

Thoughts on Coming Apart and the Coming Great Reset



Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer

Kit Webster

Themes and Theses

Why I'm Contemplating Out Loud

(Initially formulated in the early 90s, following decades of reading history, philosophy, religion, psychology and a lot of contemplation, particularly on the subject of cycles. In the end, this is a relatively straightforward story about human nature and of history rhyming.)

The US will enter a period of crisis in the early 2000s. In the late 90s, I incorporated Strauss' and Howe's terminology of the Fourth Turning (without incorporating their generations paradigm) and agreed with Howe that the end stage of the crisis began with the Great Financial Crisis and would last into the early 2030s. We are now at the beginning of the end stage of the crisis.

The crisis will be serious and could be existential.

Internal strife will increase, up to and including secession and civil war.

International conflicts will increase as the vacuum created by the weakening of the US is filled by other players.

There will be many threads to the crisis, but the primary thread will be debt, deficits and entitlements. Other factors include, eg, demographics, a loss of meaning and myth and a loss of self-discipline.

Politics will move leftward as citizens look for some refuge from the chaos. The US will become increasingly susceptible to a (man) on a white horse, who can come from either the left or the right.

Inflation, as the most likely way to address debt since austerity is not politically acceptable, will significantly lower standards of living, exacerbating the civil crises.

Eventually, the dollar will be inflated away and lose its reserve status.

Once the old rot is cleared out, and assuming continuity, there will be the basis for the establishment of a new order.

There will be what Strauss and Howe calls a First Turning . It will be constructed out of the physical infrastructure, wealth, energy sources, thoughts and values in the culture at the time. At this point in time, those components are unknowable. We can anticipate that the next future will be increasingly chaotic. We can anticipate that there will be destruction, and then reconstruction from some level. We cannot yet anticipate the form of the reconstruction or the level from which it will begin.

(Added in the early 00s) While humans are contributing to global warming, policies implemented to address manmade global warming will create a significant energy crisis, probably toward the end of the Fourth Turning.

(Added around 2020) The loss of faith by our youth in our founding principles means that the new order will at least partially be based on new principles. As yet, I have no visibility as to what those principles might be.

(Added in 2023) The lowering / elimination of standards in education, the judiciary, law enforcement, the military and other segments of our society will create a population unable to adequately comprehend, do or respond to the challenges of democracy and culture.

(Added in 2025) China has won - at least for the next 5-10 years. The US is dependent on China for the materials it uses to create defense items. We literally cannot fight China without China's help. China's industrial base is impressive; the US has to rebuild. China is out-innovating the US. China is turning out more engineers and scientists than the US by far. This does not mean that China does not face challenges - demographics perhaps being its primary challenge. The US military remains stronger than China's, but in an age of drone warfare, that statement means less than it has historically. The US still has bargaining chips and will need to use them to maintain any kind of status quo.

(Added in 2025) AI has the potential to profoundly affect human culture. However, AI faces several significant hurdles, including the demand for massive amounts of electricity, which may not be available, and a cultural revolt against its existence. Since it could be existential, and since China is pursuing it, the US has no alternative, at least in the short term.

What's Mine Is Mine and What's Yours Is Negotiable

January 23, 2026

Quotes to Contemplate

What is emerging is not simply illiberalism imposed from above, nor a relapse into overt authoritarianism. Rather, it is a gradual reorientation of democratic politics away from restraint and toward consumption—of capital, of institutional credibility, and of social trust. - Tony Deden

**I kind of think of ads as like a last resort for us as a business model. -
Sam Altman, October 2024**

**The only thing that saves us from the bureaucracy is its inefficiency. –
Eugene McCarthy**

It's incredibly easy to dismiss everything that wasn't up to our modern moral standards, but if we do that, we lose the ability to understand progress. - Johan Norberg

Summary of Primary Thoughts To Contemplate In This Issue

Humans demand fairness from a world that is relentlessly neutral. We will inevitably and unavoidably attempt to dictate the ways in which scarce resources can be allocated to achieve a myriad of definitions of fairness, while not learning from history. It's in our nature.

The whole Greenland adventure is bonkers. Can you say, Pyrrhic victory?

Gold is behaving as if the financial end game has begun.

The United States has become a low-trust society.

The partisan gap between young men and young women has doubled in recent years.

It seems that Trump is becoming increasingly unhinged.

What's Mine Is Mine And What's Yours Is Negotiable

I opened a can of worms last week talking about illegal immigration. A key, underlying issue is the distribution of income and wealth and I deferred that discussion for another day. Whether it is global, country-wide or local, there is a non-stop negotiation for how much the government gets to run itself, to pay for defense and for redistribution. Perceived "fairness" plays a significant role in these negotiations. As usual, this will be a high-level simplification, but the subject is one of the most fundamental disagreements humans have.

Spoiler alert - also as usual, there is no right answer.

Negotiations will continue.

Most societies, historically, and many today, just assume that everything belongs to the state, or the king. The state decides how much it gets of your production and you get to keep the rest. The trick for the state or king was/is to get the most it can and to use state power to prevent an uprising. This approach applies to communism and to socialism, even though differing ideologies apply.

Rule by democracy, using the US as an example, under capitalism, assumes that people own the means of production, but since the perceived needs, particularly the defense and social needs, of the state are essentially unlimited, the negotiations over how much the state gets continue unabated. As Jean-Baptiste Colbert put it, "The art of taxation consists in so plucking the goose as to obtain the largest possible amount of feathers with the smallest possible amount of hissing."

