

THE TRENDS JOURNAL[®]

HISTORY BEFORE IT HAPPENS[®]



**MONEY IS
POWER**

WE RUN THE WORLD

SHUT YOUR MOUTH & DO AS YOU'RE TOLD

TRENDS JOURNAL

HISTORY BEFORE IT HAPPENS®

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About the TRENDS JOURNAL

Gerald Celente is the Founder/Director of the Trends Research Institute and Publisher of the weekly **Trends Journal** magazine. He is the author of the highly acclaimed and best-selling books *Trend Tracking* and *Trends 2000* (Warner Books).

With a 40-year track record of identifying, tracking, and forecasting trends, Celente is world-renowned as today's #1 Trend Forecaster. Celente has earned the reputation as a trusted name in trends for his many accurate forecasts; among them the 1987 Stock Market crash, Dot com bust, "Gold Bull Run," the "Panic of '08," the rise of organic foods, and the popularity of gourmet coffee long before Starbucks was a household name.

Self-described as a "Warrior for the Prince of Peace," Gerald Celente is also the Founder "Occupy Peace & Freedom," a not-for-profit movement to honor the Constitution and Bill of Rights and restore Freedoms.

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MONEY IS POWER

Welcome to this week's [Trends Journal](#): **"MONEY IS POWER. WE RUN THE WORLD.**

SHUT YOUR MOUTH AND DO WHAT YOU ARE TOLD"

Donald Trump secured victory thanks to the working-class vote and has quickly surrounded himself with a cabal of billionaires who stand to gain even more wealth from their proximity to power.

None are more prominent than Elon Musk, the new Washington powerhouse, who as the richest man in the world with a net worth of some \$400 billion, is the new sheriff in town on the hunt for government waste.

But how much of Musk's wealth and influence comes from his cozy ties to government contracts and his budding relationship with Trump?

On 7 February, Musk posted on X: "I love @realDonaldTrump as much as a straight man can love another man." What does this public display of admiration signal for the future of politics and power dynamics?

It was a [remarkable scene](#) inside the Oval Office last week when Trump sat

submissively behind the Resolute Desk while Musk and his four-year-old son addressed reporters. The super-rich have always run the country, but now it plays out before our eyes. If you are not a billionaire—or bankrolled by Peter Thiel—just shut your mouth and do what the billionaires tell you.

Once upon a time there was a dictator by the name of Benito Mussolini who called the merger of state and corporate powers "Fascism": Welcome to Amerika.

On the Ukraine War Front

On a positive note, there was a U.S.-Russia meeting in Riyadh aimed to carve a path toward peace in Ukraine. The question is will Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky and his European allies accept it... more to come.

On the Economic Front

The Street remained steady today, but our forecast reveals why 2025 is shaping up to be another [Golden Year for Gold](#).

To access the magazine content, go to www.trendsjournal.com and sign in with your username and password. You can click on individual articles, download the PDF, peruse the Flip Book, and read it in different languages.

Sincerely,

Gerald Celente and the Trends Journal Team

TRENDS ON THE ECONOMIC AND MARKET FRONT



ECONOMIC UPDATE - MARKET OVERVIEW

We have entered a new economic cycle, the likes of which we have not seen in recent history. Indeed, we had forecast that two of our Top Trends for 2025 would be the [Trump Card](#) and the [Wild Card](#). And now, just a little over a month after we made those forecasts, both those cards are being played... and how they will play out no one knows.

Yet, there is one market player that has taken center stage that agrees with our trend forecasts that in these times of the Trump Card and Wild Card being dealt, it is time to play the Gold Card.

While **The Trends Journal** has been bullish on gold and the only magazine in the world that had forecast that 2024 would be a [Golden Year for Gold](#) (gold prices rose

25 percent last year) and remained bullish to a lesser degree after Donald Trump got elected, the current spike in gold prices, after retreating last Friday, is a warning signal about the future that is unparalleled.

As trend forecasters, we look at the current events forming future trends for what they are and not for what we'd like, want, or hope for... it's "what is" by the hard facts and indisputable data. We are political atheists that view most of the people running governments around the world as the heads of a political freak show... essentially dictators dictating what we the people of Slavelandia must do, and to them we are obligated to follow their orders.

And that brings us to the Trump side of what in the world is going on. As we detail in this and previous **Trends Journals**, there is the good, the bad and the ugly... and with him being in office for just about one month, already dozens of Trump Cards have been played, and it has just begun.

Which brings us back to gold.

We have been in the trend forecasting business for 45 years, and never in that time has the rising prices of gold been essential news in the mainstream business media. But now, while not making the headlines, as a result of a number of Trump issues, such as tariffs, the rise in gold prices are being reported... but not as much as they should be.

Need proof?

This today's CNBC headline: **S&P 500 sets fresh record as stocks rally into the close.**

They go on to write that "investors shook off headwinds on the global trade and inflation fronts" and that "Energy was the best-performing sector in the S&P 500, rising 1.9 percent. Halliburton and Valero Energy led the advance. Tech stocks also ticked higher."

And while the S&P is up some 4.5 percent this year, not a peep about gold closing at \$2,935, just \$5 down from its all-time high, and up nearly 12 percent this year.

TREND FORECAST: *We maintain our trend forecast that before this year is over, the Dot.com Bust 2.0, which is being totally ignored by the mainstream media but highly reported in this and previous **Trends Journals**, will crash the equity markets and push gold prices much higher.*



Also ignored by the mainstream business media is the coming [Office Building Bust](#) that will **ignite** our [Banks Go Bust](#) trend forecast which we again note in this week's **Trends Journal**.

Therefore, while there will be a correction in gold prices—nothing goes straight up or down—considering these current and emerging mega-trends, we forecast that gold prices in 2025 will keep hitting new highs.

LAST WEEK: BULLS SHRUG OFF ECONOMIC WARNING SIGNS

Stock markets brushed aside news of weaker-than-expected consumer

spending, trade tensions, and stubborn inflation and kept climbing last week.

"You can really tell we're in a bull market," Chris Zaccarelli, chief investment officer at Northlight Asset Management, said to *The Wall Street Journal*. "All bad news seems to have been overlooked, and really good news is celebrated."

For the week, the Dow Jones Industrial Average added 0.34 percent. The NASDAQ took on another 1.82 percent and closed above 20,000 for only the third time in its history. The Standard & Poor's 500 rose 1.13 percent.

