



Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli prime minister, arrived at the White House on Tuesday for a meeting with President Trump.

TIERNEY L. GROSS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

## MUSK ASSERTING BROAD AUTHORITY

Flouting Accountability  
in His Quest to Cut

This article is by Jonathan Swan, Theodore Schleifer, Maggie Haberman, Kate Conger, Ryan Mac and Madeleine Ngo.

In Elon Musk’s first two weeks in government, his lieutenants gained access to closely held financial and data systems, casting aside career officials who warned that they were defying protocols. They moved swiftly to shutter specific programs — and even an entire agency that had come into Mr. Musk’s cross hairs. They bombarded federal employees with messages suggesting they were lazy and encouraging them to leave their jobs.

Empowered by President Trump, Mr. Musk is waging a largely unchecked war against the federal bureaucracy — one that has already had far-reaching consequences.

Mr. Musk’s aggressive incursions into at least half a dozen government agencies have challenged congressional authority and potentially breached civil service protections.

Top officials at the Treasury Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development who objected to the actions of his representatives were swiftly pushed aside. And Mr. Musk’s efforts to shut down U.S.A.I.D., a key source of foreign assistance, have reverberated around the globe.

Mr. Musk, the world’s richest man, is sweeping through the federal government as a singular force, creating major upheaval as he looks to put an extraordinary stamp on the bureaucracy and rid the system of those who he and the president deride as “the deep state.”

The rapid moves by Mr. Musk, who has a multitude of financial interests before the government, have represented an extraordinary flexing of power by a private individual.

The speed and scale have shocked civil servants, who have been frantically exchanging information on encrypted chats, trying to discern what is unfolding.

Senior White House staff members have at times also found themselves in the dark, according to two officials, who spoke on the

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## China Swiftly Punches Back for Trump’s Tariffs

By ANA SWANSON  
and CHRIS BUCKLEY

WASHINGTON — Beijing responded swiftly on Tuesday to the tariffs President Trump had promised, announcing a fusillade of countermeasures targeting American companies and imports of critical products.

Mr. Trump’s 10 percent tariff on all Chinese products took effect at 12:01 a.m. Tuesday, the result of an executive order issued over the weekend aimed at pressuring Beijing to crack down on fentanyl shipments into the United States.

### U.S. Goods Face New Levies, and Google Is Investigated

The Chinese government came back with a series of retaliatory steps, including additional tariffs on liquefied natural gas, coal, farm machinery and other products from the United States, which will take effect next Monday. It also immediately implemented restrictions on the export of certain

critical minerals, many of which are used in the production of high-tech products.

In addition, Chinese market regulators said they had opened an antimonopoly investigation into Google. Google is blocked from China’s internet, but the move may disrupt the company’s dealings with Chinese companies.

Wendy Cutler, a former U.S. trade negotiator, said the various measures were a signal from China of the range of options it has to respond to Mr. Trump’s trade actions. “This menu approach is

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GABRIELA BHASKAR FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

### A New Day for Women in Sri Lanka

The nation’s leftist movement is seizing an opportunity to rally more women into politics. Page A4.

## Where Do Black Brands Go When D.E.I. Fades?

By JORDYN HOLMAN  
and JULIE CRESWELL

Pernell Cezar’s coffee company, BLK & Bold, was operating out of the back of a brewery with three employees when he got his big break: an audience with a buyer at a Target Black History Month expo. By January 2020, bags of his Rise & GRND roast were on Target shelves.

That was five months before the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis incited nationwide protests

### A Feeling Big Retailers Could Close the Door

for racial justice that reverberated throughout corporate America. Suddenly, big retailers were creating programs to help small businesses — and especially Black-owned businesses — get their foot in the door.

In 2021, Amazon started its Black Business Accelerator.

Sephora, which had an existing program, refocused it on Black, Indigenous and other founders of color. Target, which is based in Minneapolis, started Forward Founders, and Mr. Cezar helped the retailer develop a curriculum to educate emerging brands about how to get into major retailers.

So Mr. Cezar was disappointed when, on Jan. 24, Target announced that it was concluding its three-year diversity, equity and inclusion goals. Its Supplier Di-

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# TRUMP PROPOSING TAKEOVER OF GAZA AS U.S. TERRITORY

## Brazen Plan to Relocate All Palestinians and Rebuild War-Torn Enclave

This article is by Peter Baker, Michael D. Shear and Isabel Kershner.

WASHINGTON — President Trump declared on Tuesday that he would seek to permanently displace the entire Palestinian population of Gaza and take over the devastated seaside enclave as a U.S. territory, one of the most brazen ideas that any American leader has advanced in years.

Hosting Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel at the White House, Mr. Trump said that all 2 million Palestinians from Gaza should be moved to countries like Egypt and Jordan because of the devastation wrought by Israel’s war with Hamas after the terrorist attack of Oct. 7, 2023.

“The U.S. will take over the Gaza Strip, and we will do a job with it too,” Mr. Trump said at an evening news conference. “We’ll own it and be responsible” for disposing of unexploded munitions and rebuilding Gaza into a mecca for jobs and tourism. Sounding like the real estate developer he once was, he vowed to turn it into “the Riviera of the Middle East.”