According to the IMF, Kiribati, a Pacific island, is the taxation champ, with the government spending 98.1% of GDP. Here are some other notable amounts (2024):

Finland	57.7
France	57.2
Germany	49.4
Sweden	49.3
Canada	44.7
UK	44.0
Japan	39.1
US	37.9
Russia	36.7
China	33.0
India	28.9
Haiti	5.3

In general, it appears that you can take around 50% of Westerners' production for governmental purposes with an acceptable amount of hissing.

The US in recent years has become so politically averse to goose-hissing that it has turned to raising money through debt and deficits as opposed to taxation.

For the first part of US history, federal taxation was about 7% of GDP, and then, in 1913, the income tax was introduced, and the rest is history. But, what I want to focus on is not so much taxation as the inequality of wealth and income, which is often addressed by taxation. In one sense, the ability to tax and regulate is the ability to achieve / impose equality. The question immediately arises as to why wealth and income inequality are "bad" in the first place. Why is this a problem that needs to be addressed?

I think there are two, principal reasons.

1. Political pressure - "fairness." Intellectually, there is no problem with inequality. Life's not fair; talents are unevenly distributed. Inequality is the natural order of things. However, people dislike it, particularly when the higher status is "unearned," and therefore, it is a problem.

2. Distortion of decision-making through the influence of wealth. At its extreme, concentrated wealth inevitably leads to the corruption of institutions, including governmental institutions.

Let's first think about fairness.

It is a simple proposition that if I earn some money, it is mine, after I have paid reasonable taxes. "Reasonable taxes" under these assumptions are taxes for services that government classically provides - roads, safety, sewer, etc. - goods and services that are commonly used by all.

But, there are those who are losers in the games of capitalism and of life - the ill, the mentally ill, the disabled. There are services, such as medical treatment, that "should" be available to all in a wealthy society. As technology progresses, those without technical skills become disadvantaged. As AI takes jobs, more and more people - healthy, "normal" people - will become disadvantaged. The winners of the games of capitalism and of life should contribute to the care of the less fortunate, be it a schizophrenic or a minimum wage earner that needs medical treatment.

In effect, the argument goes, you should forcibly, through taxation, be made to give some of your money to other people. It's only fair.

Since demand for social and medical services is, for all practical purposes, infinite, the negotiations are continual and intense.

And, the definition of "fair" is also variable. Is it fair for food stamp recipients to use food stamps for, say, liquor? Candy? Pepsi? Is it fair that welfare has become so pronounced that it is disadvantageous for many low earners to even look for a job? Should they be required to look for a job, if they can, as a condition of receiving welfare? Is it fair for illegal aliens to receive welfare? Is it fair for them not to? Is it fair to pay for "gender affirming care" and not for other types of treatment? Is it fair to forgive student loans and not other forms of debt?

As I said. Never ending.

Then we get to middle-class issues like child day care and the discussion literally gets out of hand in the sense that costs mount up astronomically.

Economics is, at heart, the distribution of scarce (limited) resources.

That is what we are discussing here. There is not enough to go around,

so how should it be allocated? What services are fair and how much should you be forced to pay for other people to get those services? Since we cannot effectively address the first issue, let's go to the second, which is significant, and which most people don't think about. Wealth is power.

In general, wealth begets wealth. If you have capital to invest, you can get a return on that capital and increase your wealth. After all, that is one of the foundations of capitalism.

Inevitably, in the absence of some form of redistribution, wealth will become increasingly concentrated.

You can use your money for many things, but one thing you can, and many will, do is to game the system in their favor.

AI weighs in - "Wealth converts into political influence through multiple channels: campaign contributions, lobbying expenditures, funding think tanks and policy research, ownership of media outlets, and the revolving door between industry and government. The question isn't whether this happens—it plainly does—but whether it distorts democratic outcomes in ways that matter.

Research by Martin Gilens and others suggests that in the United States, policy outcomes correlate strongly with the preferences of affluent citizens and organized interest groups, while the preferences of median-income voters have little independent effect on what actually passes. This is contested methodologically, but the pattern is striking. Similar dynamics appear in other Western democracies, though often less pronounced due to different campaign finance regimes and stronger party systems.

There's a distinction between wealthy individuals actively capturing the political process versus politicians simply being drawn disproportionately from affluent backgrounds and thus naturally sharing those perspectives. Both produce similar outcomes but suggest different remedies. A legislature composed entirely of millionaires may sincerely believe their policy preferences serve everyone—that's not corruption in the traditional sense, but it's still a representation problem.

The feedback loop concern. The most troubling dynamic is self-reinforcement. If wealth buys political influence, and political influence shapes tax policy, regulatory enforcement, and market rules, then initial inequality can entrench itself. Those who benefit from current arrangements have both the means and incentive to preserve them. This isn't conspiracy—it's just rational behavior by political actors responding to incentives."

(Kit) Then, it gets really heavy.

Philosophy, among other things, considers morals, ethics and the best form of government (spoiler alert, democracy generally doesn't do too well because of its tendency - certainty? - of giving themselves goodies and being ruled by the mob). Topics for another time, except for John Rawls, who put together principles for the right society that look a lot like those in Western countries, at least in theory.