The Dow's growth was held back by the consumer perishables sector. Procter & Gamble's share price sank 4.8 percent.

The yield on the 10-year treasury note declined for the third consecutive week, closing at 4.475 percent.

U.S. spot gold kept moving up, reaching \$2,918.05 at 5 p.m. U.S. EST on 14 February and gaining 1.3 percent over the week.

Brent crude oil for April delivery ticked down 0.1 percent to \$74.56 at 5 p.m. U.S. EST on 14 February. West Texas Intermediate, the pricing standard for U.S. domestic crude, was down 1.1 percent at \$70.74.

Bitcoin ended the week up less than 0.01 percent at \$97,312.05 at 5 p.m. U.S. EST on 14 February.

Abroad, stocks had a positive five days.

London's FTSE 100 gained 0.37 percent. The pan-European Stoxx 600 added 1.67 percent, rising for its eighth week in a row.

The Japanese Nikkei 225 increased by 0.62 percent. South Korea's KOSPI shot up 3.2 percent as the country's political crisis continued to ease.

The Hang Seng index in Hong Kong soared 6.58 percent as Chinese president Xi Jinping said he would meet with top tech executives to discuss a lighter regulatory touch. At the same time, investors flooded money into Chinese tech firms in the wake of start-up DeepSeek's announcement that it had created an inexpensive, high-performance artificial intelligence platform. (See ["China's Equity Markets Soar on AI Promise"](#) in this issue.)

Mainland China's CSI 300 index climbed 1.05 percent and the SSE Composite 1.17 percent.

YESTERDAY: STOCK MARKET CLOSED FOR HOLIDAY, INVESTORS LOOK TO FED

The U.S. stock market was closed for President's Day yesterday and investors were using the day off to consider future moves by President Donald Trump and the Federal Reserve.

Michelle Bowman, the governor of the central bank, told the American Bankers Association that she believes there needs to be more progress on inflation made before the bank goes forward with rate cuts.

The Fed in January voted to keep interest rates at a range of 4.25 percent to 4.50 percent, citing a strong job market and high consumer demand. Bowman told the association that she wants to continue to see signs that inflation has been tamed before future rate cuts.

Consumer prices in December increased 0.5 percent, despite economists predicting a 0.3 percent increase. The jump was the biggest since the summer of 2023. CME Group data indicated that the next rate cut will likely be September and there's a 70 percent likelihood that there will only be one cut this entire year.

"I continue to see greater risks to price stability, especially while the labor market remains strong," Bowman said, according to CNBC.

Elsewhere, London's FTSE gained 35.55, or 0.41 percent, to 8,768.01 and the STOXX600 was up 3.01, or 0.54 percent, to 555.42. In Asia, Japan's Nikkei was up 24.82, or 0.06 percent, to 39,174.25 and Hong Kong's Hang Seng lost 4.10, or 0.02 percent, to 22,616.23. China's Shanghai Composite gained 9.11, or 0.27 percent, to 3,355.83 and the Shenzhen Component was up 41.60, or 0.39 percent, to 10,791.06.

TRENDPOST: *There has been a lot of talk about Trump's tariffs and how they could drive up inflation, if implemented, and economists are beginning to say that these levies will only increase prices modestly for the average American.*

Christopher J. Waller, another Fed governor, told The New York Times that he believes that it is clear that the policy rate should remain steady. However, the gold market sees it differently. Like it or not, agree or disagree, considering President Donald Trump's geopolitical and economic statements, especially on tariff and trade issues, demand for gold, the world's #1 safe-haven asset, remains bullish. And as we have forecast, as he did when he was President in 2018, Trump will again force the Fed to lower interest rates if the equity markets and economy are in a danger zone.

OIL: London-traded Brent crude closed up 0.6 percent higher to \$75.22 a barrel and U.S. West Texas Intermediate gained 50 cents to close at \$71 a barrel.

Oil investors kept a close eye on any developments out of the Ukraine War, given that Trump seems to be moving the ball along to bring the conflict to a resolution. Top officials from Moscow and Washington were set to meet in Riyadh on Tuesday—sending a shockwave through Europe.

The *Financial Times* noted that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said he would reject any deal made without a delegation from Kyiv at the table.

TRENDPOST: *Traders told Reuters that an end of the conflict would likely mean a dramatic decrease in oil prices because more Russian barrels would "enter global supplies."*

It is also worth noting that Ukraine has been firing missiles and drones at soft targets in Russia in hopes of damaging its energy capability. Again, minus the Ukraine and Israel war wild cards, should there be more peace on Earth, considering the weakened global economy, oil prices will remain weak.

GOLD: The precious metal continued its upswing and was up 0.2 percent today to \$2,910.63.

TRENDPOST: *Gerald Celente spoke with King World News last week and said he is still bullish on gold and said 2025 will be another “GOLDEN YEAR.”*

“Again, love it, hate it, this new administration, there’s nothing like it before. And so there’s going to be a lot of volatility going on. And volatility, it’s bad for some markets but great for the gold market,” [Celente said](#).

BITCOIN: The world’s most popular crypto was selling down 440.16, or 0.46 percent, to 95,811.91 as of 3:36 p.m. ET.

Glassnode issued a report that showed how BTC has been volatile within the last few weeks, but essentially hanging in the \$92,000 to \$100,000 range.

“The indecisive price action is largely in response to President Trump’s threat of tariffs applied to Canada, Mexico and China, providing an uncertain macro backdrop for investors,” the report said. “Alongside this, persistent strength in the U.S. dollar has contributed to a marginally stressed liquidity environment.”

TRENDPOST: *The Trends Journal remains bullish on BTC as investors continue to look for alternative investments. We have long forecast that bitcoin will continue to be more widely adopted, especially by developing regions and nations.*

TODAY: DOW LITTLE CHANGED AS UKRAINE PEACE TALKS RAMP UP

The Dow Jones Industrial Average gained 10.26, or 0.02 percent, to 44,556.34 and the benchmark S&P 500 was up 14.95, or 0.24 percent, to 6,129.58. The tech-heavy Nasdaq gained 14.49, or 0.07 percent, to 20,041.26.

The U.S. stock market was closed yesterday for the President’s Day holiday.

Investors have been considering U.S. President Donald Trump’s tariff policy and the next move by the Federal Reserve, which the market is anticipating will not be for a while. There are some mixed opinions on Wall Street about Trump’s idea for tariffs.

