

Donor Who Gave \$130 Million to Pay Troops Is Reclusive Heir to Mellon Fortune

SEO HEADLINE **Timothy Mellon Is Donor Who Gave \$130 Million to Pay Troops During Shutdown**

Timothy Mellon is a billionaire and a major financial backer of President Trump.

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By Tyler Pager

Reporting from Washington

Oct. 25, 2025

Timothy Mellon, a reclusive billionaire and a major financial backer of President Trump, is the anonymous private donor who gave \$130 million to the U.S. government to help pay troops during the shutdown, according to two people familiar with the matter.

Mr. Trump announced the donation on Thursday night, but he declined to name the person who provided the funds, only calling him a “patriot” and a friend. But the two people, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because the donation was private, identified him as Mr. Mellon.

Shortly after departing Washington on Friday, Mr. Trump again declined to identify Mr. Mellon while talking to reporters aboard Air Force One. He only said the individual was “a great American citizen” and a “substantial man.”

“He doesn’t want publicity,” Mr. Trump said as he headed to Malaysia. “He prefers that his name not be mentioned which is pretty unusual in the world I come from, and in the world of politics, you want your name mentioned.”

25dc-donor WASHINGTON



The White House declined to comment. Multiple attempts to reach Mr. Mellon and representatives for him were unsuccessful.

It remains unclear how far the donation will go toward covering the salaries of the more than 1.3 million troops who make up the active-duty military. According to the Congressional Budget Office, the Trump administration's 2025 budget requested about \$600 billion in total military compensation. A \$130 million donation would equal about \$100 a service member.

Mr. Mellon, a wealthy banking heir and railroad magnate, is a longtime backer of Mr. Trump and gave tens of millions of dollars to groups supporting the president's campaign. Last year, he made a \$50 million donation to a super PAC supporting Mr. Trump, which was one of the largest single contributions ever disclosed.

A grandson of former Treasury Secretary Andrew W. Mellon, Mr. Mellon was not a prominent Republican donor until Mr. Trump was elected. But in recent years, he has poured hundreds of millions of dollars into supporting Mr. Trump and the Republican Party.

Mr. Mellon, who lives primarily in Wyoming, keeps a low profile despite his prolific political spending. He is also a significant supporter of Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who also ran for president last year. Mr. Mellon donated millions to Mr. Kennedy's presidential campaign and has also given money to his anti-vaccine group, Children's Health Defense.

The Pentagon said it accepted the donation under the "general gift acceptance authority."

"The donation was made on the condition that it be used to offset the cost of service members' salaries and benefits," Sean Parnell, the Pentagon's chief spokesman, said in a statement.

Still, the donation appears to be a potential violation of the Antideficiency Act, which prohibits federal agencies from spending money in excess of congressional appropriations or from accepting voluntary services.



More than three weeks into the government shutdown, the Trump administration has taken a series of unorthodox steps to redirect funds to pay certain government workers.

Mr. Trump has vowed to pay military members, immigration agents and law enforcement officials even though lawmakers have not approved the money for their wages. Workers in those categories are considered essential and must continue working during the shutdown, although they are entitled to back pay under a 2019 law.

As part of that promise, the president signed an executive order this month directing the Pentagon to use unspent research and development funds to cover troops' salaries. But congressional leaders have warned that moving funds around is only a temporary fix.

Thousands of federal workers missed their first paycheck this week. About 670,000 workers have been furloughed, according to a tally by the Bipartisan Policy Center, a Washington-based think tank. An additional 730,000 or so are working without pay.

In an autobiography that he self-published in 2015, Mr. Mellon described himself as a former liberal who moved to Wyoming from Connecticut for lower taxes and to be surrounded by fewer people.

His book also contains several incendiary passages about race. He wrote that Black people were "even more belligerent" after social programs were expanded in the 1960s and '70s, and that social safety net programs amounted to "slavery redux."

Mr. Mellon wrote another book in the summer of 2024 about his work turning around Pan Am Systems, a collection of companies that includes rail, aviation and marketing firms. The book was put out by Skyhorse Publishing, which also published a recent memoir by Melania Trump, the first lady. Tony Lyons, the president of Skyhorse Publishing, co-founded a super PAC, American Values 2024, that backed Mr. Kennedy's presidential bid.



In 2020, during a rare and brief interview with The New York Times, Mr. Mellon declined to answer questions about his political giving.

“I’ll contribute to him or Biden or whoever I want to,” he said, referring to Mr. Trump and his rival, Joseph R. Biden Jr. “I don’t have to say why.”

Greg Jaffe contributed to this report.

Tyler Pager is a White House correspondent for The Times, covering President Trump and his administration.

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How Zelensky's Oval Office Meeting Turned into a Showdown With Trump

The question hovering over Washington was whether the confrontation was a spontaneous outburst or a planned verbal smack down.



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By Tyler Pager and Maggie Haberman

Tyler Pager and Maggie Haberman are reporters covering the White House.

March 1, 2025

Just hours before President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine sat down with President Trump in the Oval Office on Friday, Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina dispensed some advice to the Ukrainian leader.

“Don’t take the bait,” he said, encouraging him not to get into a spat with Mr. Trump.

“I said, don’t get into arguments about security agreements,” Mr. Graham recalled on Friday evening in a brief telephone interview with The New York Times, as he sat aboard Air Force One preparing to fly to Florida with the president.

Mr. Zelensky did not silence his concerns during his meeting with Mr. Trump, who has come to expect a level of capitulation from almost everyone who has met with him since Election Day, from foreign leaders to billionaire business executives. The result was an extraordinary dressing down by a U.S. president of a foreign ally in the middle of the Oval Office, while the media’s cameras recorded it all.



The question hovering over Washington on Friday evening was whether the confrontation was a spontaneous outburst or a planned verbal smack down by Mr. Trump and Vice President JD Vance, neither of whom respects Mr. Zelensky.