Again, a topic for another time, except for his concept of a "veil of ignorance." The veil of ignorance is a thought experiment where people designing the best society's rules don't know their own future status (rich/poor, race, gender, talents, etc.), forcing impartial, fair choices for the most vulnerable, leading to principles like equal basic liberties and benefiting the least advantaged. It removes bias, ensuring principles benefit everyone, not just a favored group, by making decision-makers consider all positions equally.

I think of it this way. Everyone who is yet to be born is in a group of (souls). Each will randomly be born into a particular place and status. Of course, England is much, much preferred over Haiti, but the selection is random. Given that randomness, what characteristics would those souls specify for the best society? If you were one of those souls, what rules would you want, not knowing where you are going to end up?

Most Americans think they hit a home run when they were actually born on third base.

Being born in the US in the middle class is winning the lottery of life. The way to begin life on third base is to choose your parents very carefully.

But, there is also, deep down, the awkward reality (sorry Thomas Jefferson) that all men are not created equal. There is an unequal distribution of genes and of social conditions (and of luck). The only equality that can be provided is equality of opportunity.

Or, if you are of a liberal political persuasion - those historically prioritizing and emphasizing fairness - you force the genetically and socially privileged to do with less. This is not only through taxation, but through regulation. This might best be seen in education today which is generally dismantling gifted programs and dumbing standards to a low level, achievable by the least fortunate in terms of genes and family support.

Socialism in education, if not in the economy as a whole.

But, all of this discussion boils down to, what are your objectives? What do you think society should look like? How are you going to handle the trade-offs? Do you want prosperity for most or equality at a lower level for all? You are one of Rawls' souls - what society would you dictate? The classic tradeoff between capitalism and socialism is that the majority of people will be significantly materially better off under capitalism. Socialism is inherently fairer, in the sense of being more equal, before greed and power sneak in, anyway, but it doesn't create wealth very well.

If you take the US as your sample, there is significant inequality. If you take the world as your sample, poverty in the US is heaven compared to what the majority is living through.

So we try very hard to become half pregnant - to create a system based on capitalism that fixes some of capitalism's problems. Kinda what Europe has today. Kinda like Rawls' best society.

After the Russian revolution, things were going so poorly for the economy that Lenin introduced his "New Economic Policy," to allow restricted capitalism to jumpstart the economy.

Deng Xiaoping did the same thing in China after Mao, setting up "capitalism with Chinese characteristics."

Everybody hates inequality and loves stuff. The two are not mutually exclusive, but they are correlated.

Perhaps the starkest example is North and South Korea.

They were one country until after the Korean War, which ended in 1953. Same gene pool; same history and traditions. One modified communist dictatorship; the other, modified democratic capitalist.

This picture of the Korean peninsula at night, showing the darkness of the North contrasted with the bright lights of the South, provides the dramatic contrast. (In the picture, China is in the north; the lighted area in the middle is South Korea, and the almost-totally-dark space between China and South Korea is North Korea. South Korea's GDP per person is around \$38,000; North Korea's, just above \$1,000.)



For me, it is a fascinating insight into human behavior that no matter how many North Koreas or Venezuelas or Soviet Unions there are, people are sure that next time, they will get it right. As Alexander Pope put it, "Hope springs eternal in the human breast: Man never is, but always To be blest ..."

My informal survey of utopias (the word ironically means, nowhere) throughout history is that, even under the best of circumstances - gentle people, close to nature, sharing everything - utopias do not survive for long.

So, the answer today, at least in the West, is to start with capitalism and redistribute wealth just enough so that you just maim the golden goose but do not kill it. And leave a lot of wealth un-created, but create some measure of equality.

The solutions to these problems in our world today consist of a lot of kings and dictators and strong men, and mixed economies that want to be half pregnant. How much pregnant is simplistically reflected by governments' claims on GDP. You can go from the relatively freewheeling, innovative, unequal (these things are correlated) US, to the complacent, regulated (these things are also correlated) France. All have strengths and weaknesses. Your prioritization of strengths and weaknesses reflects your genetics and upbringing.

We say, life's not fair. Actually, nature is relentlessly neutral - fairness is not even a thing. Life's only purpose is reproduction. Everything from resources to time is limited. Humans demand fairness from a world in which that term basically has no meaning. There is nothing fair. It is a human construct layered on top of a neutral nature in which resources are limited. One of my most profound insights came from understanding the Buddha's dictum, "It is." But we will inevitably and unavoidably attempt to dictate the ways in which scarce resources can be allocated to achieve a myriad of definitions of fairness, while not learning from history. It's in our nature.

And there we are.

Greenland

I have included several tidbits about Greenland in my Revolution section, below. The whole process was bizarre and destructive. Trump upset a lot of people and then ended on a positive note - typical Trump behavior, but more extreme and more consequential. The New York Times summarized it this way.

Taking Davos

Could the United States end up in possession of Greenland? After Trump gave a combative speech yesterday in Davos, Switzerland — at a forum that’s meant to foster global collaboration — it certainly seemed possible.

Trump told the audience of world leaders, billionaires and other elites that he would not send troops to seize Greenland from Denmark — but said he would take it all the same, threatening anyone who stood in his way. “You can say yes and we will be very appreciative,” Trump said, “or you can say no and we will remember.”

The threats — punishing tariffs chief among them — had an almost immediate effect. Just hours after the speech, Trump met with Mark Rutte, the leader of NATO, and afterward said they had devised a “framework of a future deal with respect to Greenland and, in fact, the entire Arctic Region.”