Some investors opposed to the idea, say they will be inflationary and drive up prices for the American consumer, while others believe that risk is minimal.

Peter Navarro, a senior White House adviser, told *The New York Times* that these levies will not be “painful for America.”

“President Donald John Trump has proven that tariffs work for the American people, and they’re going to be even more—much more—important this second term.”

TRENDPOST: *Gerald Celente has noted that U.S. President John McKinley, who passed the Tariff Act of 1890, [rejected](#) the “cheaper is better” argument.*

“We had tariffs in this country. We didn’t have income tax,” Celente has said. “The government got the money from tariffs.”

We will have to wait and see how serious Trump is on implementing these tariffs.

Elsewhere, London’s FTSE was down 1.28, or 0.01 percent, to 8,766.73 and the benchmark STOXX600 was 1.75, or 0.32 percent, to 557.17. Japan’s Nikkei was up 96.15, or 0.25 percent, to 39,270.40 and Hong Kong’s Hang Seng was up 360.58, 1.59 percent, to 22,976.81. In China, the Shanghai Composite was up 31.34, or 0.93 percent, to 3,324.49 and the Shenzhen Component lost 173.80, or 1.61 percent, to 10,617.26.

OIL: London-traded Brent gained 62 cents, or 0.82 percent, to \$75.84 and U.S. West Texas Intermediate was up \$1.11, or 1.57 percent, to \$71.85.

Ukraine carried out another major drone strike on a Russian oil pipeline that knocked out about 30 percent of flows through Kazakhstan, impacting the globe’s oil supply and sending prices higher.

The Trends Journal has noted that Kyiv has resorted to striking soft targets to give the impression that it can make life hell for the Russian economy during the war. (See [“WWIII: UKRAINE CONTINUES ASSAULT ON SOFT TARGETS IN RUSSIA”](#) 14 May 2024.)

But a U.S. delegation, led by Secretary of State Marco Rubio, met with top Russian diplomats on Tuesday to discuss an end of the war and improved diplomatic relations. (Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky quickly rejected the meeting and said Kyiv would not honor any deal without its input.)

Sergey Lavrov, the Russian diplomat, told reporters after the meeting that he believed the discussions “were highly productive,” according to RT. He told reporters that the American delegation listened to Russia’s concerns about Ukraine and, “not only did we listen, but we genuinely heard each other.”

TRENDPOST: *There are a lot of wild cards. If Trump can land a peace deal in Ukraine, that would bring down crude prices, but there remains a major risk that the Zelensky government refuses to participate and tries to take the world down with it. Iran has also said that it will eventually carry out Operation True Promise III “at the right time.”*

GOLD: The precious metal continued to rise and was up \$35.30, or 1.22 percent, to \$2,933.30 an ounce.

TRENDPOST: *Gold investors have been seeking a safe haven due to political uncertainty in the U.S. and the lack of clarity about Trump’s future plans for tariffs on foreign goods. Investors will be eyeing tomorrow’s release of the minutes of the Fed’s meeting last month to get a sense of the bank’s position on recent economic data—including weaker-than-anticipated spending in U.S. retail in January.*

Please see our [ECONOMIC UPDATE](#) in this issue for an in-depth gold trend forecast.

BITCOIN: BTC was down \$589.81, or 0.62 percent, to \$95,225.39 as of 4:30 p.m. ET today as investors consider various economic pressures. Investors see \$95,000 as an important marker to sustain continued support.

BTC is down 9.54 percent for the month, but up nearly 80 percent in the year—built largely on the back of the Trump presidency.

Coin Telegraph reported that price “choppiness” for BTC hit “extreme levels.”

TRENDPOST: *Gerald Celente has said gold prices would be much higher if not for the rise in bitcoin. And now, with bitcoin down, gold prices are going up. However, considering the Crypto-Club in the Trump administration, we remain bullish on bitcoin... as well as gold.*

STOCKS' "FRAGILITY" WORST IN THREE DECADES, BOA WARNS



Share prices of the 50 largest stocks in the Standard & Poor's 500 index are more fragile than at any time this century, Bank of America (BoA) analysts warn in a new report.

Stock "fragility" measures how much a stock's price fluctuates in a day relative to its usual movement.

Among the stocks the warning covers are tech favorites such as Amazon, Apple, and Nvidia; bank stalwarts JPMorgan Chase and Wells Fargo; and retailers Costco and Walmart.

"The sideways range the market has been in for almost three months is hiding a big increase in volatility for individual stocks," chief strategist Matt Maley at Miller Taback said to the *Financial Times*.

"When you combine this with higher bond yields and concerns over tariffs, it has created a much higher level of uncertainty and nervousness than we usually see when the market is near an all-time high," he added.

On 20 January, Chinese start-up DeepSeek announced it had created a world-class artificial intelligence system at a sliver of the cost Western developers have spent to build theirs. U.S. tech stocks crashed within hours.

However, as part of that crash, 70 S&P stocks underwent "fragility events," moving more than three times as much as they typically move in a day.

TREND FORECAST: *Uncertainties over the impact of tariffs and a global trade war, inflation's direction, and now China's rivalry with the U.S. in artificial intelligence has*

left the market especially jittery. (See [“Update: The DeepSeek Effect,”](#) 11 Feb 2025.) Again, while it was big news three weeks ago when DeepSeek sank the equity markets and the high flying Nvidia stock sank 17 percent in one day, losing nearly \$600 billion in value, while sinking the Nasdaq 3.1 percent, that is now long forgotten. But not for us... get ready for the Dot-com Bust 2.0 which will crash the equity markets and much of the economy.

Options Shelter

Realizing the risks ahead, more players in the equities markets are investing in options as protection against “tail risks” — events that are unlikely to happen but will do huge damage to a portfolio if they do.

The greater interest in defensive hedging “highlights how Trump’s erratic shifts in trade and economic policies have left investors uneasy,” the *Financial Times* noted.

“If you’re a money manager, do you shift your whole portfolio on the back of one headline?” Mandy Xu, head of derivatives research at Cboe Global Markets, said to the *FT*. “You can’t, because you don’t know if the headline will last. So you use options. People are nervous and reaching for tail hedges.”

There has been “rampant” buying of options that will pay out if the Vix index—an index of market volatility, often called Wall Street’s “fear gauge” — rises, Maxwell Grinacoff, chief of equities derivatives research at UBS, told the *FT*.

