.

Portraying wild creatures as willing companions to humans carries risk. Biologists and naturalists caution against interacting with wildlife, for the safety of animals and humans, and some narratives about human and animal friendships might leave readers thinking that animals want to be our cuddly sidekicks.

Another critique of some animal memoirs is that authors stray into anthropomorphism, assigning human traits to their nonhuman subjects. But writers who have spent time with members of other species say it's foolish to assume that we're so very different.

"For the longest time, it was in vogue to say, oh that's anthropomorphism, and that is the stupidest thing I've ever heard," Montgomery said. "It implies that emotions, individuality, personality are all human characteristics."

Part of the narrative tension in memoirs about wild animals comes from how tenuous and fleeting the relationships feel. In "H Is for Hawk," Macdonald constantly worries that when Mabel flies freely to hunt, she might never return. Dalton feels a pang when the hare bounds past the garden wall. "Each time she leaves it could be the last time," Dalton told me.

Frieda Hughes, a poet and artist who is the daughter of Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath, always knew her relationship with a magpie would end, but didn't anticipate how sharply she would feel the loss.

Hughes found George in the garden of her home in Wales after a storm blew down his nest. She didn't expect the tiny bird to survive. Instead, he thrived and grew into a wily prankster, an evolution she details in her 2023 book, "George: A Magpie Memoir."

George stole peas off Hughes's plate and stuffed them in her back pocket. He grabbed her pencil and fled as she chased him around the garden. Once he could fly, Hughes left the kitchen window open so George could come and go. She later learned during a visit to her local pub that he was flying around to see her neighbors.

"Everyone knew George," she said. "George had more of a social life than I did."

Hughes reordered her life around the bird. Every night at dusk, she whistled for him, and he came barreling through the window. One evening, she whistled and George didn't come home, and she knew the magical era was over.

"I knew that at some point the happy ending was for him to leave," said Hughes, who continued to take in injured and unwanted birds after George left, and currently lives with 11 owls. "When he died, I was so bereft."

After more than three years, Catherine Raven's relationship with the fox ended abruptly when a forest fire devastated the area around her home in Montana. She never saw the fox again. But his impact on her life has only grown in the years since, she said.

When "Fox and I" was released, Raven found herself interacting with people more, and to her surprise, enjoying it. It was Fox, as she calls him, who taught her how to connect with others, Raven said.

"Fox gave me self-esteem," she said. "I am way more like Fox now."

Mariah Carey didn't copy holiday hit, judge rules

Two writers had claimed 'All I Want for Christmas Is You' stole their song

BY ADEEL HASSAN

"All I Want for Christmas Is You," the perennial hit song by Mariah Carey that has become a holiday ear worm for the ages, was not stolen from other songwriters, a federal judge in Los Angeles has ruled.

In addition to dismissing the music copyright case, the judge, Monica Ramirez Almadani, last week ordered the two songwriters who filed the lawsuit to pay at least part of the lawyers' fees for Ms. Carey and Walter Afanasieff, her co-writer and a co-defendant.

The lawsuit, which sought \$20 million in damages, relied on music experts who claimed "similarities in isolation," the judge found, but who failed to put those similarities in the context of the entire song. The judge said that the plaintiffs had not met the burden of showing substantial similarities.

The plaintiffs — Andy Stone, who uses the stage name Vince Vance, and Troy Powers — wrote the song in 1988, court documents show. Their song, also called "All I Want for Christmas Is You," was recorded by Vince Vance and the Valiants and released in 1989.

It became a hit, appearing on Billboard's Hot Country chart in 1994 and returning to the chart multiple times in the 1990s.

Ms. Carey's song of the same name was released in late 1994 on her Christmas album, "Merry Christmas."

In the lawsuit, lawyers for Mr. Stone and Mr. Powers said that the close timing of the success of the earlier song and Ms. Carey's release "points to the overwhelming likelihood that Carey and Afanasieff, both career musicians and songwriters, who knew the importance of charting on Billboard, had access to the Vance work."

The lawsuit said that the Vance song "contains a unique linguistic structure where a person, disillusioned with expensive gifts and seasonal comforts, wants to be with their loved one" and refers to Santa Claus.



KAREN WARREN/HOUSTON CHRONICLE, VIA GETTY IMAGES

Mariah Carey performing a Christmas show in Houston last year.