Now he needn’t impose tariffs on allies who refused to heed to his demands for control of Greenland, he said.

The announcement followed a NATO meeting yesterday in which top military officers from the alliance’s member states discussed a compromise in which Denmark would give the United States sovereignty over small pockets of Greenlandic land, The Times reported. The United States could build military bases on them. (Britain has a similar arrangement with its bases in Cyprus.)

Is that the framework of the deal Trump announced? NATO said in a statement that “negotiations between Denmark, Greenland and the United States will go forward aimed at ensuring that Russia and China never gain a foothold — economically or militarily — in Greenland.”

A CNN reporter asked Trump if the deal he was pursuing would result in U.S. ownership of Greenland. Trump hesitated before replying. “It’s a long-term deal. It’s the ultimate long-term deal,” he said. How long? “Infinite. There is no time limit. It’s a deal that’s forever.”

The reviews

Trump has said that the United States needs Greenland for its natural resources, for its national security and to contain Russia’s and China’s

global ambitions. In an interview with *The Times*, he also cited a “psychological” need to possess the island. Yesterday, though, he focused on national security.

Europeans in general have been unmoved by those desires. Reactions to Trump’s speech yesterday seemed to depend on nationality and profession, wrote Zolan Kanno-Youngs, a White House correspondent who reported from Davos:

European leaders sat stunned as Mr. Trump insulted their governments and questioned their reliability as allies. Others grimaced as Mr. Trump claimed the European nations and Canada owed the United States a debt. Some even scrambled after the speech to find and question current and former U.S. officials about the president’s thinking and the future of the United States as a trustworthy partner.

As my colleague Evan Gorelick said, “It’s a confusing time to be a European leader.” The head of the Danish Parliament’s defense committee reflected that view. “I’m glad he’s ruling out military force,” he said. “He insists he wants Greenland, but that’s not new. Of course, we still insist that we are not handing over Greenland.”

But corporate executives in the audience had a very different reaction, Zolan found. At a reception after the speech for financial titans who in past years have been at the center of the conversation in Davos, Trump received a warm welcome.

“We got great reviews,” Trump told them. “I can’t believe it, but we got good reviews of that speech. Usually they say he’s a horrible dictator-type person, but sometimes you need a dictator.”

The *Morning Dispatch* carried an outline of the proposed Greenland agreement: “More details have emerged of the framework for a Greenland deal, which Trump claimed he had reached with NATO after a meeting with its secretary-general, Mark Rutte. The deal **reportedly** would see parts of Greenland designated as “sovereign base areas”—a model borrowed from Britain’s arrangement with Cyprus, where U.K. military bases are considered British territory. This condition would allow the U.S. to conduct military and intelligence

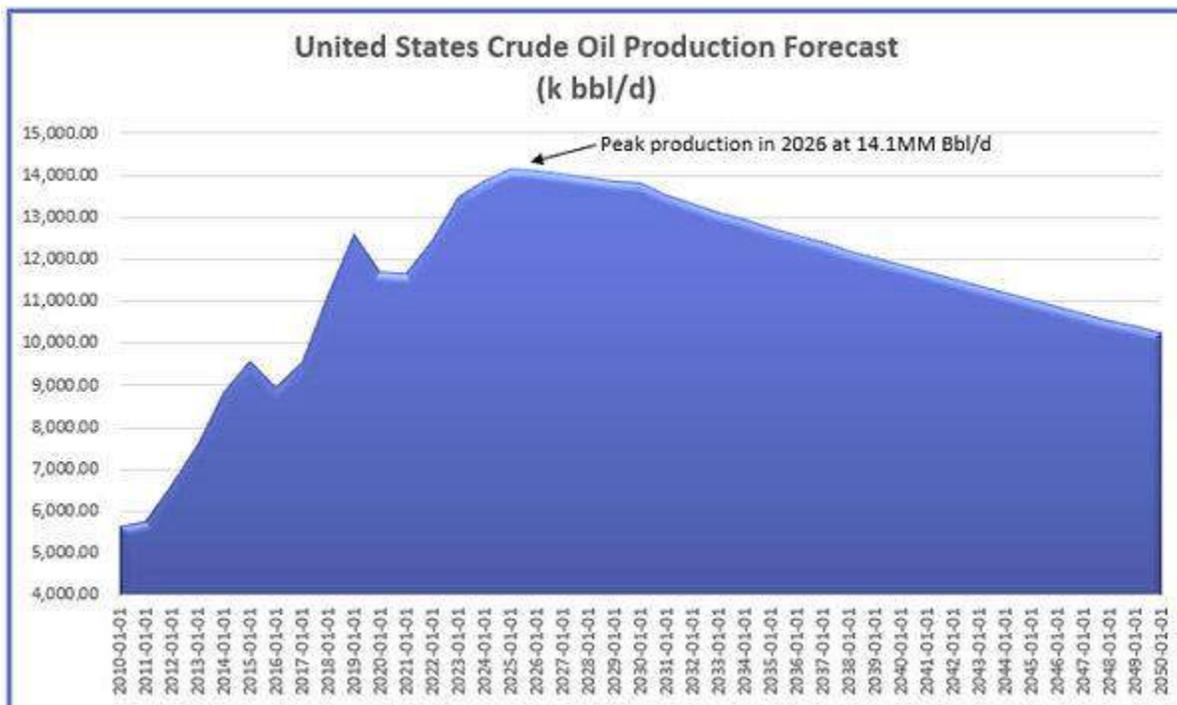
operations, station missiles—including parts of Trump’s proposed “Golden Dome” missile defense system—and possibly develop in these areas without seeking Danish permits. Bloomberg reports the framework also includes mining rights explicitly aimed at keeping Chinese interests out, a refreshed version of a 1951 defense agreement, and a bolstered NATO presence in the Arctic. "

Markets

Updated charts

> Gold is behaving as if the financial end game has begun.