Prices for these options have set new records, even though the fear gauge remains far below its long term average, according to Cboe data.

Demand also has shot up for “put” options against the Standard & Poor’s 500 index, Xu noted. Puts pay out when an asset’s value falls. Puts are in high demand even though the index has grown by about 3 percent already this year.

Retail investors are buying the S&P-focused options, while asset managers are choosing Vix options for protection, according to the *FT*.

However, individuals also are increasing their purchases of riskier, very short-term options that expire if price targets are not realized quickly.

On 31 January, when Trump threatened tariffs on major U.S. trade partners, a record 2.4 million so-called “zero-day” put options were sold against the S&P.

OOPS! “TRUMP TRADES” FLOP AS DOLLAR WEAKENS, BOND YIELDS FALL



“Trump trades”—bets that the dollar would continue to strengthen and bond yields rise—that were popular after Donald Trump’s re-election to the presidency have taken a bearish turn. Indeed, leading up to the race for the White House, the U.S. dollar was on an upswing, rising 7 percent since September and hitting a two-year high in

January.

But now the dollar has weakened to a two-month low as Trump wages his trade war and bond prices are up. Yields fall as bond prices rise.

“Despite what it feels like, if you zoom out to the beginning of this year, a lot of the Trump trades haven’t worked,” Jerry Minier, co-chief of the G10 countries currency trading at Barclays, told the *Financial Times*. “That is causing people to reassess.”

The tariffs have been less aggressive than many expected. If the import duties had been higher and quicker, trade among targeted countries would have been hobbled and the dollar’s value should have risen against other currencies.

Trump has championed the idea of weakening the dollar to make U.S. exports cheaper abroad.

Trump's global trade war might be "potentially having some growth implications," giving rise to "an underlying fear that growth might be slowing," Torsten Slok, chief economist at Apollo Capital Management, wrote in a note.

Bond traders "are caught between a fear that inflation might be higher because of a trade war and a fear that U.S. growth might be slower," David Kelly, JPMorgan Asset Management's chief global strategist, wrote in a note.

Emerging nations were assumed to be prime victims of any trade war, but they also have flipped expectations. In the past month, Chile's peso has gained 3 percent on the dollar, with Brazil's real and Colombian peso up more than 6 percent each.

TREND FORECAST: *Trump's trade policies also have been expected to reignite inflation, which would push both bond yields and the dollar's value higher.*

Instead, the dollar has edged down 0.4 percent against other major currencies this year.

If inflation had turned upward again, bond yields would have risen. However, after rising to a 14-month high of 4.8 percent last month, the yield on the bellwether 10-year Treasury note had fallen back to 4.54 percent on 12 February.

The guess on The Street is that the Feds will keep interest rates higher for longer and that will be bullish for the dollar, which Goldman Sachs says will appreciate another 3 percent this year. And on Tuesday, the euro and other major currencies went down, and the dollar went up. Indeed, as we had forecast as two of our Top Trends for 2024, there is the [Trump Card](#) and the [Wild Card](#) that no one knows how they will be played.

But again, as we have forecast, should the equity markets and/or the U.S. economy go down, as he did when he was President back in 2018, Trump will force the Federal Reserve to lower interest rates which will in turn, bring the dollar down and gold prices up.

U.S. DOMINANCE OF EQUITY MARKETS IS ENDING



The U.S. stock market's global dominance will peak this year and then decline, Michael Hartnett, Bank of America's chief global strategist, has warned.

Chinese start-up DeepSeek's bombshell—its claim that a world-class artificial intelligence system can be created for a fraction of the cost Western developers have spent—and Donald Trump's draconian federal spending cuts will drain U.S. equity markets' verve, he thinks.

Spending on artificial intelligence has kept U.S. markets aloft for more than a year. The "Magnificent Seven" tech stocks—Alphabet, Amazon, Apple, Meta, Microsoft, Nvidia, and Tesla—alone were responsible for the lion's share of growth in the Standard and Poor's 500 index in 2024.

Hartnett is credited with coining the "Magnificent Seven" moniker, naming the group of stocks after the classic 1960 Western movie that was remade in 2016.

"U.S. exceptionalism is now exceptionally expensive, exceptionally well-owned," he wrote in his analysis. "'Magnificent 7' becomes 'Magnificent 7,' [which] supports broadening of U.S. and global equity and credit markets."

A reduction in immigration into the U.S. is likely to shrink consumer spending, which also will dent equity markets, he added.

Hartnett is urging investors to look for cheaper markets outside the U.S. instead of continuing to dump their money into overpriced U.S. stocks. Markets in Brazil, Canada, Germany, and the U.K. have delivered better returns than the S&P, he said.

TREND FORECAST: *As we note in our market overview this week, U.S. equity markets are high on their own euphoria and ignoring a growing number of warning signs that the bull market has risen beyond reason.*

The warning signs include weakening consumer spending, unsustainable credit card debt and increasing delinquencies in consumer loans, a trade war that is likely to rekindle inflation and risk higher interest rates and continuing economic weakness in China and Europe.

Bets that the U.S. stock market will continue to rise from record high to record high have become speculation, not investment. Again, get ready for Dot-com Bust 2.0.

U.S. RETAIL SALES DROP MOST IN TWO YEARS



Last month, U.S. consumers spent 0.9 percent less than in December, the commerce department reported, the largest one-month drop since March 2023.

Economists in a Dow Jones poll had expected a decline of just 0.2 percent.

Inflation ran at 0.5 percent in January. The spending figures are not adjusted for inflation, so the decline is even more sharp than headlines would indicate.

Analysts attributed the spending retreat to California's wildfires, abnormally cold temperatures in much of the central and eastern parts of the country, and a shortage of cars because of generous buyer incentives in December, leaving dealers with less inventory in January.

Sales at auto dealerships fell 2.8 percent last month after growing by 2.8 percent in December. Bad weather also probably kept people off car lots, in addition to which dealers lacked the usual array of inventory after strong December sales.

The supply of cars has not improved, adding to dealers' shortages; U.S. production was down 5.2 percent in January, the U.S. Federal Reserve reported.

Sales at hobby shops were down by 4.6 percent, as were purchases of books, musical instruments, and sporting goods. E-retailers sold 1.9 percent less. Lumber Yards and home improvement stores saw sales shrink 1.3 percent. Revenue also declined for clothing, electronics, and furniture stores.