Lawyers for the plaintiffs also said that Ms. Carey and Mr. Afanasieff should have sought a license or other permission from Mr. Stone and Mr. Powers because of that "unique and original" two-part sequence.

The lyrical phrase "All I want for Christmas is you" is at the end of every verse throughout the Vance song, and that phrase also appears to be throughout Ms. Carey's song, the lawsuit said. It also said that her song used more than 50 percent of Mr. Vance's work, in the lyrics and the chords.

Lawyers for Ms. Carey and Mr. Afanasieff said that the music and the lyrics of the two songs were completely different.

They said that the lawsuit was "absurdly relying on" references "to snow, mistletoe, presents under Christmas trees and wanting a loved one for Christmas" that appear in both songs. They said that "the human condition, and the need for the company of another above all else at Christmastime," were not themes protectable by copyright.

Judge Ramirez Almadani heard testimony from two expert musicologists for

each side, but she ultimately agreed with those testifying for Ms. Carey and Mr. Afanasieff.

One of those experts found no significant harmonic similarities between the songs, because the chord progressions and harmonic rhythms are "very different" in both works, the judge said in her ruling.

The expert also found that the two songs share only five words: mistletoe, Santa Claus/Santa, snow, stocking and Christmas, according to the ruling.

The phrases referring to the holiday season — "all I want for Christmas is you" and "underneath the Christmas tree" — as well as "just one thing" and "come true" were all part of a holiday vocabulary long before either of the songs was written, the judge said.

Lawyers for each side were not immediately available.

Over the past three decades, Ms. Carey's "All I Want for Christmas Is You" has become one of the longest-charting singles in any genre, spending 65 weeks on Billboard's Hot 100.

Jack Begg contributed research.

CULTURE

Prey and predator, both in combat boots

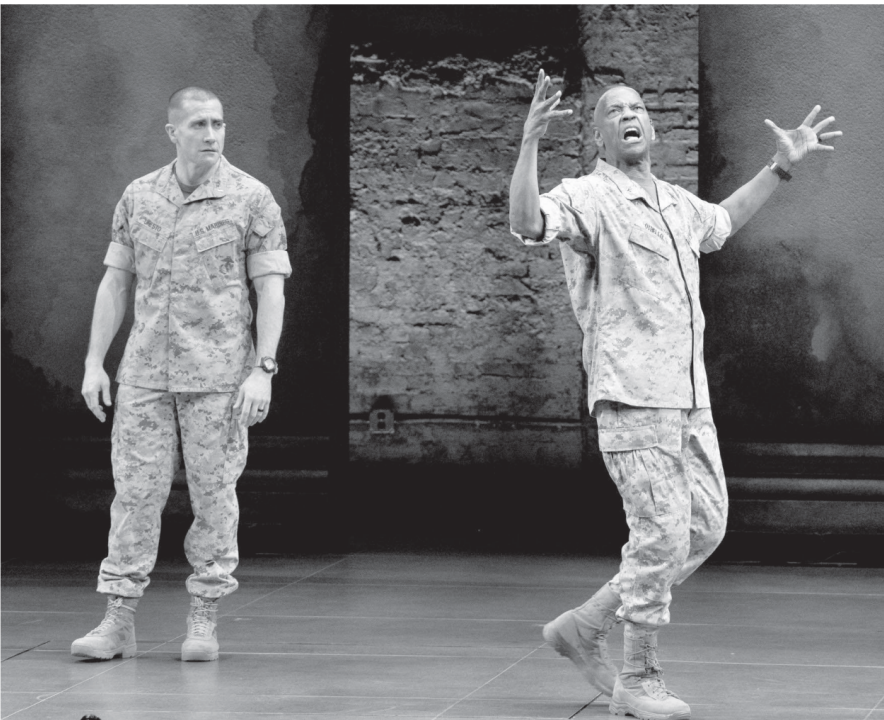
THEATER REVIEW

Denzel Washington tangles with Jake Gyllenhaal in a lean, modern 'Othello'