> Things are going to start getting ugly



Source: Energy Aspects

So, You Say You Want A Revolution?

> "The United States has become a low trust society – and that changes everything – Kyle Saunders, 12/28/25 The United States Has Become a Low-Trust Society — and That Changes Everything In high-trust societies, policy debates are primarily about effects: Will this work? Who benefits? What are the tradeoffs? In low-trust societies, debates shift toward motives: What are they really trying to do? Who is this meant to punish? What comes next? In high-trust environments, institutional breakdowns are treated as problems to be fixed. In low-trust environments, they are treated as proof that the system is fundamentally corrupt. The same event produces radically different reactions depending on the baseline level of legitimacy. This is why fraud scandals, administrative failures, or enforcement lapses now carry outsized symbolic weight. They are no longer isolated incidents; they become narrative accelerants."

> Check the bottom of this post for The Morning Dispatch's discussion of the Board of Peace. There are wheels-within-wheels here.

> Trump announced Saturday that he will implement a 10 percent tariff on Denmark and its European allies starting next month, ratcheting up the pressure in his bid to acquire Greenland. (He later backed off.)

> US formally withdrew from World Health Organization.

> Trump signs executive order to bring back mental institutions.

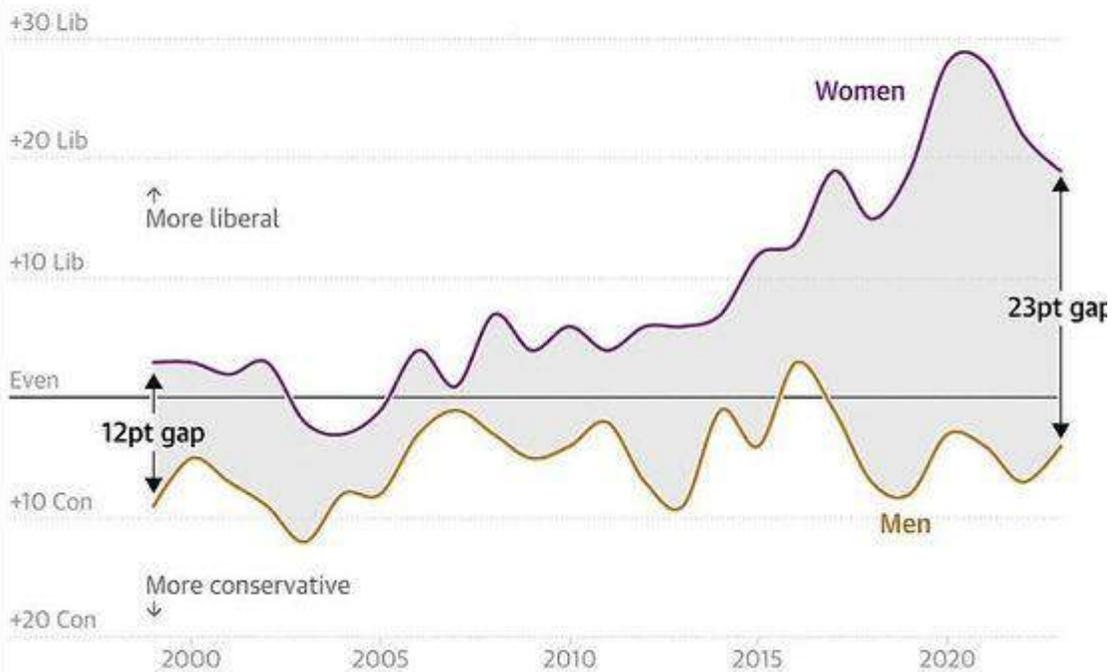
> Reader CH says there is a video of a guy training crows to attack red (MAGA) hats.

> There are other red hats - this one from Greenland (also from CH).



The partisan gap between young men and women almost doubled in the past 25 years

Political ideology of US 18 to 29 year olds, by gender



Guardian graphic. Source: Gallup Poll Social Series data from 1999 to 2023. Note: The net ideology is calculated by subtracting the percent conservative from the percent liberal.

> Damn, it's hard to keep up - New York Times headline - None of Mamdani's Deputy Mayors Are Black. It Has Become a Problem.

> The House Oversight Committee voted to hold Bill and Hillary Clinton in contempt of Congress for refusing to testify at a House hearing regarding Jeffrey Epstein.

> Native Americans don't see a problem with being represented as mascots - "The Native American Guardian's Association, "[a] Native American-backed advocacy group fighting for representation in schools," has announced that it is prepared to take its fight against "the New York Board of Regents' 2023 rule banning the use of Native names or imagery by public schools" all the way to the Supreme Court, according to Fox News. The group contends that the rule "is discriminatory and violates the 14th Amendment's guarantee of equal treatment under the law.""