However, people spent more time eating out. Receipts at bars and restaurants grew by 0.9 percent. The strength of the restaurant sector is a bellwether for economists of household finances, Reuters said.

Also on a positive note, January's sales were up 4.2 percent, year on year, and December's sales were revised upward from a 0.4-percent increase to 0.7 percent.

January's weak figure is the result of one-off circumstances and is unlikely to have a meaning beyond that, economists told Reuters, especially since the preceding four months showed continued growth in consumer spending.

"The drop was dramatic, but several mitigating factors show there's no cause for alarm," Robert Frick, Navy Federal Credit Union's corporate economist, wrote in a note. "Especially considering that December was revised up strongly, the rolling [monthly] average of consumer spending remains solid."

"We will need to wait until the February data to see if this is the start of a more cautious consumer trend or indeed whether it was simply a weather-related pull back," James Knightly, chief global economist at ING, wrote in his note.

The Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta lowered its estimate of U.S. first-quarter growth from 2.9 percent to 2.3 percent, the rate at which the country's GDP expanded in 2024's fourth quarter.

"The underlying strength of the economy remains largely unchanged," Tuan Nguyen, U.S. economist at financial services firm RSM US. "If that strength persists, we should expect sales to rebound in the coming months."

PUBLISHER'S NOTE: *The commerce department's unwillingness to adjust the spending number for inflation before publishing it allows pundits and the public to assume the consumer economy is in better shape than it is.*

As inflation was still on a rampage, we were often told that consumer spending had increased in a particular month. However, inflation often outpaced spending in many of those months, which meant that consumers had laid out more dollars to buy less stuff, as we often pointed out.

If the spending stats had factored in inflation, the economic news would have been more dismal as well as more realistic.

PRODUCER PRICES ROSE IN JANUARY, SIGNALING HIGHER RETAIL PRICES AHEAD



Producer prices—the wholesale prices factories and service companies charge for their wares—rose 0.4 percent in January from December, compared to the 0.3 percent forecast economists had made in a Dow Jones poll.

The core Producer Price Index (PPI), which excludes prices charged by producers of energy and food, was up 0.3 percent, aligned with analysts' expectations.

Also, December's PPI reading was adjusted upward to 0.5 percent from the previous estimate of 0.2 percent, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported.

For all of 2024, the overall U.S. PPI grew by 3.5 percent, far in excess of the U.S. Federal Reserve's 2-percent target.

"Inflation at the producer level remains high," senior economist Elizabeth Renter at personal finance site Nerdwallet wrote in a statement. "This inflation could ultimately be passed on to consumers."

TREND FORECAST: *A rise in wholesale prices means a rise in retail prices will soon follow.*

With the risk of tariffs jacking up costs for producers, should they be imposed, consumers will be hit with higher prices. And, the higher prices rise, the less consumers will spend. And with two-thirds of U.S. GDP driven by consumer spending, it will drag down the U.S. economy.

INFLATION TICKED UP IN JANUARY, SURPRISING ECONOMISTS



A rise in energy and food prices accelerated U.S. inflation unexpectedly last month, up 0.5 percent from December and pushing the rate to 3.0 percent, compared to 2.9 percent the month before, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported.

Prices rose at the fastest clip since August 2023. January marks the fourth consecutive monthly rise in inflation, which had dropped to 2.4 percent in September.

Economists are worried that inflation has become entrenched in the economy at around 3 percent.

"It feels like everything that could go wrong in this report did go wrong," Moody's chief economist told CNBC.

“Inflation has been around these rates for some time and clearly isn’t coming down decisively any more,” Paul Ashworth, chief economist for North America at Capital Economics, wrote in a note.

The core Consumer Price Index, which removes energy and food costs from consideration, also rose more than economists had foreseen. The index was up 0.4 percent month on month and 3.3 percent annually.

The increase in the core rate was the largest since April 2023.

January’s report is “sobering,” Austan Goolsbee, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, told *The New York Times*.

Prices for clothing and furniture declined, but not enough to offset a 1.9-percent annual rise in the cost of groceries, led by a 15.2-percent leap in egg prices due to the rampant avian flu and the resulting culling of millions of chickens, dramatically reducing the egg-laying population. Egg prices are 53 percent higher now than a year ago and accounted for about two-thirds of grocery-price inflation last month.

Gasoline’s cost added 1.8 percent in January, even though the average price is 0.2 percent lower now than a year previous. Airline fares and hotel room rates were up. The sticker price for used passenger vehicles rose about 2 percent.

Other notable annual price increases:

- Restaurant menu prices up 3.4 percent
- Raw beef roasts at the supermarket up 7.5 percent
- Auto insurance up 11.8 percent
- Auto repairs up 7.4 percent
- Video discs and other media up 19.6 percent
- Veterinary services up 6.6 percent
- Coffee up 7 percent

Housing costs have been particularly stubborn. They began to slow their increase late in 2024 but rose 0.4 percent in January, translating to an annual rate of 4.4 percent. Rental rates are rising in some metro areas as vacancy rates dwindle. (See [“Apartment Shortage Pushes Rents Higher”](#) in this issue.)

The new data “reinforces the picture of inflation getting stuck around 3 percent and that last percentage point” that would take the rate to the central bank’s 2-percent target is “becoming very difficult to achieve,” former Fed economist Jonathan Wright, now a professor at Johns Hopkins University, told the *NYT*.

The Fed is at least as likely to raise its key interest rates as to cut them in the near term, he added.

Testifying before Congress on 11 February, Fed chair Jerome Powell said “we’re not quite there [at the 2-percent target] yet, so we want to keep policy restrictive.”

The Fed’s work “will take time before we can achieve that target on a sustained basis,” John Williams, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, said in an 11 February speech.

Inflation rose as president Donald Trump is enacting his wide-ranging plan of tariffs, deporting thousands of workers, and preparing for dramatic tax cuts, all of which are expected to drive prices and interest rates even higher.

“The risks are to higher inflation and lower growth,” UBS economist Alan Detmeister wrote in a note. He called the economic outlook “very uncertain.”

The inflation report spooked interest-rate speculators. On its release, they shifted their bets from a Fed rate cut in September, pushing the probability back to December.

