

DONALD TRUMP’S TERRIBLE, HORRIBLE, NO GOOD, VERY BAD FIRST HUNDRED DAYS ON FOREIGN POLICY

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INTRODUCTION

A president’s first hundred days in office is an arbitrary but nonetheless useful benchmark. It provides a chance to evaluate and make preliminary judgments about a president’s early performance and policy priorities.

In his first hundred days back in office, President Donald Trump has given a masterclass on how to destroy a nation’s reputation and damage its interests around the world. It’s the most disastrous first hundred days for a president since the term passed into popular usage more than nine decades ago — particularly when it comes to national security. Indeed, Trump is personally responsible for three major national security debacles that have defined his first hundred days: launching an unprovoked and irrational trade war with the rest of the world, actively alienating America’s closest and oldest allies while cozying up to dictators and long-time adversaries, and displaying a shocking level of ineptitude in the conduct of foreign affairs as well as a politicization of national defense.

Trump’s foreign policy has already damaged American national security in deep and profound ways. In just over three months, Trump and his preferred policies have made America less secure, less prosperous, and less trusted in the world.

It’s worth taking a closer work to see just how.

AN UNPROVOKED, IRRATIONAL, AND DESTRUCTIVE GLOBAL TRADE WAR

President Trump fired the first shots in his unprovoked and non-sensical trade war with the world on February 1, imposing tariffs of 25% on Canada and Mexico — two countries with whom he had struck a trade agreement during his first term — and 10% on China. He then paused tariffs on Canada and Mexico for thirty days while slapping duties on aluminum and steel, then cars and auto parts, before announcing tariffs of at least 10% against every other nation in the world, beginning on April 2.¹ For 56 other countries and the 27-nation European Union, the White House added further “reciprocal” tariffs calculated via an absurd and arbitrary formula — one that saw the United States levying duties on the Heard

¹ Talya Minsberg, “A Timeline of Trump’s On-Again, Off-Again Tariffs,” *New York Times*, updated April 21, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/13/business/economy/trump-tariff-timeline.html>.

and McDonald Islands, an Australian territory inhabited solely by penguins, seals, and other Antarctic wildlife.²

When the stock and bond markets reacted poorly to these tariffs, the president suspended those above 10% for ninety days while jacking up China's tariff rate to 145% — leaving the United States itself with an effective tariff rate higher than what had prevailed after his initial announcement on April 2 as well as the highest rate in the world today and the highest national rate since 1901.³ In response to complaints from electronics firms like Apple that rely on China to assemble their products, Trump then exempted computers, smartphones, and other electronics from his tariffs against Beijing.⁴ For reasons unknown, tariffs on inputs and intermediate goods like batteries remain in place.

It's futile to look for some method in the madness of Trump's trade war. Tariff rationales offered by his economic advisors shift from day to day, and Trump invariably grants some exception or suspends a tariff that nullifies any given explanation. Trump himself has been obsessed with tariffs for decades, viewing them as an almost-magical panacea that can solve just about any problem. His capricious announcements and suspensions of tariffs have fomented severe economic uncertainty and chaos both in the United States and around the world; subsequent gyrations in financial markets have destroyed trillions of dollars in wealth. That's likely only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to damage to the American economy, with snarled supply chains and price hikes on consumer goods, industrial inputs, and other products still to come.

Trump's trade war threatens the American economy, the economies of other nations (including America's closest allies and economic partners), and the global economy as a whole. Indeed, one analysis estimates Trump's tariffs (as of April 15) will reduce real economic growth this year by 1.1% and leave the U.S. economy 0.6% smaller over the long run, all while increasing prices by 3% and costing households an average of \$4,900 in purchasing power this year.⁵ And as PPI's Ed Gresser notes, tariffs are more likely to shrink than grow America's manufacturing sector.⁶ It's a protectionist shock unlike anything the country or the world has seen in living memory.