This is a rerun of the Latinx issue, where most Hispanics don't care for the term, but white, woke people are offended by the gendered nature of Spanish. Most Native Americans are not upset by their images being used as mascots, but white, woke are offended.

There is a trend, here.

> Reaching its logical conclusion - Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem has said US citizens should be prepared to show proof of citizenship.

> Trump has earned more than \$1.4 billion during his time in the White House according to the New York Times.

> White House trade envoy Jamieson Greer said that, if the Supreme Court were to strike down the president's tariffs, the administration would "start the next day" on reinstating tariffs through different legal authorities.

> From X - "It's also important to note: even if SCOTUS curtails Trump's "emergency" tariff powers this week, there are several other laws that would remain at Trump's disposal - and they're almost as unbounded. Congress MUST act, or this stuff WILL continue."

> I'm not sure what to make of this, but first impressions are that it is a sign of delusion and increasing mental illness. Text of a letter from Trump to the Prime Minister of Norway:

“Dear Jonas: Considering your Country decided not to give me the Nobel Peace Prize for having stopped 8 Wars PLUS, I no longer feel an obligation to think purely of Peace, although it will always be predominant, but can now think about what is good and proper for the United States of America. Denmark cannot protect that land from Russia or China, and why do they have a “right of ownership” anyway? There are no written documents, it’s only that a boat landed there hundreds of years ago, but we had boats landing there, also. I have done more for NATO than any other person since its founding, and now, NATO should do something for the United States. The World is not secure unless we have Complete and Total Control of Greenland. Thank you! President DJT.”

> Then there's this - "completely out of control" seems to be a reasonable description - Trump threatened to impose 200% tariffs on French wines and Champagne following France's intention to decline the invitation to join his 'Board of Peace'.

> I am against all of this Trump-Greenland stuff, but Newsome is way out of line - Newsom issued a strong message to global leaders on Tuesday, urging them to take a stand against President Donald Trump.

> Unintended consequences, or FAFO - The US Is Basically Not A Good Credit": Danish Pension Fund To Sell US Treasuries.

> CBS Poll: 86% of Americans Oppose Military Force to Take Greenland; 70% Oppose Using Federal Funds to Buy It.

> Wall Street Journal headline - Greenland Is Trump's Great White Whale.

> In Davos, Trump toned down his Greenland rhetoric. It remains to be seen how much damage is permanent and how much is temporary.

> Canada's prime minister: the US-led global order is over, and America's closest allies can no longer trust the United States.

> Whiplash - Trump announces a "framework of a future deal with respect to Greenland and, in fact, the entire Arctic Region" has been struck with NATO.

> A higher percentage of children live in single-parent homes in America than in any other country in the world.

> For better and for worse, there will be probably be complete chaos when the Democrats come into power. Virginia just switched from Republican to Democrat governor and the following bills have already been proposed. I rarely discuss proposed bills because there is always extreme stuff and most of it doesn't go anywhere. Again, for better and for worse, DEI, the environment, woke and retribution will come roaring back. Immigration will be an interesting point of contention.

But in this case, it provides a glimmer of our future:

Here are just a few of the bills they've introduced

- New 4.3% sales tax on Uber Eats, Amazon, etc deliveries.**
- New sales tax on admissions to a wide variety of businesses.**
- Create two new higher tax brackets of 8% and 10% on people making over \$600K.**
- A new 10% tax bracket for anyone making over \$1M.**
- 3.8% investment tax on top of state income taxes.**

- Raise the hotel tax.
- New personal property tax on landscaping equipment.
- Ban gas powered leaf blowers.
- Guarantee illegal aliens free education.
- Make it illegal to approach somebody at an abortion clinic.
- Extend the time absentee ballots can be received after election day to three days
- Allow people to cast their votes electronically through the internet.
- Expand ranked-choice voting.
- Extend the deadline for ballot curing to one week after election day.
- Redact the addresses of political candidates from FOIAs.
- Add Virginia to the National Popular Vote Compact for presidential electors.
- Make it illegal to hand count ballots.
- \$500 sales tax on firearm suppressors .
- 'Assault weapons' and large capacity magazine ban.
- 11% sales tax on all firearms and ammunition.
- Prohibit outdoor shooting of a firearm on land less than 5 acres.
- Lower the criminal penalties for robbery.
- Ban the arrest of illegal aliens in courthouses.
- Remove mandatory minimum sentences.
- Allow localities to install speed cameras.
- Replace Columbus Day with 'Indigenous Peoples Day.'

Short Takes

> Duh - Germany's Chancellor Merz says it was a 'serious strategic mistake to phase out nuclear energy'.

> I have no idea where to go with this, but Mamdani is installing bidets.

> China is set to commission as many as 85 coal-fired power generating units this year, out of a total global of 104 coal projects slated for start-

up in 2026, according to data by non-profit Global Energy Monitor (GEM) cited by the Financial Times..... Of all the 63 gigawatts (GW) of coal-fired power generation expected to begin commercial operations globally this year, 55 GW will be in China, the GEM data showed...

> Weight loss drugs like Ozempic on track to save U.S. airlines more than half a billion dollars in fuel costs this year.