TREND FORECAST: *It is a guessing game as to whether or not Donald Trump will impose strict tariffs. If he does, the bet is that inflation will rise and consumer spending will decline.*

While this trend will be a negative for the economy it will be positive for gold prices. And as we have forecast, the deeper the economy sinks, the greater pressure Trump will impose on the Federal Reserve to lower interest rates. And the lower interest rates fall, the deeper the dollar will sink and the higher gold prices will rise.

U.S. CREDIT CARD DEBT TOPS \$1 TRILLION



Americans now have a record \$1.21-trillion balance on their credit cards, according to the new quarterly report from the Federal Reserve Bank of New York.

U.S. shoppers loaded another \$45 billion onto their plastic in last year's fourth quarter, due in large measure to holiday spending, and growing the total by 7.3 percent more than a year before.

Over the past year, 7.18 percent of card accounts fell at least 30 days behind in payments, the bank noted. That indicates "borrowers are having some difficulty repaying," the bank's research group said in a press briefing.

The proportion of auto and credit card accounts at least 90 days late in paying has climbed to a 14-year high, dating back to 2009 during the Great Recession, according to the bank's data.

"Stubborn inflation has shrunk a lot of Americans' financial margin for error from slim to about none, forcing people to lean more heavily on credit card debt," Matt Schultz, LendingTree's chief credit analyst, told the *Financial Times*.

Credit card debt had remained at a relatively level amount during most of the first two decades of this century. However, households spent their savings post-COVID as inflation and interest rates both rose. Even so, shoppers continued to spend, leaning more and more on debt to finance their accustomed lifestyles.

As a result, “there’s very little reason to believe that we won’t continue to see new credit card debt records being set,” Schultz added.

The average credit card interest rate has risen above 20 percent, near its record, which makes it especially hard for lower-income households to manage even minimum payments.

TREND FORECAST: *Having long since spent their COVID-era windfalls, consumers have been living out on the edge of their credit card limits for more than two years, as we have documented in [“U.S. Consumers Continue to Pile Up Huge Credit Card Debts”](#) (19 Sep 2023), [“More Americans Falling Behind on Credit Card Payments”](#) (30 July 2024) and [“Americans Using Credit Cards More, Taking Longer to Pay Them Off”](#) (30 Jan 2024), among other articles.*

The labor market has leveled off, slowing wage growth. At the same time, inflation is stuck at about 3 percent. As a result, prices for everyday goods and services keep rising, but incomes not so much.

Consequently, consumers will continue to rely on credit cards, keeping balances high and keeping consumers enslaved by debt that carries interest rates of 20 percent or more.

More credit card accounts will fall into arrears and more will default and be canceled, damaging households’ credit records. Consumers will be constrained in their spending, which will limit U.S. economic growth because consumer spending accounts for two-thirds or more of U.S. GDP.

President Joe Biden and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau had worked to lower or abolish cards’ “junk fees” and some legislators tried to cap interest rates. But it was nothing more than empty talk. And when he was running for president, President Trump said that credit card interest rates should be lowered to 10 percent. So, was what Trump said all talk and no action? And if he does live by his word, credit card debt will ease and consumer spending will rise.

APARTMENT SHORTAGE IS PUSHING RENTS HIGHER



Apartment rents, which fell during the post-COVID apartment building boom, are poised to rise again.

The new flats built since 2021 will have been rented by the end of this year, landlords have said, and people are renting for longer instead of buying homes because mortgage

interest rates remain high and home prices are lodged in record territory.

For the first time in two years, U.S. apartment vacancy rates have now dipped below their long-term average.

At the same time, new apartment construction has not yet stepped up to meet the looming need for more. In the southern U.S., multifamily construction permits issued in 2024 were 4.4 percent fewer than in 2019, census bureau data shows.

“The relationship is very quickly going to flip from a renter-friendly environment to a landlord-friendly environment,” Lee Everett, chief strategist at apartment giant Cortland Communities, told *The Wall Street Journal*.

Rents already are on the rise in areas that saw fewer new apartments built, including the U.S. Midwest, Northeast, and some parts of the West Coast.

“By the end of this year, every major metropolitan market is expected to see positive rent growth,” Jay Lybik, multifamily housing analyst at research service CoStar, wrote in a note.

That will be bad news not only for renters, but for everyone: housing costs make up about a third of the U.S. Consumer Price Index. As those costs rise, the risk of inflation rises with them and gives the U.S. Federal Reserve another reason to hold interest rates higher or even to raise them again.

“It will be very hard for the headline inflation number to reach the Fed’s 2-percent goal without a slowdown in housing costs,” chief economist Lisa Sturtevant at Bright MLS confirmed to the *WSJ*.

In January, shelter costs were 4.4 percent higher than a year earlier, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported. Large as that is, it was the smallest annual gain in three years.

While those numbers might spur new construction, Donald Trump’s tariffs on imported construction materials and deportation of thousands of immigrant workers are likely to raise construction costs and slow the pace of building, analysts told the *WSJ*.

The U.S. receives about a quarter of its construction materials from Canada and Mexico, the National Association of Homebuilders says. Those materials now face 25-percent import duties. Undocumented immigrants comprise roughly 13 percent of the industry’s workforce, according to the association.

As in the post-COVID boom, investors are betting on strong apartment demand in the U.S.’s growth centers. Equity Residential, a national landlord, paid more than \$274 million for three apartment properties in Atlanta and Denver late last year.

Rents declined in both cities in 2024 but are expected to rise again this year. Equity said it will invest more in both regions in the months ahead.

TREND FORECAST: *Fifty years ago, the median rent-to-income ratio was 20 percent. Mortgage lenders typically want the all-inclusive cost of housing to not exceed a third of income. Today, renters and home buyers often spend 40 percent of their income on keeping a place to live.*

When rents skyrocketed during and after the COVID War, tenants were forced to take in roommates or left their flats and moved in with family members. As rents increase again, that scenario will repeat itself: landlords are tending to build for well-heeled tenants who can, and will, pay for amenities such as in-house gyms and clean energy systems.

Given today's hefty construction costs, "affordable" apartments are not being built, and will not be, without government subsidies.

Through this year, home prices will remain in record territory due to continuing demand from well-off buyers. The shortage of homes available to moderate-income households also will continue, freezing buyers that could afford to buy a home pre-COVID out of the housing market for the foreseeable future.

Historically, between 35 and 40 percent of home sales were to first-time buyers. In 2024, the proportion was 24 percent, a record low.