² Caroline Haskins and Leah Feiger, "Trump Tariffs Hit Antarctic Islands Inhabited by Zero Humans and Many Penguins," *Wired*, April 2, 2025, <https://www.wired.com/story/trump-tariffs-antarctic-islands-heard-mcdonald/>.

³ "State of U.S. Tariffs: April 15, 2025," Yale Budget Lab, April 15, 2025, <https://budgetlab.yale.edu/research/state-us-tariffs-april-15-2025>.

⁴ Ryan Christoffel, "Trump Touts How He 'Helped' Tim Cook with US Tariff Pivots," *9to5Mac*, April 14, 2025, <https://9to5mac.com/2025/04/14/trump-touts-how-he-helped-tim-cook-with-pivots-on-us-tariffs/>

⁵ Yale Budget Lab, "State of U.S. Tariffs: April 15, 2025," April 15, 2025, <https://budgetlab.yale.edu/research/state-us-tariffs-april-15-2025>.

⁶ Ed Gresser, "Trump Tariffs More Likely To Shrink Than Enlarge U.S. Manufacturing Industry," Progressive Policy Institute, April 16, 2025, <https://www.progressivepolicy.org/trump-tariffs-more-likely-to-shrink-than-enlarge-u-s-manufacturing-industry/>.

All in all, Trump's trade war amounts to an unprecedented and egregious act of national economic self-harm, one that opens up opportunities for corruption unrivaled in the modern era.

ALIENATING ALLIES AND LOSING FRIENDS

The damage done by Trump's trade war extends well beyond economics and into international politics and security. Indeed, the geopolitical and diplomatic losses incurred by Trump's tariffs may well exceed their purely economic costs. Trump's tariffs have already caused Japanese political leaders to pose difficult questions about the nature of their country's relationship with the United States.⁷ Moreover, Trump's moves to slap duties on countries with which the United States has free trade agreements — allies Australia, Canada, and South Korea among them⁸ — call into question American reliability not just as a trading partner but a strategic one as well. Nor will these allies maintain the fragile common front against unfair Chinese trade practices the Biden administration had begun to pull together over its four years in office.

Even as they damage America's strategic relationships with allies and friends around the world, Trump's tariffs look set to harm America's own defense industry in two main ways: by making American weapons unattractive to potential buyers, including to allies, and by increasing the cost of the imported inputs and material needed to build them. Canada, for instance, may not complete its full order for F-35 stealth fighters, while Portugal — another NATO ally — has voiced doubts about buying F-35s to replace its own aging F-16 fleet.⁹ Trump's 25% tariffs on steel and aluminum — and retaliation from major U.S. suppliers like Canada — will likely make the production of aircraft carriers, fighter jets, and other weapons even more expensive for American defense companies and lead to delays in delivery.¹⁰ The AUKUS submarine agreement between Australia, Great Britain, and the United States will also likely face further cost increases and delays.¹¹ Likely tariffs on

⁷ Tobias Harris, "Japan's 'Zelenskyy Moment,'" *Observing Japan*, April 8, 2025, <https://observingjapan.substack.com/p/japans-zelenskyy-moment>.

⁸ "Free Trade Agreements," Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, last accessed April 29, 2025, <https://ustr.gov/trade-agreements/free-trade-agreements>.

⁹ Stefanie Dazio and Tara Copp, "Europe and Canada Are Eyeing Alternatives to American-Made Fighter Jets. Here's Why," *Associated Press*, March 19, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/trump-f35-defense-military-fighter-jets-7e18c5459228d16769385dd0b8c3d930>.