But three people with knowledge of what took place beforehand said neither Mr. Trump nor Mr. Vance had been looking to blow up a deal for Ukraine's mineral rights, which Mr. Zelensky had been expected to sign in Washington. Instead, they said, Mr. Zelensky seemingly triggered the two American leaders by not sufficiently thanking the United States for trying to end the war (which Mr. Trump wanted to hear) and by pressing for commitments to protect Ukraine from Russian aggression going forward (which Mr. Trump did not want to hear).

In the end, Mr. Zelensky left the White House without a signed deal over mineral rights, which Mr. Trump had sought for weeks, and, for now, an even more contentious relationship with his country's most important ally.

The day was not supposed to unfold this way.

'Oh look, you're all dressed up'

The day before the Oval Office meeting, Mr. Trump called Mr. Graham and invited him to sit in the front row of the White House ceremony when the leaders signed the minerals deal. The president appeared to be on a high, excited about the deal to obtain revenue from Ukraine's natural resources, Mr. Graham said. Mr. Trump believed it would be a fitting coda to his third foreign leader visit of the week and weeks of negotiations.

Those talks had gone in fits and starts, with a sense of distrust hanging over it all. The Ukrainians felt affronted by the initial proposal; a U.S. team privately accused the Ukrainians of gumming up the discussions. And the Americans separately had peace discussions with Russian officials, which had infuriated the Ukrainians.

Mr. Trump's two other bilateral meetings this week — with President Emmanuel Macron of France on Monday and Prime Minister Keir Starmer of Britain on Thursday — were chummy affairs, in part because the leaders came prepared to

flatter even as they voiced some disagreements with Mr. Trump over his approach to Ukraine.

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Greeting Mr. Zelensky at the White House on Friday, Mr. Trump immediately commented on the Ukrainian president's casual attire. Doug Mills/The New York Times

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On Friday morning, Mr. Graham, along with roughly a dozen of his Senate colleagues, met Mr. Zelensky at 9:30 a.m. at the Hay-Adams hotel. During that meeting, Mr. Graham, a close ally of Mr. Trump, shared his advice with Mr. Zelensky on how he should conduct himself at the White House.

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Mr. Graham has been one of the most vocal supporters of Ukraine in the Republican Party. Yet his warning to Mr. Zelensky underscored how significantly the G.O.P., business leaders and even some Democrats had reoriented themselves around Mr. Trump's desires in the wake of his November win.

Senator Richard Blumenthal, a Democrat from Connecticut who also attended the Hay-Adams meeting, said it was "very positive and productive." When Mr. Zelensky arrived at the White House soon after, Mr. Trump greeted him at the entrance to the West Wing and made a crack about his casual outfit.

"Oh look, you're all dressed up," Mr. Trump said, an early signal that he was going into the meeting somewhat peeved. Mr. Zelensky, who says he does not wear a suit to show solidarity with his soldiers, had on the unadorned, military-style clothing he usually wears at official events.

Mr. Trump, Mr. Vance and their advisers have long disliked Mr. Zelensky, complaining that he just wants the United States to provide more money and resources for a war that has no end in sight. Mr. Trump in recent days has tried to shield Vladimir V. Putin, the Russian president, from criticism for instigating the conflict.

But as the two leaders sat down for a bilateral meeting without any cameras, the exchange was cordial, according to one person with direct knowledge of the events.

Then the reporters showed up, and the energy in the room instantly shifted, the person said. About eight minutes into the meeting, journalists started peppering the leaders with questions, exposing the divisions between Mr. Trump and Mr. Zelensky.

Mr. Trump began to grow frustrated at reporters who pressed him on security guarantees, which Ukraine was hoping to get in exchange for giving the United States a share in the country's mineral wealth.

Those guarantees from Washington, the only nuclear-armed power truly capable of standing up to Russia, had been Mr. Zelensky's most important demand.



There were several moments of pique, like when, nearly 40 minutes into the meeting, Mr. Trump was asked to address concerns that he was too closely aligned with Mr. Putin. Mr. Trump disputed that, arguing he was prioritizing a peace deal.

At another point, Mr. Trump tried to correct Mr. Zelensky on the year when Russia annexed Crimea, but he provided the incorrect year. Mr. Zelensky then corrected him and reminded the leaders that Mr. Putin had repeatedly broken negotiated cease-fires. Mr. Vance lashed out, telling Mr. Zelensky he was being disrespectful to the president.

But perhaps the most contentious point came when Mr. Zelensky said the war in Ukraine also threatened the United States.

“You have nice ocean and don’t feel now, but you will feel it in the future,” he said.

That prompted Mr. Trump to pile on, telling Mr. Zelensky that he was “not in a very good position” and was “gambling with World War III.” Mr. Trump then mocked a reporter who asked what would happen if Russia broke a cease-fire.

“What if anything?” he asked. “What if a bomb drops on your head right now? OK? What if they broke it? I don’t know, they broke it with Biden because Biden, they didn’t respect him. They didn’t respect Obama. They respect me.”

As the extraordinary argument continued, Oksana Markarova, Ukraine’s ambassador to the United States who was sitting beside the leaders, put her face in her hands.

Finally, Mr. Trump declared that there had been enough, adding that it would make for “great television” before leaving the room.

‘I’m not sure that we did something bad’

Once the meeting ended, Mr. Zelensky and his aides returned to the Roosevelt Room while Mr. Trump huddled with his aides in the Oval Office. The two leaders were supposed to participate in the signing ceremony that Mr. Graham was eager



to attend, and then to hold a joint news conference. The delegations were also supposed to have lunch together.

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Mr. Zelensky leaving the West Wing after his heated meeting with Mr. Trump. The two leaders were supposed to sign a minerals deal and then have lunch, but those events were canceled. Doug Mills/The New York Times

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Mr. Trump was still unhappy, and did not want to continue working with Mr. Zelensky that day. Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Michael Waltz, Trump's national security adviser, were dispatched to the Roosevelt Room to say the rest of the day's events would be canceled.