BY JESSE GREEN

Just moments earlier, he was an infatuated new husband, and she his "gentle love." Now, in Act III, Scene 3 of "Othello," he vows to kill her. What has happened? Why does Othello, the great Black general, the savior of Venice in a war with the Ottomans, resolve to murder Desdemona, the pearl of the white aristocracy he has won at great risk? The scene in which this strange alteration occurs is one of the most gripping, baffling episodes in Shakespeare, and it remains so in the starry Broadway revival of "Othello" at the Ethel Barrymore Theater. We can be grateful for that — and yet, in Denzel Washington's commanding performance, what's especially gripping is perhaps too baffling. As in his many movies, he leads with action, giving us a general whose psychology is as obscure to us as it is to him. Speaking very fast, with a slight mid-Atlantic accent, and stiffened by his ramrod military bearing, he betrays little evidence of the sorrows and injuries that moved Desdemona when he wooed her. Speed and decisiveness ("to be once in doubt is once to be resolved") seem to matter more than emotion. Usually the obscure one is Othello's ensign, Iago. Though Shakespeare provides many possible reasons he might have wanted to poison his commander with lies about Desdemona, awakening the famous green-eyed monster of jealousy, we are typically still in the dark at the end, when the cur is sent to his punishment. "I am not what I am" is his paradoxical, irreducible credo. Then what is he? Yet in a fascinating reversal, this "Othello" offers an Iago far more legible than his master. Jake Gyllenhaal's eely take, with a physical wiggle to match his moral one, is a little bit mad

scientist, a little bit Travis Bickle. His blue eyes pierce the atmospheric murk as he tracks all possible routes to his goal, like a rat in a maze, in the process allowing us to see how a twisted man thinks. He is a calculator of grievance; havoc is the carefully tabulated result. He adds up. The switched polarities are arresting to observe in Kenny Leon's handsome and headlong modern-dress production. Othello enters that fateful scene fully sane and even lighthearted. He banters easily with Desdemona (Molly Osborne) and agrees to reconsider his harsh punishment of Cassio (Andrew Burnap), a lieutenant whose uncharacteristic roistering resulted in violence some nights before. "I will deny thee nothing," he tells his wife uxoriously. Then Iago enters. Purveying the lie that Cassio has slept with Desdemona and, somehow even worse, that he was seen to "wipe his beard" with the handkerchief Othello gave her, the ensign works his evil alchemy, flipping his master's master switch in a moment. Henceforth Othello is only monstrous, and Washington makes an excellent monster. But he has not earlier and does not now offer gradations of character that would help connect the before to the after. To be fair, Shakespeare doesn't either. The possibility of a sympathetic racial interpretation of Othello's rage is mostly voided by the evident racist glee of the writing. When, in Act I, Iago warns Desdemona's father (Daniel Pearce, excellent) of the consequences of her marriage to a "Barbary horse," what he adds is beyond hideous: "You'll have your nephews" — meaning his grandchildren — "neigh to you." Yet Othello never takes the bait or acknowledges prejudice except glancingly. Nor does this production make hay of the play's potential homoerotics. The fantasia Iago spins to convince Othello of Cassio's betrayal — that, in his sleep, moaning for Desdemona, he "kissed me hard" then "laid his leg o'er my thigh" — can't help making a modern audience wonder: Does Iago play any part in the ensign's envy of the handsome lieutenant, who is also, in Burnap's performance, so boyishly sympathetic Cassio. In Kenny Leon's production, Iago is far more legible than Othello.



PHOTOGRAPH BY SARA KRELL/WIREIMAGE.COM

Above, Jake Gyllenhaal, left, as Iago and Denzel Washington as Othello in Shakespeare's tragedy in New York. Below left, Washington with Molly Osborne as a cosmopolitan and businesslike Desdemona, and right, Gyllenhaal with Andrew Burnap as a boyishly sympathetic Cassio. In Kenny Leon's production, Iago is far more legible than Othello.

Similarly sexually cloudy is Iago's connection to Roderigo, usually a comic patsy but much more complex in Anthony Michael Lopez's performance. When Iago urges him to cuckold Othello, it's hard not to hear his reasoning — "thou dost thyself a pleasure, me a sport" — in reverse. In any case, the possessiveness of love that in some men becomes paranoia is a theme that needs exploring in "Othello" or its engine will not turn over. After all, one thread of Iago's rage is his belief, on no evidence, that he, too, was cuckolded — by Othello himself. The age difference between Washington, who is 70, and Osborne, who is 27, might have enhanced such an exploration, but the subject is ignored. (Iago is likewise aged up, to "six times seven" from "four times seven" years.) Indeed, Osborne's Desdemona, though charming in speech and credible in affection, is also cosmopolitan and businesslike, hardly the maiden Shakespeare describes as "of spirit so still and quiet that her motion/Blushed at herself." These avoidances, and others, do little harm in themselves, but accumulate into a mist of confusion. Perhaps Leon's decision to set the action "in the near future" (as a projection tells us at the start) is part of that problem, as we cannot discern how the shift from the presumable 1570s of the text, when a real war between Venice and the Ottomans was waged, is meant to influence our understanding. The geographical setting is also vague. The collection of stabbable col-

