

Look through the smoke and chaos and drama. Elon Musk is blundering and flailing and destroying the Trump White House



The words “shock and awe” describe the first month of the second Trump administration pretty well, it seems to me. It’s been a blitzkrieg of executive orders, mass firings, violations of laws and norms, wanton cruelty for the sick, destitute, and hungry, and performative administrative chaos as far as the eye can see — all designed to paralyze and stun what’s left of the opposition.

And front and center: a drug-fueled, sleep-addled billionaire, commandeering the Oval Office, offering half-baked political theories, threatening judges with impeachment, tweeting at the pace of an adderall-addicted gamer, and holding press conferences with a toddler on his shoulders, where he tells the world he cannot be trusted to tell the truth. I guess there are some people who find all this deeply impressive. I’m sorry to say that, despite agreeing with some of Trump’s policy planks, I don’t.

Which brings me back to “shock and awe.” You may recall those words were also once used by a previous administration, huffing its own fumes, bent on breaking norms and boldly declaring a new era.

We know now, of course, how the Iraq War ended. And it's beginning to look as if Trump 2.0 will have something like the same result.

Take DOGE. First off: is this what Trump really ran on? Slashing government spending is a Ryan/Romney type of Republicanism, not Trumpism. Trump, like Karl Rove, has never cared about deficits. "I'm the King of Debt," he once bragged in a rare lapse into honesty. In his first term, Trump ran up the deficit with glee; and in the first 30 days of this term, his spending per day is \$4 billion higher than Biden's was a year ago. Go read Riedl for how Trump is set to bankrupt the US still further.

Speaking of which: next up are massive tax cuts for the wealthy — paid for by huge cuts to Medicaid and SNAP. Just what Trump's new multiracial working-class coalition wants! In a Fox News poll, only 1 percent of Americans favored "tax reform" as a Trump priority. I doubt "tax cuts" would get even that.

More to the point, Musk is doing nothing *serious* to actually cut the deficit. Of course he isn't: 90 percent of government spending is outside his remit. And where does this guy cut? A program, PEPFAR, that is a rare example of a hugely successful, cost-efficient program; and an entity, the CFPB, which was the only thing that empowered the little guy against big financial corporations after 2008. Populism reborn! Please.

Worse, Musk has cut and fired first, often illegally, and asked questions after — which leaves everything vulnerable to being reversed as soon as the courts weigh in. Has he uncovered rampant fraud, as he and Trump insist? None they've shown us. Is the goal to get a case to SCOTUS to affirm the executive's control of the purse? Maybe. But meantime, many of the EOs are simply and easily being reversed by the courts.

As for that "power of the purse"? Does Vought really think that Kavanaugh or Roberts is about to turn the Congress into the equivalent of Putin's rubber-stamp Duma? The same Kavanaugh who previously ruled that "even the President does not have unilateral authority to refuse to spend" funds appropriated by Congress? The same Roberts who ruled that "no area seems more clearly the province of Congress than the power of the purse"? Let's just say that I doubt even this Court will assent to a Claremonster's view of the American presidency. Which means that all this law-breaking is for naught in the long-term. It's chaos leading to failure.

Imagine what they might have done. Trump could have announced that Musk and his minions were going in to audit the federal government. Within a few months, they'd bring a report, outlining every insane piece of waste or DEI excess or fraud they could find. Trump would then urge Congress to vote on these reforms. Win, win, win. It's a great idea to shake up the joint with an outsider! But nah. They are busy ensuring that any cuts they make are brutal, dumb, and destined to expire.

Immigration? As of now, we've seen no major change since Biden's executive order restoring control. The border is extremely quiet. Deportations? The pace of arrests is up but still only around a third of the levels Trump promised. Give him time, of course, but so far: underwhelming. Foreign policy? A man who pledged to keep the US from getting into quagmires abroad now wants the US to take over — *checks notes* — Gaza, ethnically cleanse its inhabitants, and give it all to Jared and his friends to make money. He also wants to invade and occupy ... Greenland! In talking to Russia, he has begun

by blessing Putin's conquered territories in Eastern Ukraine in advance — for nothing in return. What a negotiator!

And remember the other issue that won him major support: inflation. It ticked up this month, with the average wholesale price of eggs reaching an all-time high of \$8 a dozen. It will get worse: Trump is pursuing lower interest rates from the Fed *and* higher tariffs everywhere: a recipe for super-charging inflation. "The layers of intellectual confusion here are hard to parse," notes the Wall Street Journal, with uncharacteristic understatement. What happens to Trump's support when inflation takes off again?

Trump is on firmer ground with his efforts to leverage the federal government's ubiquitous funding to curtail DEI's race and sex discrimination. But even here, he is larding up the public record with comments that absolutely reflect his own animus and bigotry — especially against trans people — which will give opponents some chance to fight back in the courts. He didn't have to do this. There are good, non-transphobic arguments for fairness in sports and ethical medicine for children. But a bigot's gotta bigot, even if it boomerangs on him, as it should.

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Trump is also making exactly the same mistake as Biden did. Biden refused to have any enemies to his left, enabling crazies and extremists and fanatics to run riot in his administration. Trump has a no-enemies-to-the-right approach — which means, for example, he is more than happy to rehire a grown man who just a few months ago tweeted "Normalize Indian hate," "Just for the record, I was racist before it was cool," and "You could not pay me to marry outside of my ethnicity." If expressing neo-Nazi views does not disqualify you from the Trump team, nothing does.

Then there's the equivalent of Caligula's legendary (and probably exaggerated) nomination of his horse for a consulship. That's RFK Jr, a man who doesn't believe in vaccines in charge of vaccines; or Tulsi Gabbard, a steward of US intelligence who prefers the KGB to the CIA. Or the insane idea that the president of the United States can just declare that the Gulf of Mexico is now called something else — and then take your press credentials away if you don't agree.

I guess you could call this frightening. But another word for it is pathetic. Last year, a ton of readers who agreed with me on immigration, DEI, the transing of children, and the need for a more restrained foreign policy asked, in frustration, why I still couldn't endorse Trump.

I hope that's clearer now.