¹⁰ Stephen Losey, "Trump Tariffs Could Backfire on Military, Some Experts Warn," *Defense News*, January 24, 2025, <https://www.defensenews.com/air/2025/01/24/trump-tariffs-could-backfire-on-military-some-experts-warn/>; Katrina Bishop and Amala Balakrishner, "Trump's 25% Tariffs on Steel and Aluminum Imports Take Effect, Europe Retaliates," *CNBC*, March 12, 2025, <https://www.cnbc.com/2025/03/12/trumps-25percent-tariffs-on-steel-and-aluminum-imports-take-effect.html>; "List of Products from the United States Subject to 25 Per Cent Tariffs Effective March 13, 2025," Department of Finance Canada, last updated March 12, 2025, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/news/2025/03/list-of-products-from-the-united-states-subject-to-25-per-cent-tariffs-effective-march-13-2025.html>.

¹¹ Larisa Brown, "US Tariffs Threaten Production of Aukus Nuclear Submarines," *The Times* (UK), April 10, 2025, <https://www.thetimes.com/uk/defence/article/aukus-submarine-pact-us-tariffs-trump-xhs3xt0gl?region=global>.

critical minerals, semiconductor chips, and other metals justified on supposed national security grounds will only compound the damage.

These tariffs come on top of Trump's open threats to the sovereignty and independence of American allies Canada and Denmark. He renewed his first-term fixation on acquiring Greenland, an autonomous Arctic territory under Danish sovereignty, threatening Copenhagen with coercive tariffs¹² and openly hinting at the possible use of military force against a NATO ally nation. Vice President JD Vance made an unwelcome visit to the island and scolded Denmark for its governance, prompting a blunt rebuke from Danish foreign minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen: "And of course, we are open to criticism. But let me be completely honest: we do not appreciate the tone in which it is being delivered. This is not how you speak to your close allies."¹³

Trump's threats against Canada have been even more harmful to American interests and security. He has consistently used derogatory and demeaning language to talk about his desire to annex Canada and make it the 51st U.S. state, all while launching a wholly unprovoked trade war against Ottawa in violation of the USMCA trade deal he himself struck in his first term. Canadian officials have already begun rethinking their reliance on the United States for security by rethinking their acquisition of F-35 fighters. Worse, Trump's rhetoric and actions toward Canada jeopardize agreements and arrangements fundamental to American national security, including NATO, the binational North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) early warning partnership, and the Five Eyes signals intelligence network that includes other core allies like Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand.¹⁴

At the same time, Trump has made his sympathies for Vladimir Putin and his war against Ukraine — as well as his antipathy for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his nation — clear. He and his administration have offered Putin concession after concession while asking for almost nothing in return from the Kremlin; indeed, his administration's so-called "peace" proposal requires Ukraine to cede territory to Moscow both formally and informally while the Kremlin receives relief from U.S. sanctions.¹⁵ They have put the screws to Ukraine, from attempting to extort a critical minerals agreement from Kyiv to temporarily

¹² Alan Wm. Wolff, "Would the US Imposing High Tariffs on Denmark Bring it Greenland? If it Did, at What Cost?" *Realtime Economics*, January 28, 2025, <https://www.piie.com/blogs/realtime-economics/2025/would-us-imposing-high-tariffs-denmark-bring-it-greenland-if-it-did>.

¹³ "Trump Won't Rule Out Military Force to Take Greenland," *NPR*, March 30, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/03/30/nx-s1-5344942/trump-military-force-not-off-the-table-for-greenland>; Karen Gilchrest, "Danish Shoppers Boycott U.S. Products as Greenland — and Trade — Tensions Escalate," *CNBC*, April 11, 2025, <https://www.cNBC.com/2025/04/11/danish-shoppers-boycott-us-products-as-greenland-trade-tensions-escalate.html>.

¹⁴ Demetri Sevastopulo and Ilya Gridneff, "White House Official Pushes to Axe Canada From Five Eyes Intelligence Group," *Financial Times*, February 25, 2025, <https://www.ft.com/content/2dfa3c11-64a7-49f6-83df-939b8d1cfb8e>; "North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD)," Government of Canada, last updated June 22, 2022, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/news/2022/06/north-american-aerospace-defense-command-norad.html>.

