



Supporters of the Alternative for Germany last week in Munich. A counterculture is forming around a party seen as a pariah. Page 6.

German Vote
Will Resonate
Across Europe

By JIM TANKERSLEY
and CHRISTOPHER F. SCHUETZE

In the final days of Germany’s abbreviated election campaign, the task facing its next chancellor has snapped into focus. It appears far more existential, for the country and for all of Europe, than almost anyone initially imagined.

Germany’s coalition government came apart just a day after the U.S. presidential election last November. As a result, a vote that was supposed to come this September is now set for Sunday. German leaders quickly realized that meant their campaign would be largely fought in the early days of President Trump’s second term.

They were nervous from the start. And they were nowhere near prepared.

In just a few short weeks, the new Trump team has cut Ukraine and Europe out of negotiations to end the war with Russia, and embraced an aggressive, expansionist regime in Moscow that now breathes down Europe’s neck. It also threatened to withdraw troops that have protected Germany for decades.

How Germans vote will now be a critical component of Europe’s response to Mr. Trump’s new world order, and will resonate far beyond their borders.

“It is not just another change of government” under Mr. Trump, Friedrich Merz, the leading candidate for chancellor, warned on Friday after taking the stage for an arena rally in the western town of Oberhausen, “but a complete re-drawing of the world map.”

Perhaps no one has distilled the stakes of the election more succinctly — ironically enough — than the prime minister of Greece, a country that famously clashed with the Germans when it was digging out of a financial crisis a decade ago. Kyriakos Mitsotakis, a fellow conservative, addressed Mr. Merz in a recorded message broadcast to 4,000 attendees at the Oberhausen rally. He reminded the audience of Greece’s emergence from its economic woes, and encouraged Mr. Merz to

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OFFER TO UKRAINE The U.S. toughened demands for revenues from the war-torn country. PAGE 8

Key to Trump’s Success: Knack for Habitual Lying

By PETER BAKER

WASHINGTON — The United States sent \$50 million in condoms to Hamas. Diversity programs caused a plane crash. China controls the Panama Canal. Ukraine started the war with Russia.

Except, no. None of that is true. Not that it stops President Trump. In the first month since he returned to power, he has demonstrated once again a brazen willingness to advance distortions, conspiracy theories and outright lies to justify major policy decisions.

Mr. Trump has long been unfettered by truth when it comes

Unfettered by the Truth,
He Tries to Make His
Reality America’s

to boasting about his record and tearing down his enemies. But what were dubbed “alternative facts” in his first term have quickly become a whole alternative reality in his second to lay the groundwork for radical change as he moves to aggressively reshape America and the world.

If the U.S. Agency for International Development is stupid enough to send prophylactics to

a Palestinian terrorist group in Gaza, he claims, then it deserves to be dismantled. If recruiting people other than white men to work in the airline sector compromises safety, such programs should be eliminated. If China controls the strategic passage through the continent, the United States should take it back. If Ukraine is the aggressor, it should make concessions to Moscow.

“One of the biggest presidential powers that Trump has deployed is the ability to shape his own narrative,” said Julian E. Zelizer, a Princeton history professor and editor of a book of essays about Mr. Trump’s first

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In Suwaisah, southeastern Syria, an Israeli Army incursion reduced a military outpost to rubble.

They Escaped From Mass Shooting, but Teacher Never Left Students of Room 1214

By EMILY BAUMGAERTNER NUNN

It was 45 seconds too late, but the teacher had a plan.

A gunman had just barraged her classroom with an AR-15, killing two students and injuring four others before turning to a classroom across the hall. The bullet-riddled walls were crumbling.

Ceiling tiles were falling. If the shooter came back to kill more of her students, the teacher decided, she would stand up and shout, “We love you.”

The teacher was Ivy Schamis, whose husband would be waiting at home with a Valentine’s Day dinner; whose son was planning a wedding she couldn’t imagine

missing; whose curriculum for this class — History of the Holocaust — had just moments earlier stirred a discussion about hate on campuses.

We love you. These would surely be her final words, Ms. Schamis thought. She knew her plan was futile — irrational, even. But with no stop-the-bleed kit, no shield, no

PRESIDENT OUSTS
TOP U.S. GENERAL
AS PART OF PURGE

Trump Attempting to Root Out What He
Sees as Military’s Diversity Focus

This article is by Eric Schmitt, Helen Cooper and Jonathan Swan.

WASHINGTON — President Trump fired the country’s senior military officer as part of an extraordinary Friday night purge at the Pentagon that injected politics into the selection of the nation’s top military leaders.

Gen. Charles Q. Brown Jr., a four-star fighter pilot known as C.Q. who became only the second African American to hold the chairman’s job, is to be replaced by a little-known retired three-star Air Force general, Dan Caine, who endeared himself to the president when they met in Iraq six years ago.

In all, six Pentagon officials were fired, including Adm. Lisa Franchetti, the first woman to lead the Navy; Gen. James Slife, the vice chief of the Air Force; and the top lawyers for the Army, Navy and Air Force.