One member of the Ukrainian delegation suggested that Mr. Trump and Mr. Zelensky try a one-on-one meeting to reduce the simmering anger; the U.S. officials had no interest.



The president went ahead with the lunch prepared in honor of Mr. Zelensky. He filled the empty seats with some of his top aides, who dined on an early spring green salad, rosemary roasted chicken and crème brûlée. Mr. Trump's deputy White House chief of staff, Dan Scavino, gleefully posted on social media about the menu.

For years, the Republican Party has fractured over its posture toward Russia. And privately, some operatives said they were aghast at Mr. Trump's behavior, even as they criticized Mr. Zelensky for what they saw as needless aggravation.

But instead of a massive schism among Republican elected officials after the blowup in the Oval Office, nearly all of them quickly fell in line behind Mr. Trump.

Mr. Graham told reporters outside the White House that Mr. Zelensky should "resign and send somebody over that we can do business with, or change." Senator Roger Wicker of Mississippi, who told Mr. Zelensky at the Hay-Adams earlier in the day that the senators were there "as a show of support," took down a post showing him shaking hands with the Ukrainian leader.

ALT TEXT undefined



Senator Lindsey Graham, Republican of South Carolina, told reporters after the failed White House meeting that Mr. Zelensky should “resign and send somebody over that we can do business with, or change.” Eric Lee/The New York Times

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A few hours later, Mr. Zelensky appeared on Fox News for a previously scheduled interview, and some Republicans wanted him to apologize for the confrontation at the White House. Instead, Mr. Zelensky expressed some regret about the contentious exchange, but he said he believed he could repair his relationship with Mr. Trump.

“I think that we have to be very open and very honest,” he said. “And I’m not sure that we did something bad.”

As if taking a victory lap, Mr. Trump departed Washington with some of the boxes the F.B.I. had seized from Mar-a-Lago in 2022 as part of the Justice Department’s investigation into his handling of classified documents.

“Justice finally won out,” Mr. Trump said in a statement. “I did absolutely nothing wrong.”

On the flight to Florida, Mr. Trump had the television turned to Fox News, watching Mr. Zelensky’s interview.

Maggie Haberman is a White House correspondent, reporting on the second, nonconsecutive term of Donald J. Trump.



Trump Said to Demand Justice Dept. Pay Him \$230 Million for Past Cases

Senior department officials who were defense lawyers for the president and those in his orbit are now in jobs that typically must approve any such payout, underscoring potential ethical conflicts.



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By Devlin Barrett and Tyler Pager

Reporting from Washington

Oct. 21, 2025

President Trump is demanding that the Justice Department pay him about \$230 million in compensation for the federal investigations into him, according to people familiar with the matter, who added that any settlement might ultimately be approved by senior department officials who defended him or those in his orbit.

The situation has no parallel in American history, as Mr. Trump, a presidential candidate, was pursued by federal law enforcement and eventually won the election, taking over the very government that must now review his claims. It is also the starkest example yet of potential ethical conflicts created by installing the president's former lawyers atop the Justice Department.

Mr. Trump submitted complaints through an administrative claim process that often is the precursor to lawsuits. The first claim, lodged in late 2023, seeks damages for a number of purported violations of his rights, including the F.B.I. and special counsel investigation into Russian election tampering and possible



connections to the 2016 Trump campaign, according to people familiar with the matter. They spoke on the condition of anonymity because the claim has not been made public.

The second complaint, filed in the summer of 2024, accuses the F.B.I. of violating Mr. Trump's privacy by searching Mar-a-Lago, his club and residence in Florida, in 2022 for classified documents. It also accuses the Justice Department of malicious prosecution in charging him with mishandling sensitive records after he left office.

Asked about the issue at the White House after this article published, the president said, "I was damaged very greatly and any money I would get, I would give to charity."

He added, "I'm the one that makes the decision and that decision would have to go across my desk and it's awfully strange to make a decision where I'm paying myself."

Lawyers said the nature of the president's legal claims poses undeniable ethics challenges.

"What a travesty," said Bennett L. Gershman, an ethics professor at Pace University. "The ethical conflict is just so basic and fundamental, you don't need a law professor to explain it."

He added: "And then to have people in the Justice Department decide whether his claim should be successful or not, and these are the people who serve him deciding whether he wins or loses. It's bizarre and almost too outlandish to believe."

The president also seemed to acknowledge that point in the Oval Office last week, when he alluded vaguely to the situation while standing next to the F.B.I. director, Kash Patel, Attorney General Pam Bondi, and her deputy, Todd Blanche. According to Justice Department regulations, the deputy attorney general — in this case, Mr. Blanche — is one of two people eligible to sign off on such a settlement.



“I have a lawsuit that was doing very well, and when I became president, I said, I’m sort of suing myself,” Mr. Trump said, adding: “It sort of looks bad, I’m suing myself, right? So I don’t know. But that was a lawsuit that was very strong, very powerful.”

Administrative claims are not technically lawsuits. Such complaints are submitted first to the Justice Department on what is called a Standard Form 95, to see if a settlement can be reached without a lawsuit in federal court. If the department formally rejects such a claim or declines to act on it, a person could then sue in court. Still, that is an unlikely outcome in this instance, given that Mr. Trump is already negotiating, in essence, with his subordinates.

Compensation is typically covered by taxpayers. Two people familiar with the president’s legal claims said that he had not been paid by the federal government but that he expected to be.

The second claim accused Merrick B. Garland, then the attorney general, Christopher A. Wray, then the F.B.I. director, and Jack Smith, the special counsel investigating Mr. Trump at the time, of “harassment” intended to sway the electoral outcome. “This malicious prosecution led President Trump to spend tens of millions of dollars defending the case and his reputation,” the claim said.