¹⁵ Barak Ravid, "Trump's 'Final Offer' for Peace Requires Ukraine to Accept Russian Occupation," *Axios*, April 22, 2025, <https://www.axios.com/2025/04/22/trump-russia-ukraine-peace-plan-crimea-donbas>.

suspending intelligence and military assistance after publicly castigating Zelenskyy during a shameful Oval Office confrontation. Trump has even gone so far as to blame Ukraine for starting the war, absolving Putin of responsibility for his aggression and implying that Zelenskyy should have simply capitulated to the Kremlin.

Worse still, Trump's disgraceful performance on Ukraine raises severe doubt as to whether he would actually come to the defense of America's NATO allies if Russia attacked, given his antipathy to the alliance. Indeed, it's entirely plausible that he would blame Russian aggression on its victims and renege on America's formal obligations to its NATO allies. He could restrict the supply of American arms and ammunition supplies to these allies in an attempt to force them to settle on the Kremlin's terms. As long as Trump is in office, America's allies around the world cannot count on the United States to come to their aid in the event of an armed attack.

In short, Trump's alienation of America's oldest and closest allies leaves the United States less safe in the world — and raises the risk of conflict in Europe and the Pacific by sowing doubts about America's commitments to its allies and their security.

INEPTITUDE, CHAOS, AND POLITICIZATION

Over the course of the administration's first hundred days in office, Trump's national security team has displayed immense ineptitude and incompetence — all while working diligently to fight culture wars and politicize their agencies in pursuit of their perceived domestic enemies.

The revelation that Trump's national security team discussed operational military plans and conducted sensitive government business on their own insecure personal devices, likely in violation of official recordkeeping laws, provides just the most noteworthy example. National Security Adviser Mike Waltz added *The Atlantic* editor-in-chief Jeffrey Goldberg to the group chat apparently by accident, while Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth posted the operational details of imminent U.S. air strikes against Houthi targets in Yemen.¹⁶ At least two members of the group chat — Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard and special envoy Steven Witkoff — were overseas at the time Hegseth disclosed upcoming operations.¹⁷ The CIA also disclosed that Director John Ratcliffe's group chat messages have been deleted.¹⁸

¹⁶ Jeffrey Goldberg and Shane Harris, "Here Are the Attack Plans That Trump's Advisers Shared on Signal," *The Atlantic*, March 26, 2025, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2025/03/signal-group-chat-attack-plans-hegseth-goldberg/682176/>.

¹⁷ Joanne Stocker and Emmet Lyons, "As Top Trump Aides Sent Texts on Signal, Flight Data Show a Member of the Group Chat Was in Russia," *CBS News*, March 26, 2025, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/trump-envoy-steve-witkoff-signal-text-group-chat-russia-putin/>; Robin Stein et al., "Where Was Each Member of the Signal Group Chat?" *New York Times*, March 29, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2025/03/29/us/signal-group-chat-locations.html>.

¹⁸ Julian E. Barnes, "C.I.A. Director's Messages in Leaked Chat Were Deleted, Agency Says," *New York Times*, April 15, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/15/us/politics/cia-director-leaked-chat.html>.

Hegseth also shared sensitive information with his wife, brother, and personal lawyer over the same chat app.¹⁹ This information came via secure communications from Gen. Michael “Erik” Kurilla, the general in charge of U.S. Central Command, and included the specifics of when American fighters would take off and hit their targets in Yemen.²⁰ In an effort to track down the source of information leaked to the press, Hegseth reportedly shouted at the acting chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and demanded he and other high-ranking military officers take polygraph tests.²¹ Nor has the chaos spared Hegseth’s own political appointees, five of whom have either been fired or resigned — including his own chief of staff.