The decision to fire General Brown, which Mr. Trump announced in a message on Truth Social, reflects the president’s insistence that the military’s leadership is too mired in diversity issues, has lost sight of its role as a combat force to defend the country and is out of step with his “America First” movement.

Joint Chiefs chairmen traditionally remain in place as administrations change, regardless of the president’s political party. But current White House and Pentagon officials said they wanted to appoint their own top leaders.

In a statement, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth thanked Admiral Franchetti and General Slife “for their service and dedication to our country” and requested

nominations for their replacements.

Mr. Hegseth did not say why he was firing the judge advocates general. But in his Senate confirmation hearing last month, he criticized military lawyers for placing needless legal restrictions on soldiers in battle — putting “his or her own priorities in front of the war fighters, their promotions, their medals, in front of having the backs of those making the tough calls on the front lines.”

Mr. Hegseth has previously said General Brown should be



Gen. Charles Q. Brown Jr., left, is to be replaced by Dan Caine, a retired Air Force general.

fired because of his “woke” focus on diversity, equity and inclusion programs in the military.

“First of all, you’ve got to fire the chairman of the Joint Chiefs,” Mr. Hegseth said in an appearance on the “Shawn Ryan Show” in November. He added that any general involved with D.E.I. efforts should be fired. “Either you’re in for warfighting, and that’s it,” he said. “That’s the only litmus test we care about.”

In his 2024 book “The War on Warriors,” Mr. Hegseth questioned whether General Brown was selected as the Joint Chiefs

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RESISTANCE Some civil servants are finding public and private ways to push back against orders issued by Elon Musk’s team. PAGE 19

TRUMP’S MOVES A roundup of the president’s most significant actions, staff shake-ups and statements from the past week. PAGE 18

Joy at Dictator’s Demise Wanes,
Replaced by Fear of Israeli Raids

By RAJA ABDULRAHIM

SUWAISAH, Syria — Ruwayda al-Aqaar was sleeping next to her husband and 3-year-old daughter in late December when they were awakened by the sound of approaching tanks and bulldozers. They rushed outside their small house and saw dozens of Israeli soldiers marching into their small farming village, she said.

“I was terrified,” Ms. al-Aqaar said recently in her home in the village of Suwaisah, in southeastern Syria, as her daughter watched “Tom and Jerry” cartoons. “We were afraid of being displaced and forced to leave our homes.”

For weeks, the family and their neighbors feared that Israeli forces would target their village after carrying out similar incursions into towns nearby. Just days after a coalition of Syrian rebels

ousted President Bashar al-Assad in early December, Israel invaded border villages in Syria in what it described as temporary measures to protect its own security.

But the Israeli raids continued throughout January and into February, raising fears among Syrians that the incursions could become a prolonged military occupation. The Israeli troops have been targeting villages, particularly ones with military outposts.

In Suwaisah, the Israeli soldiers tore down a small military outpost that had been abandoned by Syrian troops who took their weapons with them after the Assad regime

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HOSTAGES RELEASED Six captives were the last set to be freed in this phase of a truce. PAGE 11

NATIONAL 14-24

A Nickel for Your Thoughts

The president wants to eliminate the penny to save money. But the nickel is even more expensive to make. PAGE 14

Landslides Gaining Speed

A new map shows where California land movement is accelerating, buckling roads and collapsing homes. PAGE 23

SPORTS 28-31

New Era: Hamilton at Ferrari

After changing Formula 1 teams, Lewis Hamilton is seeking an eighth title. “The energy that I’m receiving from the team, there’s magic here,” he said. PAGE 28



INTERNATIONAL 4-13

A Solemn Anniversary

U.S. Marines raised an American flag on Iwo Jima 80 years ago, but the bloody battle raged on for a month. PAGE 12

METROPOLITAN

It’s a Raffle, Only Meatier

Spinning a wheel for a chance to win beef has become a fund-raising tool for youth sports and other charities, and a way to stock up your freezer. PAGE 1

SUNDAY STYLES

New Scene for L.A. Hot Spot

San Vicente West Village arrives in Manhattan. Who’s joining? Will you feel as if you are missing out if you aren’t part of the club? PAGE 10

SUNDAY OPINION

Jeff Shesol

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ARTS & LEISURE

Clooney’s Next Act

George Clooney is making his Broadway debut with a stage version of “Good Night, and Good Luck.” PAGE 20

Soap Opera Breaks Ground

“Beyond the Gates” will try to revive the genre, and will be the first focused primarily on a Black family. PAGE 32

SUNDAY BUSINESS

Coffee Prices at a 50-Year High

Climate change is behind the windfall gains, and growers are worried about future crop calamities and whether they can adapt and keep up with increasing production costs. PAGE 6

The Parrots Next Door

How noise complaints over birds shrieking in a Manhattan co-op led to years of legal battles, a \$750,000 settlement and a friendship left in tatters. PAGE 1