urns by Derek McLane, lit in sickly, sullen colors by Natasha Katz, could be anywhere. Though some uniforms marked "Polizia" suggest Venice, others feature U.S. flags, and Dede Ayite's exceedingly well-cut civilian suits and Armani-style ensembles for Desdemona perhaps point more to Milan. Interstitial music includes American hip-hop and Andrea Bocelli in schmaltzy Euro-pop mode. In short, as I felt the production's blunt force more and more, I grasped its aura and aims less and less. "Othello," unique among Shakespeare's tragedies, is lean. (It's even leaner in this production, thanks to some judicious cutting.) It has fewer major characters than most, and fewer sideshows. (Among the cuts: the annoying clown.) Its poetry is extraordinary. And though four principals die, ultimately by Iago's hand or influence, it does not tumble indiscriminately toward the blood bath. The deaths are specific and necessary to its themes. Leon's "Othello" gets all that, except the themes. A good enough bargain, I suppose — or would be, except that center orchestra tickets are selling for \$921. You could spend a lot less — or a lot more — to learn the sad truth "Othello" dramatizes: that those who choose to assume the best in people are most vulnerable to the worst. Innocence is ignorance, certainty a death wish. In a world (and on a stage) that loves not wisely but too well, Iago will always win.



Yoko Ono, demonized no longer

BOOK REVIEW

Yoko: A Biography

By David Sheff. Simon & Schuster. 384 pp. \$30.

BY ALEXANDRA JACOBS

Here's the thing about Yoko Ono, the artist and widow of the murdered rock star John Lennon (usually not identified in that order), and the subject of David Sheff's new biography. She is funny — ha-ha, not peculiar. Asked by an interviewer if she'd ever forgive Lennon's killer, Mark David Chapman, since Pope John Paul II had visited the jail of his own would-be assassin to offer absolution, Ono replied: "I'm not the pope." Promoting an ephemeral Museum of Modern Art "exhibit" in 1971, in part to protest the underrepresentation of women and Asian people there, she posed in front with a strategically placed shopping bag so that the building signage read "Museum of Modern (F) Art." (This was years before "Family Guy.") Elton John recounted in his memoir, "Me," how he'd wondered why Ono had sold the herd of Holstein cows she'd bought, trying to invest ethically. "All that mooing," she told him. For Ono, now 92 and mostly out of

the public eye, to have written her own "Me" would have been profoundly out of character. Her art was crowd-sourced long before that was a word. "Self-Portrait" was a mirror in a manila envelope that reflected the viewer. She invited audiences to step on a painting, play a form of the child's game Telephone, climb into a bag, cut off her clothing or otherwise "finish" her visions. Following Lennon's death in 1980, trusted intimates flouted confidentiality agreements, stole the couple's memorabilia and wrote tell-alls that Ono fought hard to suppress. ("Best book I'll ever burn," their son, Sean, told one particularly egregious betrayer in court.) Long racistily reviled as the dragon lady who broke up the Beatles, Ono has enjoyed a reputational spiffing in the 2020s. In the luscious documentary "The Beatles: Get Back" she is mostly Where's Waldo-like in the frame, but occasionally wails into the mic as the bandmates jam. There have been retrospectives of her own art, as a participant of the Fluxus movement and beyond, at the Japan Society and Tate Modern. Sheff is a prolific journalist and author who conducted one of the last significant interviews with John and Yoko, for Playboy, and became good friends with her. His memoir, "Beautiful Boy," about his son's methamphetamine addiction, was named with her blessing for one of Lennon's last songs. Having received her astrological and numerological clearance, he became enough of a regular at the Dakota to see the changing of the slipcovers from denim in winter to white linen in summer. There have been other biographies of Ono, most recently by the critic



WATKINS/REXUS/VEA/GETTY IMAGES

Yoko Ono in 1967 with some of her art. David Sheff's book is sympathetic but not fawning.