According to the Justice Department manual, settlements of claims against the department for more than \$4 million “must be approved by the deputy attorney general or associate attorney general,” meaning the person who oversees the agency’s civil division.

The current deputy attorney general, Mr. Blanche, served as Mr. Trump’s lead criminal defense lawyer and said at his confirmation hearing in February that his attorney-client relationship with the president continued. The chief of the department’s civil division, Stanley Woodward Jr., represented Mr. Trump’s co-defendant, Walt Nauta, in the classified documents case. Mr. Woodward has also represented a number of other Trump aides, including Mr. Patel, in investigations related to Mr. Trump or the Capitol riot on Jan. 6, 2021.



A spokesman for the president's personal legal team said he was fighting back against the Russia investigation he has long denounced as a witch hunt, and what he has called the weaponization of the criminal justice system by the Biden administration.

A White House spokeswoman referred questions to the Justice Department. Asked if either Mr. Blanche or Mr. Woodward would recuse or have been recused from overseeing the possible settlement with Mr. Trump, a Justice Department spokesman, Chad Gilmartin, said, "In any circumstance, all officials at the Department of Justice follow the guidance of career ethics officials."

In July, Ms. Bondi fired the agency's top ethics adviser.

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Stanley Woodward Jr., the head of the Justice Department's civil division, has represented a number of Trump aides in criminal investigations related to Mr. Trump or the Capitol riot on Jan. 6, 2021. Saul Martinez for The New York Times

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Mr. Trump famously hates recusals. He complained bitterly after his first attorney general, Jeff Sessions, withdrew from overseeing the Russia investigation that is now the subject of one of his demands for money.

“The attorney general made a terrible mistake when he did this and when he recused himself,” Mr. Trump said in 2018. “He should have certainly let us know if he was going to recuse himself, and we would have used a — put a different attorney general in.”

21dc-justice WASHINGTON



The Justice Department does not specifically require a public announcement of settlements made for administrative claims before they become lawsuits. If or when the Trump administration pays the president what could be hundreds of millions of dollars, there may be no immediate official declaration that it did so, according to current and former department officials.

Some former officials have privately expressed misgivings that the department's leaders did not reject Mr. Trump's legal claims in the waning days of the Biden administration. It has long been standard practice for civil litigation, including lawsuits against the government, to be paused until any criminal cases around the same facts have been resolved.

Alan Feuer contributed reporting.

Devlin Barrett covers the Justice Department and the F.B.I. for The Times.

Tyler Pager is a White House correspondent for The Times, covering President Trump and his administration.

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The Nobel Prize and a Testy Phone Call: How the Trump-Modi Relationship Unraveled

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President Trump's repeated claims about having "solved" the India-Pakistan war infuriated Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India. And that was only the beginning.



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By Mujib Mashal, Tyler Pager and Anupreeta Das

Mujib Mashal and Anupreeta Das reported from New Delhi, and Tyler Pager from Washington.

Aug. 30, 2025

Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India was losing patience with President Trump.

Mr. Trump had been saying — repeatedly, publicly, exuberantly — that he had “solved” the military conflict between India and Pakistan, a dispute that dates back more than 75 years and is far deeper and more complicated than Mr. Trump was making it out to be.

During a phone call on June 17, Mr. Trump brought it up again, saying how proud he was of ending the military escalation. He mentioned that Pakistan was going to nominate him for the Nobel Peace Prize, an honor for which he had been openly campaigning. The not-so-subtle implication, according to people familiar with the call, was that Mr. Modi should do the same.

The Indian leader bristled. He told Mr. Trump that U.S. involvement had nothing to do with the recent cease-fire. It had been settled directly between India and Pakistan.

30dc-trump-modi EDIT

WASHINGTON



Mr. Trump largely brushed off Mr. Modi's comments, but the disagreement — and Mr. Modi's refusal to engage on the Nobel — has played an outsized role in the souring relationship between the two leaders, whose once-close ties go back to Mr. Trump's first term.

The dispute has played out against the backdrop of trade talks of immense importance to India and the United States, and the fallout risks pushing India closer to American adversaries in Beijing and Moscow. Mr. Modi is expected to travel to China this weekend, where he will meet with President Xi Jinping and President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia.

This article is based on interviews with more than a dozen people in Washington and New Delhi, most of whom spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss a relationship that has far-reaching implications for both sides, with Mr. Trump eroding a strategic relationship and India alienating its biggest trading partner as it tries to keep its economy afloat.

ALT TEXT People on motorcycles drive by giant cut-out posters of Mr. Trump and Mr. Modi.



Commuters in Ahmedabad, India, passing images of President Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India during Mr. Trump's visit in 2020. Atul Loke for The New York Times

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Just weeks after the June phone call, and with trade talks dragging on, Mr. Trump startled India by announcing that imports from the country would be subjected to a tariff of 25 percent. And on Wednesday, he slapped India with an additional 25 percent tariff for buying Russian oil, adding up to a crushing 50 percent.

Mr. Modi, who once called Mr. Trump “a true friend,” was officially on the outs. After telling Mr. Modi that he would travel to India later this year for the Quad summit, Mr. Trump no longer has plans to visit in the fall, according to people familiar with the president's schedule.

In India, Mr. Trump is now seen in some quarters as a source of national humiliation. Last week, a giant Trump effigy was paraded around a festival in the state of Maharashtra, with signs declaring him a backstabber. The blows from the

30dc-trump-modi EDIT

WASHINGTON

United States have been so intense that one Indian official described them as “gundagardi”: straight-up bullying, or thuggery.

The two men have not spoken since the June 17 phone call.

At its core, the story of Mr. Trump and Mr. Modi is about two brash, populist leaders with big egos and authoritarian tendencies, and the web of loyalties that help keep both men in power. But it is also the tale of an American president with his eye on a Nobel Prize, running smack into the immovable third rail of Indian politics: the conflict with Pakistan.