> From Nature - "Researchers have attempted to put a number on the concept of 'toxic masculinity' — the idea that some stereotypically 'masculine' traits, such as dominance and aggression, can have damaging social impacts. Researchers defined eight indicators of toxic masculinity and applied them to the results of a large survey in New Zealand. Of more than 15,000 participants that identified as heterosexual males, the smallest group, at just 3.2%, held 'hostile toxic' views, such as that women seek to gain control over men and that "inferior groups should stay in their place". The group was made up mainly of marginalized, disadvantaged men."

> From Jesús Fernández-Villaverde on X - "... China's government announced on Monday ... that births in 2025 fell to 7.92 million, a staggering 1.62 million fewer than in 2024, and that the total fertility rate has dropped to 0.93. ... To put this into perspective: if China could somehow sustain 7.92 million births per year from now on, its population would eventually stabilize at roughly 625 million, far below today's 1.405 billion. In reality, as smaller cohorts reach childbearing age, births will fall well below 7.92 million. Hence, 625 million is a very generous upper bound, even under implausibly optimistic assumptions about life expectancy. Put differently, there were fewer births in China in 2025 than in 1776, the year the United States declared independence. I am still trying to process these numbers. This is the defining issue of our time."

> In spite of China's demographic decline, they will be making most of it up in robotics and AI.

> Fact check, true - from X - "College is sports, bolted onto a hedge fund. The rest is for show."

> Appellate court rules Trudeau had no justification to freeze truckers' bank accounts.

> It has long been clear that both Chicago and Illinois are incompetently run, but I just ran across a statistic that boggles my mind - around 80% or more of Chicago's property tax revenue, especially recent increases, goes directly to funding its four struggling pension funds for police, fire, and municipal workers, leaving little for other city services. This situation has led to doubled property taxes over the past decade, with all new tax dollars primarily covering pension debt.

> Works for me - More than 200,000 people in Denmark signed an online petition last year to buy California from the United States.

> The effects of AI will come from more than taking jobs - 72% of US teenagers have used AI for companionship, according to a study from the nonprofit Common Sense Media.

> Anthropic just released their January Economic Index, for which they tracked over 1 million conversations to understand how people are using Claude.

One key insight: AI is systematically taking your highest-skill work and leaving you with the grunt work.

Travel agents lose itinerary planning (high skill), keep payment processing (grunt work). Teachers lose grading and research (high skill), keep attendance (grunt work).

> This seems right - "As I do a deep dive into the science on child anxiety, I'm becoming more and more convinced that allowing MUCH more risky play is the single most important step a parent can take to inoculate their child from debilitating current OR future anxiety." Dr. Camilo Ortez on X

Has Anybody Seen The Epstein Files?

Gallery

Nothing this week.

reconstruction, showing slides of gleaming skyscrapers along the Mediterranean coast and luxury waterfront developments under the caption “New Gaza.”

In October, Israel and Hamas **agreed** to a 20-point Gaza peace plan. Phase one wasn’t seamless— Hamas has yet to return the body of Israeli police officer Ran Gvili, and occasional firefights and air strikes interrupted the ceasefire—but last week, White House special envoy Steve Witkoff **announced** the plan had entered phase two: Hamas’ demilitarization, the beginning of Gaza’s reconstruction, and a transition to technocratic governance overseen by a new U.S.-led “Board of Peace.” Trump has **said** the board “will set the framework and handle the funding for the redevelopment of Gaza” until the Palestinian Authority completes designated reform initiatives, “and can securely and effectively take back control of Gaza.”

But, as he signed the panel’s founding charter at Davos on Thursday, it was clear that the president had aspirations for his new board that extended far beyond the Strip. The charter doesn’t actually mention Gaza once, and Trump **remarked**, “Once this board is completely formed, we can do pretty much whatever we want to do.”

But what actually is the Board of Peace? And what does it mean for Gaza, and the future of the United Nations?

The board originated in the Gaza peace plan, and in November, 13 of the 15 nations on the U.N. Security Council **voted** to **approve** it as a “transitional administration” in Gaza through 2027. It was only after this vote that the board’s charter was released, which provided more details about the structure. Trump will **serve** as the organization’s inaugural chairman,”—but his term has no set end date, and the chairman designates his own successor, holds complete veto power, and casts tie-breaking votes.

The board has two tiers: an executive board of global

leaders, **including** Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Kushner, former U.K. Prime Minister Tony Blair, and World Bank President Ajay Banga; and a Gaza executive board **featuring** U.S. officials, along with Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan, Qatari diplomat Ali Al-Thawadi, Egyptian intelligence chief Maj. Gen. Hassan Rashad, and others.

To become a permanent member nation, countries need to pay a \$1 billion contribution within the first year; otherwise, their country will serve a three-year term. The White House **claims** that roughly 50 countries were invited and that 35 or so have accepted—but neither list is public, and it has been changing. Canada’s Mark Carney was invited, and said he had accepted “in principle,” only for Trump to **rescind** the invitation on Truth Social Thursday night. Denmark—steward of Greenland—seemingly was not invited, and many European nations, including Germany, have yet to respond to their invites. There are also legal complications: The Italian government **said** it’s not sure it can join, because the board, as it’s currently formulated, appears to be incompatible with the Italian constitution.

Brett Schaefer, a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute who focuses on multilateral treaties, peacekeeping, and the U.N. and international organizations, explained that Trump aspires for the board to serve as a global peacemaking mechanism. “The president has touted that he solved eight wars in different conflicts,” he told TMD. And, while Schaefer noted that some of those conflicts have reignited, he said, “I think the president sees this as a more flexible tool to address those situations than the United Nations, which he has dismissed as not helping him resolve those conflicts in the past.”