Donald Brackett. But with cooperation from her children and brother; her ex-husband Tony Cox; her former partner and decorator, Sam Havard; her stepson, Julian Lennon; colleagues from the art and music worlds; and such longtime friends as the feminist writer Kate Millet, Sheff's is the closest to an authorized one the world will get.

After the war, Ono dropped out from both a philosophy program at Gakushuin University and the boho Sarah Lawrence College. The journalist Betty Rollin, a classmate there, found her "someone without mooring, drifting, lost and striving." Ono's finishing school would be Greenwich Village; her musical god not Elvis Presley but John Cage. She married twice before Lennon, to

The book is predictably sympathetic, but not fawning, mostly written in a straightforward prose, with sentences like "The oppression of women by men was the subject of many of her songs, films, writing and artworks." And yet sympathy for Ono seems wholly justified. "As a woman she wasn't just dismissed," the art dealer Mary Boone tells Sheff. "She was demonized." Yoko, meaning "ocean child," was born in 1933 in Tokyo to wealthy but cold parents. She didn't meet her father until she was 2½, and her mother was vain and germophobic. "Even now I find it unpleasant to sit on a cushion or chair that still retains the temperature of somebody who had just been sitting there," Ono once wrote. At 12, she watched bombs falling on Tokyo; after evacuation to the countryside she had to beg and barter for food, take care of her siblings and suffer through pleurisy and other ailments. There would be suicide attempts and time in a mental hospital. The war, Ono dropped out from both a philosophy program at Gakushuin University and the boho Sarah Lawrence College. The journalist Betty Rollin, a classmate there, found her "someone without mooring, drifting, lost and striving." Ono's finishing school would be Greenwich Village; her musical god not Elvis Presley but John Cage. She married twice before Lennon, to

Toshi Ichiyanagi, a Juilliard pianist, and Cox, an art promoter who fathered her daughter, Kyoko, whom she took onstage as a baby "as an instrument — an uncontrollable instrument, you know," and from whom she was long estranged. Many of her artistic experiments now seem prescient, like offering shares of herself at \$250 each. Long before Maurizio Cattelan duct-taped a banana to a wall, she made "Apple," a piece of fresh fruit on a stand at the Indica gallery in London. (Lennon, naughtily and biblically, took a chomp.) I am not an Ono-phile who wants to wallow overmuch in this kind of art, but applaud Sheff's book as an important corrective to years of bad PR. He's done the opposite of a hatchet job, putting his subject back together branch by branch, like a forester. (Climbing trees is a big theme in her work.) He argues convincingly for her as survivor, feminist, avant-gardist, political activist and world-class sass. When people criticized her for licensing "Instant Karma" to Nike in 1987, she retorted, "I got \$800,000 which went to the United Negro College Fund. . . . You have a problem with that?" The internet, in particular, seemed built for Ono's participatory visions. When Donald Trump was first elected in 2016, she tweeted a 19-second audio clip of herself screaming.

TRAVEL



From Porto Jofre, small motorboats, like the one at left, take wildlife enthusiasts to Encontro Das Águas State Park, where they are almost guaranteed to see rich wildlife, including jaguars, center.



Above right, fires last year burned about one-quarter of the Pantanal.



From Porto Jofre, small motorboats, like the one at left, take wildlife enthusiasts to Encontro Das Águas State Park, where they are almost guaranteed to see rich wildlife, including jaguars, center.

