



POLITICS

Trump's 3rd week saw more executive orders, a trade war that wasn't and a Mideast jolt



1 of 4 | President Donald Trump greets Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as he arrives at the West Wing of the White House, Tuesday, Feb. 4, 2025, in Washington. (AP Photo/Alex Brandon)

BY [WILL WEISSERT](#) AND [JOSH BOAK](#)

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WASHINGTON (AP) — Three weeks in, President [Donald Trump](#) keeps cranking out executive orders designed to remake the government while billionaire [Elon Musk](#) hunts for more ways to upend the federal workforce.

Trump also provoked — [then called off](#) — trade wars with Canada and Mexico but allowed [one with China](#) to move forward. He seemingly made light of potentially thorny political issues while insisting he was serious about the United States [seizing Gaza, emptying out its residents and redeveloping](#) the

area into "the Riviera of the Middle East." It was an idea that friend and foe alike around the world rejected.

Here are some Week 3 takeaways:

So many executive orders

Trump has spent 20 days in office, and on nearly every one of them, he has signed executive orders — often several.

Just like Presidents Barack Obama and Joe Biden before him, Trump used Inauguration Day to put pen to paper on actions meant to wipe out large numbers of his predecessor's policies. Trump also issued Day 1 orders to pardon most members of the mob that attacked the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, withdraw the U.S. from the Paris climate accord and keep TikTok functioning.

He hasn't stopped since, taking at least 92 presidential actions, including one marking the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. One that would ban paper straws is supposed to come soon.

The president signed most of the orders in the Oval Office; some were done aboard Air Force One. At times, officials have carted around a mini desk, affixed with the presidential seal, for the signings. It was there in the White House's East Room when Trump signed an order intended to [ban transgender athletes from participating in girls' and women's sports](#).

Trump used a similar desk to sign executive orders during a rally at Capital One Arena after his inaugural address. It's a prop Trump loves. He even mused about incorporating a special desk into his presidential swearing-in ceremony before it happened.

"I may even have a very tiny little desk put on the 20th stair because I always like to sign with a desk," Trump said in Iowa on Nov. 18, referring to his Inauguration Day walk up the Capitol steps.

Trade wars are off, for now

Trump [temporarily backed away from his tariff threats against Canada and Mexico](#), staving off a possible North American trade war as the U.S. holds separate talks over the next 30 days with its two biggest trading partners.

But Trump followed through on trade penalties against China, imposing a 10% tax on imports from that country.

White House aides say that tariffs, and Chinese retaliations, are not the start of a trade war because Trump's executive orders said the taxes were meant to force countries to address drug smuggling and, in the case of Canada and Mexico, illegal immigration.

Still, Trump asserted that he wants to fix the trade imbalance as part of the negotiations with Canada and Mexico. Trump posted on his social media site regarding Canada that the talks should produce "a final Economic deal."

The White House treated Canada's decision to create a "fentanyl czar" and Mexico's deployment of 10,000 National Guard troops to the border as wins for Trump. But by most economic analyses, this

was also a near catastrophe averted. The tariffs, if put in place, could increase inflation and subtract from growth.

DOGE access to vital federal payment system is challenged in court

The week featured another avalanche of activity to disrupt the government.

The Musk-led special commission known as the [Department of Government Efficiency](#) helped pull almost all [U.S. Agency for International Development workers](#) off the job worldwide, while a [push to pressure millions of federal workers into resigning](#) has [engulfed even the CIA](#).

Lieutenants for Musk, the Tesla and X owner, also temporarily got access to [the Treasury Department payment information system](#), setting off concerns about transparency and accountability that led to a court challenge.

A federal judge early Saturday [blocked DOGE](#) from accessing those records and set a hearing for Feb. 14.

The payments system handles trillions of dollars annually. It's a hidden part of the government plumbing that's essential for paying income taxes, collecting tax refunds, distributing money to contractors and paying out Social Security and Medicare benefits — and one of those parts of government that cannot afford to be broken.

The Treasury Department tried to assuage Democratic lawmakers with a letter claiming that no changes were being made to the system. But people familiar with the situation, who spoke on condition of anonymity to provide details that have not been made public, said Musk's team had been looking for ways to block USAID payments.

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'Half-jokingly, but also serious'

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt was asked on Fox News Channel why Trump nominated Linda McMahon as head of the Education Department when he had suggested shutting down the agency entirely.

"You heard the president say half-jokingly, but also serious, he wants Linda McMahon, who will lead that agency, to put herself out of a job," Leavitt said.

Joking, but maybe not joking, is a favored Trump tactic going back to his first term. And he's been doing it again.

Asked about data and other key information disappearing from [government websites](#) as federal officials scrambled to comply with new Trump administration rules, the president said he didn't know. But, he added, "That doesn't sound like a bad idea."

He has also repeatedly laughed about seeking a third term as president — constitutional prohibitions be damned.

"It will be the greatest honor of my life to serve not once but twice or three times or four times," Trump said during a recent rally in Las Vegas. "No, it will be to serve twice."

At a House Republican meeting in Florida, Trump said he had leftover campaign funds that could go toward running for a third term. He joked that he assumed he could not "use for myself, but I'm not 100% sure."

"Am I allowed to run again?" Trump asked House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La. "Mike, I better not get you involved in that."

Gaza gobsmacker

One area where it seemed like Trump might be joking — but insists he wasn't — is Gaza.

Trump [caused an uproar](#) by suggesting that the U.S. could seize long-term control of the [war-ravaged](#) territory, force its Palestinian population to live elsewhere — perhaps permanently — and use a massive redevelopment project to make it a tourist destination along the Mediterranean Sea.

Secretary of State [Marco Rubio](#) later [repeatedly suggested](#) that any resettlement would be on an interim basis, and even Leavitt insisted that such a relocation would be temporary.

But that only made Trump double down, saying that the U.S. would "slowly and carefully begin the construction of what would become one of the greatest and most spectacular developments of its kind on Earth."

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