A Political Nonstarter

Few in India expected Mr. Modi to end up in this situation.

He won his third term in office on the promise of transforming himself and his country into global players. And even if Mr. Trump was known to focus more on personal relationships and less on geopolitical strategy, the Indians thought that dynamic would work in their favor.

During Mr. Trump’s first term, he attended the large “Howdy Modi!” rally of the Indian diaspora in Texas. Months later, the American president visited Mr. Modi’s home state of Gujarat for an event branded “Namaste Trump!”

Mr. Modi greeted him with a hug at the airport and then celebrated Mr. Trump with music, dancers and more than 100,000 cheering attendees.

ALT TEXT Mr. Trump and Mr. Modi holding hands while walking past a crowd of people.



Mr. Trump and Mr. Modi holding hands at a “Howdy Modi” event in Houston in 2019. Doug Mills/The New York Times

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ALTTEXT A large crowd of young men smiling and holding tickets showing pictures of Mr. Trump and Mr. Modi.





A crowd turned out for a rally with both leaders in Ahmedabad in 2020. Atul Loke for The New York Times

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In Mr. Trump's second term, foreign leaders have found success by tending to his ego with compliments and gifts. The British prime minister arrived at the White House with a letter from King Charles. The Finnish president bonded with Mr. Trump on the golf course. Even President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine, whom Mr. Trump once berated in public, showed up at the White House and thanked him in front of the cameras.

But what Mr. Trump wants most from Mr. Modi is a political nonstarter.

If Mr. Modi were to be perceived as having caved to American pressure for a cease-fire with a weaker nation, the costs at home would be enormous. Mr. Modi's strongman identity depends, in large part, on how tough he is on Pakistan. Acknowledging that Mr. Trump had a role, let alone nominating him for a Nobel for it, would be seen as surrender. For Pakistan, which has found itself in Mr. Trump's good graces recently, the decision to nominate him for the prize came quickly.

30dc-trump-modi EDIT

Want to stay updated on what's happening in India, Pakistan and Russia? [Sign up for Your Places: Global Update](#), and we'll send our latest coverage to your inbox.

It is difficult to quantify exactly how much influence the United States had in resolving the latest outbreak of violence between India and Pakistan. Mr. Trump contends that he used trade as leverage to get the two sides to stop fighting. After these enticements and warnings, he said, “all of a sudden they said, ‘I think we will stop’” the fighting.

India denies that.

Washington does carry a lot of sway on both sides, and historically, messages from American leaders have helped quell tensions. But the fact that Mr. Modi could not find a way to even subtly acknowledge some Trump role, given the stakes, shows how explosive the issue is for him. Analysts say the extreme rigidity of the Indian response also speaks to how power over the past decade has been increasingly centralized at the service of protecting Mr. Modi's strongman image at all costs.

“The idea that Modi would accept a cease-fire under U.S. pressure or that he needed or sought mediation — it doesn't just go against his personality,” said Tanvi Madan, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. “It goes against Indian diplomatic practice. Modi sold his relationships with U.S. presidents as an asset — strategically and politically — and now the opposition is portraying his friendship with Trump as a liability.”

ALTTEXT Mr. Modi walking past military officers and a mural of armed soldiers.



Mr. Modi inspecting an honor guard this month in New Delhi. If he were to be perceived as having caved to American pressure for a cease-fire with Pakistan, the political costs at home would be enormous. Money Sharma/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

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After the June call with Mr. Trump, Indian officials put out a statement saying Mr. Modi had “firmly stated that India does not and will never accept mediation” and that “President Trump listened carefully” and “expressed his support toward India’s fight against terrorism.”

The White House did not acknowledge the call, nor did Mr. Trump post about it on his social media accounts. And yet, four days after he spoke with Mr. Modi, Mr. Trump mentioned the issue again when he announced a peace deal between Congo

and Rwanda.

“I won’t get a Nobel Peace Prize for this, I won’t get a Nobel Peace Prize for stopping the War between India and Pakistan,” Mr. Trump posted. “No, I won’t get a Nobel Peace Prize no matter what I do.”

‘This Is About More Than Just Russia’

Mr. Trump says the tariffs on India are punishment for buying Russian oil and for the protectionist nature of the Indian market, a longstanding complaint for Mr. Trump and other American presidents.

The White House insists that the two men have “a respectful relationship” and “remain in close communication,” Anna Kelly, a White House spokeswoman, said in a statement.

“President Trump was able to successfully bring peace to the conflict between India and Pakistan,” she said, repeating the assertion that India had flatly denied.

But to many officials and observers, the colossal penalties on India in particular appear to be punishment for not falling in line rather than any kind of cohesive effort to reduce the trade deficit or cut off funding for Mr. Putin’s war. They point out that China, the biggest importer of Russian crude, has been spared.

ALT TEXT Men in blue and brown shirts shoveling ice into boxes as other men load the boxes onto trucks.



Workers packing boxes of prawns for export in Kochi, India. Elke Scholiers/Getty Images

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“If this was a real change in policy in trying to squeeze Russia, Trump could have put his weight behind legislation that would have imposed secondary sanctions on countries that buy Russian hydrocarbons,” said Richard M. Rossow, the chair on India at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. “The fact that they have uniquely targeted India says this is about more than just Russia,” he added.

India is now alone with Brazil, led by a president who has antagonized Mr. Trump directly, in being subject to 50 percent tariffs, higher than any other country. (Pakistan came away with 19 percent.)

Another point of tension has been the power of the anti-immigrant sentiments within Mr. Trump’s base. Indian officials believed early on that they could find common ground with the American right-wing movement but they were caught off guard by the rift among Mr. Trump’s supporters over H-1B visas, with much of the attention directed at Indians, who make up the largest holders of such visas.

Indian students also make up one out of every four foreign students in the United States, so Mr. Trump's crackdown on student visas took the country by surprise.