In the land of the jaguars

In Brazil, a tiny outpost in the Pantanal wetlands allows for close contact

BY ANTHONY HAM

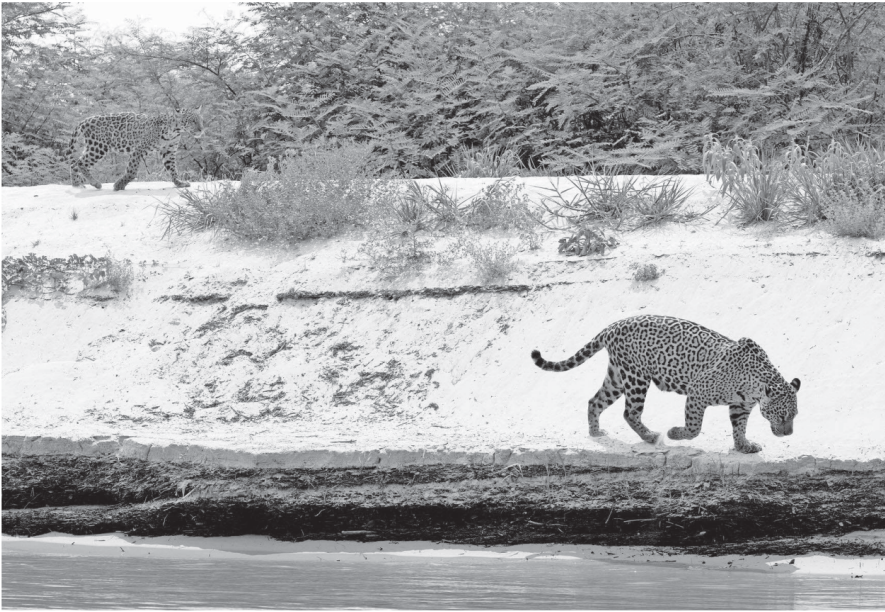
I was prepared to wait, to soak up the magical morning light as our small motorboat traveled up the Rio São Lourenço in the Pantanal, Brazil's vast wetlands. A tangle of lianas, acuri palms and strangler figs pressed close along the riverbank. I stared into the forest, scanning for movement, for shadows, for a jaguar. But it was too soon.

Patience in the wild is a lesson I have learned over a lifetime of travel. On an African safari, for example, it can take days to spot a cheetah or a leopard.

But in Brazil, we had been out on the river for barely half an hour when the cry went up from Gabriel, the captain: "Jaguar!"

And there he was, a magnificent male sunning himself in the reeds. I expected him to flee. But as we pulled up to the riverbank, he remained watchful but inscrutable, giving no sign of being disturbed. Farther upriver, we happened upon a female jaguar with her cub. As they walked along the riverbank, the cub eyed us suspiciously, but for the mother it was as if we were not even there.

WHERE NATURE HOLDS SWAY
Close to the center of Brazil, the Pantanal begins south of the city of Cuiabá. From there to tiny Porto Jofre (about 160 miles, or 250 kilometers), the MT-060 and the unpaved Transpantaneira Highway unfurl across the world's largest wetlands, passing



Brazil's Pantanal, the world's largest wetlands, is home to a sizable population of jaguars. Above, two jaguars in Encontro Das Águas State Park, less than an hour from Porto Jofre.



savanna and forest, ranches and eco-lodges.

At Porto Jofre, the highway ends and motorboats take over, with guides and local captains, many with their own Instagram accounts, ready to take you upriver to look for jaguars.

It was late November, the end of the dry season, when I arrived, and Porto Jofre was barely a pinprick of human presence, with a handful of lodges, camps and houses surrounded by rainforest. Families of capybara, the world's largest rodent, had taken over the airstrip. Hyacinth macaws screeched overhead.

Over the days that followed, I would wake before dawn in the simple, palm-shaded surroundings of the Jaguar Camp, run by my guide, Ailton Lara, and we would head down to the riverbank, where each sultry morning, with rain on the near horizon, a few fishermen cleaned their morning catch. The flotilla of tourist boats during the June-to-September high season was already a distant memory.

But even on these quiet mornings, there were still boats setting out with visitors, heading as far as 60 miles upstream in their search for jaguars. They usually don't have to travel that far, finding what they're looking for in the Encontro Das Águas (Meeting of the Waters) State Park, less than an hour upriver from Porto Jofre.

I had been drawn to Mr. Lara, 44,



and his Pantanal Nature tour company, by his soft-sell approach. One of the Pantanal's most experienced guides, he had been exploring the network of rivers for decades. For him, it was all about the jaguars. If I wanted to join him, that would be wonderful. If not, he'd be out there anyway, looking for the animals.

I had Mr. Lara and Gabriel to myself. After our first two sightings of the morning, we eased from the main river into a creek called Corixo Negro. "This

is ground zero for jaguars," Mr. Lara said.

As if on cue, beyond a family of giant otters, a female jaguar, cub in tow, launched herself from a branch overhanging the water's edge and onto an unsuspecting caiman in a violent commotion of water. With a handful of other guide boats alongside us, there was an audible gasp from amid the whirl of camera clicks. The female jaguar, magnificent in the golden light of morning, emerged from the water, a



Above left, tourists slipping by in a boat obscured by riverside foliage. "They are there recording everything and observing the jaguars every day," one animal scientist said. "It's a kind of citizen science." Above, a young male jaguar on the river. At left, a jaguar attacking a caiman in Encontro Das Águas State Park.

small, writhing caiman in her jaws. I looked around at Mr. Lara. Like all of us, his eyes were shining, as if seeing wild nature for the first time.