For the working class, i.e. plantation workers of Slavelandia, the national housing crisis will worsen. In many cities there will be a push from politicians to create affordable apartment rentals as well as imposing restrictions on landlords as to how much they can increase rent and draconian policies that will prohibit them from evicting tenants who don't pay their rent, etc. There will also be a push for cities and states to create more low income projects that will be costly to tax-payers.

CORPORATIONS SEE LOWER PROFITS AHEAD



After an upbeat earnings season, corporations foresee a less sunny future.

Among companies that have offered financial guidance in the current quarter or further ahead, most are projecting profits lower than analysts are expecting.

Earlier this month, an index that tracks how well analysts' projections and corporate forecasts match fell to a level not seen since 2016. The index has somewhat recovered but still was at its lowest point in a year as of 15 February.

Among the dark clouds: Donald Trump's trade war is likely to curtail profits for multinational corporations; inflation in the U.S. remains stuck around 3 percent and is likely to rise as tariffs take hold; the U.S. Federal Reserve is unlikely to drop its interest rates before fall at the earliest; and consumer spending is in jeopardy. (See ["U.S. Credit Card Debt Tops \\$1 Trillion"](#) in this issue.)

In early January, analysts forecasted a 13-percent rise in profits this year among companies listed on the Standard & Poor's 500 index. That has now been revised to an average forecast of 10 percent.

"The uncertainty entering this year is as great as it has been in years and executives are trying to navigate through that with more modest guidance," Jim Tierney, AllianceBernstein's chief investment officer, explained in a *Financial Times* interview.

"Fourth-quarter earning results are strong, but it didn't fully follow through to 2025 guidance," he said.

Another reason for conservative outlooks: if companies perform less well, there is less chance of missing their forecasts. If they perform better than expected, their stock prices will likely rally.

Analysts also are holding back. Only 80 of the Standard & Poor's 500 companies have offered guidance so far. "Analysts have been hesitant to revise their outlooks for this year and beyond until more companies issue profit guidance," the *FT* said.

With inflation down by two-thirds from its peak, investors remain optimistic. However, tariffs and the deportation of thousands of immigrant workers could send inflation higher. Interest rates likely would follow and consumer spending, already wobbling, could retreat further.

Regardless of those considerations, one issue still dominates attempts to forecast corporate performance. "The real question is, will tariffs have teeth?" Patrick Armstrong, chief investment officer at Plurimi Wealth, said to the *FT*.

TREND FORECAST: For us, this is a warning sign that the U.S. equity markets are overvalued and there will be a correction.

TRUMP FLIP FLOPS ON INTEREST RATES AGAIN



During his presidential campaign and after taking office, Donald Trump said interest rates must come down “immediately.” Indeed, go back to 23 January when President Trump gave a speech to the Davos Gang and said he would “demand that interest rates drop immediately.” But after the Federal Reserve held interest rates

steady a week later, Trump applauded their decision saying, “Holding the rates at this point was the right thing to do.”

Now, in a 12 February social media post, Trump wrote, “Interest Rates should be lowered, something that would go hand in hand with upcoming Tariffs!!! Let’s Rock and Roll, America!!!”

Trump posted his comment the day after Fed chair Jerome Powell told Congress the central bank doesn’t need to be “in a hurry” to lower its rates, as inflation remains stuck above the bank’s 2-percent target rate.

“People can be confident we’ll keep our heads down, do our work, and make our decisions based on what’s happening in the economy,” he said.

Powell was asked if “comments by elected officials are not among the things that cause you to act one way or another.” He responded, “That’s correct.”

Interest-rate speculators had been betting the Fed would reduce its key interest rates in June or July, then not again this year. Some analysts, including those at Bank of America, see no rate cuts at all in 2025.

About a half-hour after Trump's post, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that inflation in January ran at 3.0 percent, higher than expected and prompting speculation that the central bank might wait until at least September and perhaps December to reduce its rates.

TREND FORECAST: *The word on The Street, and from the Feds, is that the Federal Reserve will hold off the cutting of interest rates until later this year. But as we have noted by the facts, when Trump was president and the Dow had its worst December in 2018 since the Great Depression, he powered Fed-Head Jerome Powell to lower interest rates to boost up the sinking markets. Following his orders, Powell lowered interest rates in January 2019. Therefore, should the equity markets and/or the economy go down, we forecast that Trump will again call the shots and force the Feds to lower interest rates.*

WHICH PRICES WILL BE HIGHER, AND HOW MUCH, UNDER TRUMP'S CHINA TARIFFS?



Now that Donald Trump has laid a 10-percent tariff on everything coming into the U.S. from China—and could raise the import tax higher if he wishes—everything from smartphones and microwave ovens to shoes and cosmetics could cost U.S. consumers more.

In 2023, the most recent year for which complete data is available, the U.S. brought in \$427 billion worth of Chinese-made merchandise, the census bureau reported.

About \$66.7 billion was in cell phones and other household goods, \$37.4 billion in computers, and \$15.7 billion in computer accessories.

Roughly 87 percent of video game consoles bought in the U.S. came from China, along with 79 percent of laptop computers and tablets and 78 percent of smartphones, according to the Consumer Technology Association.

In an analysis last month, the group calculated that the 10-percent tariff will jack up the price of laptops by as much as 68 percent for some models, game consoles by up to 58 percent, and smartphones by 37 percent.

China shipped \$19.6 billion in clothing and textiles to the U.S in 2023, along with \$14.3 billion in car parts and \$13.8 billion worth of appliances. The average cost of a no-frills refrigerator will rise from \$650 to \$776 under Trump's tariffs, the National Retail Federation said.

Prices for clothing and footwear also will increase "considerably," the federation warned.

Columbia Sportswear and ELF Beauty have signaled that they will incorporate the cost of the tariffs into the retail prices that consumers pay, Business Insider reported.

Companies are unsure about shifting production out of China because it cannot be known which countries might be subject to a new round of Trump tariffs, Mary Lovely, a senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, told BI. "You don't really know if there's any safe place," she added.

TREND FORECAST: Again, "By their deeds, you shall know them," and week after week, Donald Trump keeps singing a different tariff song. Neither Rome, nor tariffs were built in a day. Yes, there will be increased tariffs and only time will tell if they will create more manufacturing jobs in the United States and how much higher costs will push up inflation.