Stephen Miller, a top adviser to Mr. Trump, has repeatedly complained to the president about the high numbers of undocumented immigrants from India, who are among those who have been rounded up and deported as part of Mr. Trump's crackdown on illegal immigration. The method and timing of some of those deportations caused headaches for Mr. Modi and made clear Mr. Trump would not be sensitive to the political realities the Indian leader was facing.

ALTEXT A woman and child watching a U.S. military plane landing at an airport.



A U.S. military plane carrying Indian deportees landing in Amritsar in February. Adnan Abidi/Reuters

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Planeloads of deportees in shackles and handcuffs arrived in India in February, causing an uproar just as Mr. Modi was departing for a trip to Washington.

But at a friendly news conference during the visit that month, there were signs that the two sides could still find a way forward, with India buying billions of dollars more of American oil and gas, to assuage Mr. Trump's grievance over the balance sheet.

"We can make up the difference very easily with the deficit," Mr. Trump said, with Mr. Modi standing next to him.

'Do You Believe Me or Trump?'

Then, in May, some of the worst fighting in decades erupted between India and Pakistan.

The conflict began after 26 people were killed in a terrorist attack on the Indian side of Kashmir, a contested region between the two nations, while Vice President JD Vance and his family were on a visit in India. Mr. Trump dialed up Mr. Modi to express his sympathies.

As the fighting raged, with both sides firing drones and missiles over four days, the Trump administration stepped in to lend its weight for a diplomatic solution, with the vice president and the secretary of state making calls to both sides.

Early in the evening on the fourth day of fighting, reporters were called for a news conference in New Delhi with rumors that a conditional cease-fire had been agreed to by the two sides. But just before India's foreign secretary, Vikram Misri, stepped up to the podium to make the announcement, Mr. Trump upstaged him by flashing an announcement of "FULL AND IMMEDIATE CEASEFIRE" on Truth Social.

Minutes later, Marco Rubio, the secretary of state, announced that India and Pakistan had agreed "to start talks on a broad set of issues at a neutral site."



That statement in particular was galling to the Indians because it has been India's policy for decades that the issue of Pakistan — especially in relation to Kashmir — is one for the two countries to handle alone, without third-party mediation.

ALT TEXT A woman in a yellow sari looking at her home which has a large hole in the ceiling.



A woman surveying the damage to her home in Kashmir during the conflict between India and Pakistan in May. Atul Loke for The New York Times

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ALT TEXT Men in uniforms and red headdresses lay flowers next to a casket.





The funeral of an Indian border security soldier who was killed during fighting in the Kashmir region in May. Atul Loke for The New York Times

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The shock and anger was clear on the faces of the Indian officials in the room. Mr. Misri stepped up and read his statement, making no mention of any outside role or Mr. Trump's claim, and left. When reporters swarmed around other officials and asked about Mr. Trump's declaration, one official pushed back: "Do you believe me or Trump?"

A Declined Invitation to Washington

By the time Mr. Trump and Mr. Modi got on the phone in June, there might have been an opportunity to mend ties and refocus on the ongoing trade negotiations.

But that did not happen.

The call, which lasted 35 minutes, took place as Mr. Trump flew back to Washington on Air Force One after he left early from the Group of 7 industrialized countries meeting in Canada, which Mr. Modi also attended.

Mr. Modi declined an invitation from Mr. Trump to stop by Washington before he flew home. His officials were scandalized that Mr. Trump might try to force their leader into a handshake with Pakistan's army chief, who had also been invited to the White House for lunch around the same time. It was another clear sign, a senior Indian official said, that Mr. Trump cared little for the complexity of their issue or the sensitivities and history around it.

Later on, there was talk of trying to set up another call to finalize a partial trade deal. But with the trust between the two leaders eroding, the Indians were wary of putting Mr. Modi on the phone with Mr. Trump. Indian officials were nervous that Mr. Trump would post whatever he wanted on Truth Social, regardless of what agreements were made on the call, a senior Indian official said.

Mr. Trump, frustrated by the tariff negotiations, reached out to Mr. Modi several times, according to two people briefed on the discussions who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss them publicly.

Mr. Modi did not respond to those requests, they said.

Ms. Kelly, the White House spokeswoman, denied that Mr. Trump had reached out.

In the final stretch before the additional 25 percent tariff kicked in on Wednesday, Mr. Trump announced he was nominating Sergio Gor, a close adviser, to serve as ambassador to India, with the additional charge of special envoy for the region. (Indian officials were torn over how to read the nomination — Mr. Gor was close to Mr. Trump, yes, but they were offended that the “regional” envoy designation lumped India in with Pakistan.)

In the hours before the deadline, officials from the United States and India held a virtual meeting, discussing a range of issues from trade to defense cooperation.

But not only have the additional tariffs gone into effect as announced, Mr. Trump’s advisers have continued railing against India. One called India’s approach to trade negotiations “arrogant” and another went as far as calling the conflict in Ukraine “Modi’s war.”

Now, Mr. Modi, in public at least, appears to be moving on from talk of trade negotiations. Instead, he is talking about “self-reliance” and reviving his decade-old “Make in India” campaign as he continues to play to his home base.

And during this weekend’s trip to China — Mr. Modi’s first in seven years — he is expected to have a receptive audience for stronger and expanded ties with Beijing and Moscow.

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A version of this article appears in print on , Section A, Page 1 of the New York edition with the headline: The Striking Split Between Trump and Modi

President Trump has yet to make a decision, but his advisers are pressing a range of objectives — from attacking drug cartels to seizing oil fields — to try to justify ousting Nicolás Maduro.



By David E. Sanger, Tyler Pager, Helene Cooper, Eric Schmitt and Devlin Barrett

Reporting from Washington

Nov. 4, 2025

The Trump administration has developed a range of options for military action in Venezuela, including direct attacks on military units that protect President Nicolás Maduro and moves to seize control of the country's oil fields, according to multiple U.S. officials.