Khaled Elgindy, a senior research fellow at the Quincy Institute’s Middle East program, explained that the Trump administration initially led the U.N. Security Council members to believe that the board’s influence would be limited to Gaza. “There’s a kind of bait and switch that happened,” he told TMD. “The Board of Peace was sold to the

international community—to the Arab states, to the Europeans—as this entity that is going to oversee Gaza’s transition, and then, lo and behold, it really doesn’t have anything to do with Gaza, except Gaza is the launching pad.”

This has been a core contention of the countries that haven’t joined. The French government announced publicly declined its invitation to the Board of Peace on Monday, with President Emmanuel Macron’s office **citing** “serious questions” raised by the founding charter, including concerns that the panel’s peacekeeping actions may extend beyond Gaza and conflict with the United Nations’ authority.

France had voted to approve the Board of Peace in November, but as Ian Johnstone—a law professor at Tufts University who specializes in international organizations—told TMD, “You have to sort of separate the original vision of a sort of transitional governance arrangement for Gaza from the sort of broader international organization. Nobody, until these [invitation] letters went out, ever imagined that this would become a new international organization.”

John Bolton—who served as national security adviser in Trump’s first term and U.S. ambassador to the U.N. under George W. Bush—told TMD that France likely views the board “as a direct threat to the [U.N.] Security Council,” on which France holds one of five permanent seats. The French government likely doesn’t “want to see anything that undercuts” the influence or veto power that comes with the seat, Bolton explained.

Trump **responded** to France’s rejection by threatening a new 200 percent tariff on wine and champagne imports and claiming the French leader will be “out of office in a few months.”

The pivot away from a narrowly Gaza-focused body has drawn a wider range of countries, many with little stake in Palestinian affairs. The office

of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu initially **criticized** the White House's picks, stating the board's composition was "not coordinated with Israel" and "contrary to its policy"— though it would go on to **announce** on Wednesday that Netanyahu had accepted the invitation to join the board.

"Even though Israel has joined this Board of Peace, it's very unhappy about Qatar and Turkey being on the executive committee, and it's not at all of the view that Hamas is ready to do this next necessary step," Bolton said. "So, I think on Gaza itself, this [board] remains purely aspirational at this point."

Bolton also emphasized that any progress in Gaza would require Hamas to follow through with the phase two agreement and voluntarily demilitarize. Axios **reported** last week that the Trump administration believes demilitarization is on the horizon, with one U.S. official telling the outlet that "Hamas is indicating that it will happen." However, earlier this month, the Wall Street Journal, **citing** Arab and Israeli officials, reported that Hamas had been restructuring its command leadership, reconstructing its underground tunnel network, and collecting funds with which to pay fighters. Bolton said, "The board can issue all kinds of pronouncements, but if conditions on the ground don't change, it won't make any difference."

The other issue with the "Board of Peace" has been the potential inclusion of Russian leader Vladimir Putin. Ukraine has been invited, but hasn't said whether it will join. Yesterday, British Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper **said** the U.K. won't be joining the board—at least for the time being—**citing** "concerns about President Putin being part of something which is talking about peace, when we have still not seen any signs from Putin that there will be a commitment to peace in Ukraine." Trump said on Wednesday that Putin had accepted his invitation to join the Board of Peace, but the Russian president later clarified that he had not yet decided and was still considering the offer.

Speaking to reporters on Wednesday, Trump **acknowledged** that some “controversial people” would be on the board, but he emphasized that he wanted a team that could “get the job done,” including world leaders with significant “control and power.” “If I put all babies on the board, there wouldn’t be very much,” Trump said. “So [Putin] was invited.” Putin’s close ally, Belarusian dictator President Alexander Lukashenko, also received and accepted a proposal to join. The White House also **invited** Chinese leader Xi Jinping, and while he has yet to provide an official response, a Chinese Foreign Ministry official **said** on Wednesday that China “will stay firmly committed to safeguarding the international system with the U.N. at its core.”

Though these nations could have some involvement in rebuilding Gaza, their membership seems more connected to the board’s broader, international aims.

“The Russians have never been stakeholders [in Gaza], they’ve never been involved,” Ghaith al-Omari, a senior fellow in the Washington Institute’s Irwin Levy Family Program on the U.S.-Israel Strategic Relationship who served in various senior positions within the Palestinian Authority, told TMD. “They don’t have the resources to contribute.” However, al-Omari noted that Putin and Xi “perceive this as an opportunity to basically bargain with Trump away from the constraints of the U.N. and other traditional bodies.”

Ian Hurd—a political science professor at Northwestern University, where he directs the school’s international studies program—told TMD that he doesn’t expect the board to gain international legitimacy, predicting, “Don’t expect people to be talking about it much three months from now.”

While organizations like the United Nations and World Economic Forum receive criticism as being ineffectual bureaucracies, they have a record

of being places where leaders can meet to discuss and address ongoing problems. Hurd argued that the Board of Peace doesn't have that, and that foreign leaders view "it as a vanity project of Donald Trump, and his brand carries very little trust or legitimacy around the world these days."

They "may see it instrumentally as a vehicle for currying favor with Donald Trump, and that, I think, is explains why it's getting the attention that it's getting, but I don't think it will last."