Not even Trump’s signature policy of blunderbuss tariffs has been spared his administration’s general ineptitude. The tariff rates Trump announced on April 2 — suspended for ninety days since April 9 — appear to be the result of a simple and entirely arbitrary formula that James Surowiecki, the journalist who first discerned it, called “extraordinary nonsense.”²² Other observers noted the eerie similarity of Trump’s tariff formula to those produced by artificial intelligence programs like ChatGPT, Gemini, and Claude when prompted.²³ In suspending these tariffs, moreover, Trump has given his administration the impossible task of negotiating trade agreements with 150 countries in just three months — and it’s still not at all clear what outcomes, exactly, Trump seeks from these deals.²⁴

Finally, Trump and his senior appointees — most notably Secretary of Defense Hegseth — have sought to politicize American national security institutions and make them culture war battlegrounds. Without cause or reason, Trump fired Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. C.Q. Brown, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Lisa Franchetti, and Commandant of the Coast Guard Adm. Linda Fagan, replacing Brown as chairman with a retired

¹⁹ Greg Jaffe, Eric Schmitt, and Maggie Haberman, “Hegseth Said to Have Shared Attack Details in Second Signal Chat,” *New York Times*, April 20, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/20/us/politics/hegseth-yemen-attack-second-signal-chat.html>.

²⁰ Courtney Kube and Gordon Lubold, “Info Hegseth Shared With Wife and Brother Came From Top General’s Secure Messages,” *NBC News*, April 22, 2025, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/info-pete-hegseth-shared-wife-brother-came-top-generals-secure-message-rcna198838>.

²¹ Nancy A. Youssef, Alexander Ward, and Vera Bergengruen, “Polygraph Threats, Leaks and Infighting: The Chaos Inside Hegseth’s Pentagon,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 24, 2025, <https://www.wsj.com/politics/national-security/pete-hegseth-pentagon-fired-aides-cfa9e0d5>.

²² Jakob Weizman and Giovanna Coi, “Trump’s Tariff Math is Crazy, Says ‘Wisdom of Crowds’ Author,” *Politico Europe*, April 3, 2025, <https://www.politico.eu/article/donald-trump-us-trade-tariff-math-is-crazy-wisdom-of-crowds-author/>; Alan Cole, “Trump’s Reciprocal Tariff Calculations Are Nonsense, Will Punish Mutually Beneficial Trade,” *The Tax Foundation*, April 3, 2025, <https://taxfoundation.org/blog/trump-reciprocal-tariffs-calculations/>.

²³ Dominic Preston, “Trump’s New Tariff Math Looks a Lot Like ChatGPT’s,” *The Verge*, April 3, 2025, <https://www.theverge.com/news/642620/trump-tariffs-formula-ai-chatgpt-gemini-claude-grok>.

²⁴ David Goldman and John Towfighi, “Trump Has 90 days to Do 150 Trade Deals. Financial Markets Aren’t Buying it,” *CNN*, April 11, 2025, <https://www.cnn.com/2025/04/11/investing/stock-market-dow-tariffs/index.html>; Andy Bounds and Aime Williams, “US Wants to Retain Key Tariffs on EU, Say European Officials,” *Financial Times*, April 15, 2025, <https://www.ft.com/content/c9bec30c-e0b6-4d50-a3bb-feb11eadc13c>.

lieutenant general he falsely claimed lavished praise on the president during a first-term meeting.²⁵ He also dismissed Gen. Tim Haugh, head of the National Security Agency, and his civilian deputy as well as three National Security Council staffers, all apparently at the behest of a far-right social media influencer.²⁶

In addition, Secretary of Defense Hegseth fired the top lawyers for the three main services and put his own personal lawyer in charge of the military's legal corps.²⁷ Hegseth also launched a crusade against diversity, equity, and inclusion in the military, an effort that went so far as to ban transgender Americans from military service and remove mentions of baseball legend Jackie Robinson, the Navajo Code Talkers of World War II, and the first female Thunderbirds demonstration pilot from Department of Defense websites (some of which were later restored).²⁸ The end result of these moves will be a politicized military less able to offer honest advice, less trusted by the American public, and less able to actually defend the country from external threats.²⁹