While the president framed the matter as a humanitarian imperative and an economic development opportunity, he effectively reopened a geopolitical Pandora’s box with far-reaching implications for the Middle East. Control over Gaza has been one of the major flash points of the Arab-Israeli conflict going back decades, and the idea of relocating its Palestinian residents recalls an era when Western great powers redrew the maps of the region and moved around populations without regard to local autonomy.

The notion of the United States taking over sovereign territory in

the Middle East would be a dramatic reversal for Mr. Trump, who first ran for office in 2016 vowing to extract America from the region following the Iraq war and decried the nation-building of his predecessors. In unveiling the plan, Mr. Trump did not cite any legal authority giving him the right to take over the territory, nor did he address the fact that forcible removal of a population violates international law.

Hamas, which has ruled in Gaza for most of the past two decades and is re-establishing control there now, immediately rejected mass relocation on Tuesday, and Egypt and Jordan have rejected the idea of taking in a large influx of Palestinians, given the fraught history, burden and destabilizing potential. But Mr. Netanyahu, sitting at Mr. Trump’s side in the Oval Office, smiled with satisfaction as the president first outlined his ideas.

“I don’t think people should be going back to Gaza,” Mr. Trump said. “I heard that Gaza has been very unlucky for them. They live like hell. They live like they’re living in hell. Gaza is not a place for people to be living, and the only reason they want to go back, and I believe this strongly, is because they have no alternative.”

He suggested that nations in the region could finance the resettlement of Gazans to new places that would provide better living conditions, either as a single territory or as many as a dozen. “It would be my hope that we could do something really nice, really good, where they wouldn’t want to return,” he said without offering details of what that would entail.

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## In Marked Lull, Cases of Covid Are Mildest Yet

By FRANCESCA PARIS

This winter’s Covid wave in the United States has been the gentlest to date, in a welcome reprieve.

According to wastewater data aggregated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, not only was there less Covid circulating over the holidays than in previous years, but there was also less virus in the wastewater than in all the summer waves the program has tracked.

The Covid hospitalization rate stayed around half of what it was last year, and deaths fell too. In late December, around 600 people were dying each week. Last winter at that time, it was around 2,000. (During the Omicron surge at the end of 2021, weekly deaths were topping 10,000.)

Although wastewater levels can’t tell us how many individual cases of Covid there are, the recent data reflects a significant lull in the virus’s five-year assault.

“This is definitely the mildest Covid winter,” said Michael Mina, an epidemiologist and chief science officer for eMed. “In terms of hospitalizations, in terms of spread.”

One possible reason for the lull is that the population is still carrying some immunity from a large, later-than-usual summer surge, said Peter Chin-Hong, an infectious disease specialist at the University of California, San Francisco.

This year’s vaccine was also a

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ERIN SCHAFF/THE NEW YORK TIMES

A single 2.5-inch outlet on a hydrant is now substandard.

## Many Hydrants At Fire’s Origin Were Outdated

By MIKE BAKER  
and ROBERT GEBELOFF

In the early stages of a fire that swept through Pacific Palisades in Los Angeles, firefighters made an attempt to stop it in a residential area high in the rugged hills — a neighborhood that had an unusual set of fire hydrants.

Across several city blocks, on the edge of parched wild lands, water for firefighting was provided by dozens of aging hydrants, each featuring a single 2.5-inch outlet for attaching a hose. The standard for modern fire hydrants is to be equipped with a larger outlet for firefighters to draw a greater volume of water, in addition to at least one other outlet.

The older hydrants with a single 2.5-inch outlet “are not considered to be suitable for normal fire-protection service,” according to

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### NATIONAL A9-18

#### Kennedy Clears Panel Vote

Senator Bill Cassidy dropped his concerns and voted with other Republicans to advance the nomination. PAGE A16

#### Struggle for Disabled Students

New Jersey has the worst record of helping young people with disabilities enter the work force. PAGE A10

### INTERNATIONAL A4-8

#### At Least 10 Killed in Sweden

A shooting, called the worst in the nation’s history by its prime minister, took place at a center for adult education in the city of Orebro. PAGE A8



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#### They’re Unlocking Flavor

The people who cook at Rikers Island, New York’s troubled jail complex, see a higher mission in their work. PAGE D4

#### Desserts to Make With Jam

Two easy filled delights satisfy the craving for bright, bold berries when they’re far from their peak. PAGE D2

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#### How TikTok Sale Would Work

A new law requires the social media app to get a non-Chinese owner or face a U.S. ban. President Trump has made a lot of suggestions. PAGE B1

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#### Positive Reinforcement Guru

Karen Pryor successfully trained animals, and applied her techniques to humans. She was 92. PAGE A20

#### Widow of Nobel Recipient

A Holocaust survivor, Marion Wiesel, helped her husband, Elie, achieve wide acclaim. She was 94. PAGE A21



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#### Opera Star’s U.S. Comeback

The Russian singer Anna Netrebko, shunned over her support of Vladimir V. Putin, performed in Florida. PAGE C1

#### Adapting ‘Schmigadoon!’

The Apple TV+ series that liked to poke fun at Broadway songs comes to the stage of the Kennedy Center. PAGE C1

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#### Following Bills in Antarctica

Research scientists in remote locations need to be creative in order to keep up with their favorite teams. PAGES B6-7

#### A Game Within the Games

Seven officials are vying for the powerful position of president of the International Olympic Committee. PAGE B9

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#### Thomas L. Friedman

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