President Trump has yet to make a decision about how or even whether to proceed. Officials said he was reluctant to approve operations that may place American troops at risk or could turn into an embarrassing failure. But many of his senior advisers are pressing for one of the most aggressive options: ousting Mr. Maduro from power.

Mr. Trump's aides have asked the Justice Department for additional guidance that could provide a legal basis for any military action beyond the current campaign of striking boats that the administration says are trafficking narcotics, without providing evidence. Such guidance could include a legal rationale for targeting Mr. Maduro without creating the need for congressional authorization for the use of military force, much less a declaration of war.

While the guidance is still being drafted, some administration officials expect it will argue that Mr. Maduro and his top security officials are central figures in the Cartel de los Soles, which the administration has designated as a narcoterrorist group.



The Justice Department is expected to contend that designation makes Mr. Maduro a legitimate target despite longstanding American legal prohibitions on assassinating national leaders.

The Justice Department declined to comment. But the move to justify targeting Mr. Maduro would constitute another effort by the administration to stretch its legal authorities. It has already engaged in targeted killings of suspected drug smugglers who, until September, were pursued and arrested at sea rather than killed in drone strikes. Any effort to remove Mr. Maduro would place the administration under further scrutiny over whatever legal rationale it does offer, given the hazy mix of reasons it has presented so far for confronting Mr. Maduro. Among them are drug trafficking, the need for American access to oil and Mr. Trump's claims that the Venezuelan government released prisoners into the United States.

Mr. Trump has issued a series of contradictory public messages about his intentions, and the goals and justification for any future military action. He has said in recent weeks that the attacks on speedboats in the Caribbean Sea and the Eastern Pacific — including another strike on Tuesday — that have killed at least 67 people would be expanded to land attacks. But that has not happened yet.

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U.S. Marines training in Arroyo, Puerto Rico, last month. There are about 10,000 American military personnel in the Caribbean, roughly half on warships and half on bases in Puerto Rico. Ricardo Arduengo/Reuters

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When asked by CBS News whether the United States is headed to war with Venezuela, Mr. Trump said on Sunday: “I doubt it. I don’t think so, but they’ve been treating us very badly, not only on drugs.” He repeated his unsupported allegation that Mr. Maduro opened his prisons and mental institutions, and sent Tren de Aragua gang members to the United States, a charge Mr. Trump has made since his campaign for the presidency last year.

Asked whether Mr. Maduro’s days as president of Venezuela were numbered, he added, “I think so, yeah.”

The support for the more aggressive options is coming from Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who is also the acting national security adviser, and Stephen Miller, Mr. Trump’s deputy chief of staff and homeland security adviser. According to

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several U.S. officials, they have privately said they believe Mr. Maduro should be forced out.

Mr. Trump has repeatedly expressed reservations, aides say, in part because of a fear that the operation could fail. Mr. Trump is in no rush to make a decision, and has repeatedly asked about what the United States could get in return, with a specific focus on extracting some of the value of Venezuela's oil for the United States.

“President Trump has been clear in his message to Maduro: Stop sending drugs and criminals to our country,” Anna Kelly, a White House spokeswoman, said in a statement. “The president has made clear that he will continue to strike narcoterrorists trafficking illicit narcotics — anything else is speculation and should be treated as such.”

Mr. Trump will most likely not be forced to decide at least until the Gerald R. Ford, the United States' largest and newest aircraft carrier, arrives in the Caribbean sometime in the middle of this month. The Ford carries about 5,000 sailors and has more than 75 attack, surveillance and support aircraft, including F/A-18 fighters.



The aircraft carrier Gerald R. Ford will arrive in the Caribbean in the middle of this month. Jonathan Klein/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

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There has been a steady buildup of U.S. troops in the region since late August. Even before the carrier arrives, there are about 10,000 American military personnel in the Caribbean, roughly half on warships and half on bases in Puerto Rico.

The Pentagon has in recent weeks also dispatched B-52 and B-1 bombers from bases in Louisiana and Texas to fly missions off the coast of Venezuela in what military officials call a show of force. B-52s can carry dozens of precision-guided bombs, and B-1s can carry up to 75,000 pounds of guided and unguided munitions, the largest nonnuclear payload of any aircraft in the Air Force arsenal.

And the Army's elite 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, which conducted extensive counterterrorism helicopter operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, recently carried out what the Pentagon said were training exercises off the Venezuelan coast.

The military buildup has been so rapid, and so public, that it appears to be part of a psychological pressure campaign on Mr. Maduro. In fact, Mr. Trump has talked openly about his decision to issue a “finding” that permits the C.I.A. to conduct covert operations inside Venezuela — the kind of operation presidents almost never discuss in advance.

Should Mr. Trump elect to order the action inside Venezuela, it would amount to a considerable military, legal and political risk. For all the risks Mr. Trump took in authorizing the American bombing of three nuclear-related sites in Iran in June, it did not involve an effort to overthrow or replace the Iranian government.

If Mr. Trump goes that route, there is no assurance that he would succeed or that he could guarantee that a new government would arise friendlier to the United States. Aides say that far more planning has gone into striking at the Maduro government than on what it would take to govern Venezuela should the operation succeed.

And some of Mr. Trump’s most loyal political backers have been warning against striking at Mr. Maduro, reminding the president he was elected to end “forever wars,” not incite new ones.

A Military Plan in Three Parts



American F-35 fighter jets at an airport in Ceiba, Puerto Rico, on Monday. There has been a steady U.S. military buildup in the Caribbean since late August. Alejandro Granadillo/Associated Press

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Mr. Trump's authorization for the C.I.A. to operate inside Venezuela's borders could enable the agency to conduct a variety of activities, from information operations to building opposition to Mr. Maduro to actively sabotaging his government — and even seizing the leader himself. But national security officials say that if such operations could really pry Mr. Maduro from power, he would have been gone years ago. That is why the White House is considering military action, and the proposals on the table come in three broad varieties.