Similar machinations are underway in the intelligence community, where DNI Gabbard launched a task force to look into alleged "politicization" among America's intelligence agencies — and given the Trump administration's all-encompassing definition of "politicization," it's not hard to imagine what Gabbard's task force will find.³⁰ She also summarily fired over 100 intelligence officers for their participation in supposedly sexually explicit group chats after a right-wing provocateur brought these chats to public attention.³¹

²⁵ Eleanor Watson, "President Trump's Nominee for Top U.S. General Says he Never Wore a MAGA Hat," *CBS News*, April 1, 2025, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/dan-caine-maga-hat-joint-chiefs-of-staff-nominee-senate-armed-forces-confirmation-hearing/>.

²⁶ Lolita C. Baldor and Lisa Mascaro, "Trump Abruptly Fires the 4-Star General Who Headed the National Security Agency," *Associated Press*, April 4, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/trump-national-security-agency-tim-haugh-ec08b455e2c1112f5c6bb1881fad73e2>; Katie Bo Lillis et al., "White House Fires Multiple Administration Officials After President Meets With Far-Right Activist Laura Loomer," *CNN*, April 4, 2025, <https://www.cnn.com/2025/04/03/politics/nsc-firings-trump-laura-loomer-meeting/index.html>.

²⁷ Lolita C. Baldor, "Hegseth Says He Fired the Top Military Lawyers Because they Weren't Well Suited for the Jobs," *Associated Press*, February 24, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/pentagon-hegseth-firing-chairman-lawyers-6bead3346b1210e45e77648e6cbc3599>.

²⁸ David Roza, "By-Product of DEI Purge: Air Force Vets Find Their History Erased," *Air and Space Forces Magazine*, March 11, 2025, <https://www.airandspaceforces.com/air-force-dei-purge-veterans/>; Daniel Lippman and Jack Detsch, "Top Pentagon Official at Center of Jackie Robinson Controversy to Resign," *Politico*, April 14, 2025, <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/04/16/top-pentagon-official-resigns-00295381>; Riley Ceder, "Articles About Navajo Code Talkers Removed in Pentagon's DEI Purge," *Air Force Times*, March 18, 2025, <https://www.airforcetimes.com/news/your-military/2025/03/18/articles-about-navajo-code-talkers-removed-in-pentagons-dei-purge/>.

²⁹ Risa Brooks, "The Dangerous New Civil-Military Bargain," *Foreign Affairs*, April 8, 2025, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/dangerous-new-civil-military-bargain>.

³⁰ Julian E. Barnes, "Gabbard Starts a Task Force Focused on Politicization of the Intelligence Agencies," *New York Times*, April 8, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/08/us/politics/tulsi-gabbard-intelligence-task-force.html>.

³¹ Dan De Luce, "Tulsi Gabbard Fires More Than 100 Intelligence Officers Over Messages in a Chat Tool," *NBC News*, February 26, 2025, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/gabbard-fires-100-intelligence-officers-messages-chat-tool-rcna193799>.

In sum, the Trump administration seems dead-set on weakening the U.S. military and intelligence community — leaving Americans less safe at home and their national interests overseas far more vulnerable.

CONCLUSION: THE WORST IS YET TO COME

Few other presidents have wrought as much damage to American national security as Donald Trump has in the first hundred days of his second term in office. But the cavalcade of self-inflicted economic blows, alienation of allies, and general ineptitude and politicization catalogued here only scratches the surface. It does not address the attacks by Trump and Musk on the domestic foundations of American power, from eviscerating federal science and technology funding as well as support for higher education to illegally dismantling the U.S. Agency for International Development and other institutions to punitive immigration policies (including disappearances) and the general breakdown of the rule of law in the United States.

Indeed, it's hard to imagine what an adversary intent on actively harming American national security would do differently than this president and his administration have done during their first hundred days in office — and there are still 1,360 days of this presidency yet to go.

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