AN UNLIKELY INTIMACY
This section of the northern Pantanal has one of the highest jaguar densities in South America — about three for every 39 square miles (100 square kilometers). But when it comes to actually seeing jaguars, it hasn't always been like this.

Beginning about 20 years ago — after decades of hunting, poaching for skins and retaliation for the occasional loss of livestock, all of which drove jaguars into hiding — a combination of government protection, a rise in tourism and early eco-tourism projects resulted in an increasingly friendly relationship between humans and jaguars. Over the years, the jaguars have become used to the boats and the camera-toting humans in them.

"Human-jaguar conflict is disappearing around this area of Porto Jofre," Mr. Lara said. "We are starting to live in harmony with jaguars."

It's an unusual situation. "Jaguars are normally very shy and avoid the human presence," said Fernando Tortato, the Brazil conservation program coordinator for the wildcat conservation nonprofit group Panthera. "People say that the jaguar is like a ghost living

inside the jungle."

But not here. There is an unlikely intimacy between the animals and the guides, who have given the jaguars names — Ousado, for example, a male whom Mr. Lara named, whose paws were burned in recent wildfires; Patricia and her cub; bent-eared Marcela, amber-eyed and pregnant.

It helps that in the northern Pantanal, there are no sizable towns — Porto Jofre, with a transient population of perhaps 100, has neither a gas station nor a shop within 100 miles. And the riverbanks are filled with jaguar prey: caiman, capybara and tapir, as well as birds like black-backed water tyrants, and the menhir frog, which blends in perfectly with the brown leaf litter on the forest floor and has a call that sounds like a Formula 1 engine.

"Jaguars here are doing so well," Mr. Lara said, "because there are so many different species they can eat."

As long as certain rules are followed — tourist boats should keep a respect-

"Jaguars are normally very shy and avoid the human presence. People say that the jaguar is like a ghost living inside the jungle."

ful distance, observe jaguars in silence and allow the animals space to hunt and swim — the jaguars are largely unaffected by visitors. In fact, tourism has deepened the knowledge of jaguar behavior.

With so many eyes on the jaguars, new behaviors have been observed: The jaguars have learned to stalk caimans by swimming underwater and surfacing suddenly alongside their prey; males are forming coalitions to hunt cooperatively.

"They are there recording everything and observing the jaguars every day," Dr. Tortato said. "It's a kind of citizen science. Just one WhatsApp video can be the start of new research."

CHALLENGES AHEAD
The Pantanal may look like a jaguar paradise, but threats remain. On the last day of my trip, the Mato Grosso and Mato Grosso do Sul state governments announced to build a bridge across the São Lourenço at Porto Jofre, where a road would cut through forest and wetlands to the regional city of Corumbá.

In their announcement, the state governments — which did not respond to requests for comment — justified the move as a means of furthering eco-tourism by connecting the northern and southern Pantanal regions.

Local activists, scientists and tour operators are against the project.

"This road is going to increase traffic, which will inevitably increase roadkill," said Gustavo Figueiró, a biologist and conservation director of SOS Pantanal, a nonprofit that opposes the road. "The Pantanal will lose its wildness and isolation."

Mr. Lara echoed his concerns. "Building a road could kill the Pantanal," he said. "There will be more people, more trucks carrying soybeans, more construction."

Even without the road and bridge, the Pantanal faces challenges.

Last year, fires burned one-quarter of the Pantanal, and a drought led to the lowest water levels ever in the Rio Paraguay, part of the network of rivers upstream from Porto Jofre.

A landmark 2023 study of plans to dredge the Paraguay River to enable cargo river traffic found that the project posed an existential threat to the wider biome. Just 5 percent of the Pantanal is officially protected.

And as ever in Brazil, the political winds that pit ranchers against conservationists are never far away.

Even in times of relative peace, the two coexist uncomfortably: A sign welcoming visitors to Cuiabá describes the city as "Capital of the Pantanal and Agribusiness."

For now, the region's isolation and growing fame as the world's best place to see jaguars are keeping it safe.

Back on the river for the last time, we watched Marcela, the pregnant female jaguar, stalk and attack a caiman in the river shallows, carrying it into the undergrowth. Soon, her meal finished, she re-emerged and took to the water.

We followed at a distance for more than an hour, until she disappeared.

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