The first option would involve airstrikes against military facilities, some of which might be involved in facilitating drug trafficking, with the aim of collapsing Venezuelan military support for Mr. Maduro. If Mr. Maduro believed he was no longer protected, he might seek to flee — or, in moving around the country, make



himself more vulnerable to capture, officials say. Critics of such an approach warn that it could have the opposite effect, of rallying support around the embattled leader.

A second approach envisions the United States sending Special Operations forces, such as the Army's Delta Force or the Navy's SEAL Team 6, to try to capture or kill Mr. Maduro. Under this option, the Trump administration would seek to sidestep prohibitions against assassinating foreign leaders by arguing that Mr. Maduro is, first and foremost, the head of a narcoterrorist gang, an extension of the arguments used to justify the U.S. airstrikes on boats the administration says are smuggling drugs.

The State Department has a \$50 million reward for Mr. Maduro's arrest or conviction — up from the \$25 million offered in the last days of the Biden administration. The Trump administration may also argue that because Mr. Maduro suppressed opposition and worked to rig elections, he is not the legitimate leader of the country. The Biden administration refused to recognize him as Venezuela's president after he declared victory last year.

A third option involves a much more complicated plan to send U.S. counterterrorism forces to seize control of airfields and at least some of Venezuela's oil fields and infrastructure.

These last two options carry much greater risks to American commandos on the ground — not to mention civilians — especially if they were targeting Mr. Maduro in an urban setting like Caracas, the country's capital.

Mr. Trump has been reluctant to consider attacks that could put American troops at risk. As a result, many of the plans under development employ naval drones and long-range weapons, options that may prove more viable once the Ford and other ships are in place.

For Trump, an Oil Conundrum



Seizing Venezuela's oil fields is one option the Trump administration has developed. Adriana Loureiro Fernandez for The New York Times

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Mr. Trump is deeply focused on Venezuela's enormous oil reserves, the largest in the world. But how to deal with them — whether to cut off exports to the United States or keep them going in hopes of retaining a foothold should Mr. Maduro be ousted — is a problem that has vexed administration officials for the past 10 months.

Even as Mr. Trump doubled the bounty on Mr. Maduro and called him a narcoterrorist, he canceled, then renewed, a license for Chevron, an American oil company that is a pillar of Venezuela's economy, to keep operating there.

Chevron's existing license was killed in March under pressure from Mr. Rubio, and over the summer Venezuelan exports to the United States plummeted. But a new license — the details of which have been kept confidential — apparently prevents



the company from sending hard currency into Venezuela's banking system. Still, Chevron's oil exports are providing Mr. Maduro's economy with real support.

Chevron is a rare survivor; most American oil companies operating in the country had their assets seized or transferred to state-owned firms years ago. The company is one of the few that have figured out how to deal with both Mr. Trump and Mr. Maduro, who declared that "I want Chevron here for another 100 years." It has hired as its lobbyist in Washington a top fund-raiser for Mr. Trump.

Mr. Maduro made a last-ditch effort over the past few months to offer Mr. Trump oil concessions, including a dominant stake in Venezuela's oil and other mineral wealth. He dangled the possibility of opening up existing and future oil and gold projects to American companies, which would receive preferential contracts. And he said he would redirect exports that are now headed to China, and limit mining contracts with Chinese, Iranian and Russian firms.

But Mr. Trump rejected the offer in early October, and the U.S. military buildup accelerated.

Should Mr. Maduro's government fall and be replaced by a stable leadership open to improved relations with the United States, Chevron would be best positioned for what the Trump administration believes would be a boom in investment in the country's huge oil reserves. It is a topic that fascinates Mr. Trump, much as it did when he urged the seizing of oil fields in Syria, whose reserves are a tiny fraction of Venezuela's.

The company is keeping its head down.

"We believe our presence continues to be a stabilizing force for the local economy, the region and U.S. energy security," said Bill Turenne, a Chevron spokesman.

Seeking a Legal Rationale



A Reaper drone armed with missiles in Aguadilla, Puerto Rico, last month. Ricardo Arduengo/Reuters

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As Mr. Trump’s aides push for the most aggressive military option, lawyers at the Justice Department are working to develop a legal analysis to justify the full range of military options that are being developed.

White House officials have said they want an updated legal analysis before taking any additional steps, and administration lawyers told Congress last week that the president did not need congressional approval for his lethal military strikes on boats.

T. Elliot Gaiser, who leads the department’s Office of Legal Counsel, told Congress that the administration did not think the boat-strike operation rose to the kind of “hostilities” covered by a 1973 law called the War Powers Resolution, which limits the president from conducting military operations for longer than 60 days without



congressional approval. But lawmakers on both sides of the aisle have raised concerns about the strikes and have demanded more information from the administration.

Perhaps the closest recent parallel to a legal justification for killing a head of state would be a legal opinion produced by the Office of Legal Counsel during Mr. Trump's first term. It concluded that the president had authority to conduct a missile strike to kill Maj. Gen. Qassim Suleimani.

General Suleimani was Iran's top intelligence and security commander when he was killed by a U.S. drone strike in 2020, and Mr. Trump has long viewed that killing as one of the signature successes of his first term.

In that instance, the Office of Legal Counsel concluded that the drone strike could be carried out because General Suleimani was "actively developing plans for further attacks against U.S. military personnel and diplomats," according to a heavily redacted memo released after the strike.

"Military leaders who organize and oversee attacks against U.S. persons and interests may be legitimate military targets," the memo said, adding that the strike was intended "to avoid civilian casualties or substantial collateral damage" and was not aimed "at imposing through military means a change in the character of a political regime."

The memo concluded that "given the targeted scope of the mission, the available intelligence and the efforts to avoid escalation," a drone strike against him "would not rise to the level of a war for constitutional purposes."

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