TOP TREND 2024, BANKS GO BUST: BUFFET DUMPS BILLIONS OF DOLLARS' WORTH OF BoA, CITI SHARES



Berkshire Hathaway, Warren Buffet's investment vehicle, sold 40.6 million shares of financial services firm Citi in the final quarter of 2024, newly published securities filings show. The sales were worth more than \$2.4 billion.

Buffet also continued to pare back his stake in Bank of America (BoA). He intervened in the bank's troubles in 2011 during the Great Recession to keep the bank solvent, becoming its biggest shareholder with 13 percent of its stock.

The bank then invested hundreds of billions of dollars in long-dated treasury securities during the COVID War to grow its earnings. The investment backfired when the U.S. Federal Reserve began raising interest rates, sticking the bank with a portfolio of low-yielding bonds that no one wanted to buy.

Those ill-fated securities will not begin to mature until 2026, leaving the bank without funds to put into higher-yielding investments. As a result, its stock performance has lagged that of its competitors and the sector in general.

Last July, Buffet began unloading his holding in dramatic fashion, sometimes dumping shares onto the open market on successive trading days. Since mid-October, he has sold roughly 95 million more shares, reducing his ownership to about 8.9 percent, below the level at which he will continue to be required to file reports with regulators.

Citi also had been underperforming. CEO Jane Fraser began a thorough restructuring in 2023, a plan Buffet supported. The company shrank its operating expenses by 4 percent last year.

The bank posted a 7-percent return on equity in 2024, up from 4.9 percent the year before but still lower than other major banks. Citi had set a target of 11 to 12 percent for 2026 but cut that to 10 to 11 percent last month.

Buffet's decision to reduce his holdings in the financial sector seems contrarian. Many investors see the area as returning to growth now that Donald Trump has promised to shrink regulations governing it.

The KBW Bank Index shows that shares of major U.S. banks gained an average of 40 percent in value in 2024.

In addition, Buffet has been clearing out his Capital One shares, selling about 1.7 million shares or about a fifth of his holding.

The filings show that Buffet's organization has largely steered clear of new stock investments and has lodged much of the sales' proceeds in U.S. treasury bills, which have raised Berkshire's profits.

TREND FORECAST: *Small and regional U.S. banks hold most of the country's commercial real estate loans, but megabanks also have been hit by the sector's doldrums. The property industry remains troubled, with a significant portion of office blocks still valued at less than they owe.*

While office occupancy is rising among newer buildings with glitzy amenities, older office towers as much as a quarter of the U.S. inventory—is largely seen as not worth the investment required to make it competitive with those new ones.

Consequently, there are still more office loans that will become delinquent and some share of those will default. That will lead to a number of banks becoming troubled, with some either failing outright or being sold before they collapse.

When those effects begin to be felt, not only will the banking sector's financial performance be damaged, it will bring down the equity markets and drive gold prices much higher. See our recent article and the many associated links to other articles in

[“TOP TRENDS: OFFICE BUILDING BUST, BANKS GO BUST”](#) (28 Jan 2025), and also [“BANKS GO BUST”](#) (2 Jan 2024).

TRENDS ON THE GLOBAL ECONOMIC FRONT



WHEN THE ECONOMY FALLS JOBS GO WITH IT

The federal government laid off 200,000 probationary employees and fixed-term contract employees throughout various federal agencies as President Donald Trump works to reduce government waste. This is in addition to the 75,000 federal workers who have voluntarily accepted the Fork in the Road buyout offer.

Vietnam is eliminating 20 percent of government jobs to cut costs.

Nissan and Honda called off merger talks, and as a result Nissan plans to cut 6,500 jobs at car and engine factories and reduce production by 20 percent.

Chevron has announced 9,000 layoffs throughout 2026 as it seeks to cut costs.

U.S. retailers continue to suffer as consumers cut back on discretionary spending. Britain's retailers have warned that 300,000 retail jobs could be cut in the next three years due to increased business taxes.

As school districts prepare their budgets for the next school year, several have announced mass layoffs and school closures due to declining enrollment and decreased funding.

The reports make it clear the job cut trend will increase this year as we have detailed in this and previous **Trends Journals**. This is week 119 that we have been reporting on the latest round of job cuts.

Bank/Financial Layoffs:

- Clearstream – 212 layoffs
- Commerzbank – 3,900 layoffs
- JPMorgan – 1,000 layoffs through September

Layoffs:

- 10:10 Games – 20 layoffs
- Bell telecommunications – voluntary separation and early retirements
- Blue Origin space company owned by Jeff Bezos – 1,000 layoffs
- Bluestem Brands – 50 percent of workforce at headquarters
- Boeing – warns of 400 layoffs to NASA's Space Launch Systems
- Bronco Wine Co. – 81 layoffs
- Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston (Texas) – 120 layoffs
- Centers for Disease Control – 1,300 layoffs
- Chevron – 9,000 layoffs
- Crytek – 60 layoffs
- Department of Justice – 20 immigration judges
- Eviation electric aircraft developer – Most of staff laid off
- FAA – Hundreds of layoffs
- Franklin & Marshall College – Some layoffs
- General Services Administration – Layoffs begin

- Hempstead Schools (Long Island, N.Y.) – Considering layoffs, possible school closures
- Housing and Urban Development – about 4,800 layoffs
- Inventiva pharmaceutical company – 50 percent of staff
- IRS – 15,000 probationary workers
- Johnstown Heights Behavioral Health in Colorado – 158 layoffs
- JSI Research & Training Institute (Boston) – 1,100 layoffs due to funding cuts
- Kroger Supermarkets – 200 layoffs due to strategic restructuring
- Liquid Swords Swedish game developer – Number of layoffs not provided
- Logically – 40 layoffs
- Macy's at Greece Mall – 50 layoffs on April 11
- National Nuclear Security Administration – 325 layoffs
- New England Public Media – 7 layoffs
- Nissan – 6,500 layoffs at car and engine factories
- Pajaro Valley Unified School District – to vote on 100 possible layoffs
- Poly-Pak plastic bag maker – 146 layoffs
- Porsche – 1,900 layoffs
- Redfin – 450 layoffs
- Rincon Valley Union School District (Ca.) – 65 layoffs
- Royal Customs Designs – 142 layoffs, possible bankruptcy filing
- RTI International nonprofit research institute – 61 layoffs
- San Francisco Unified School District – Layoffs possible
- SellerX – 20 percent of staff
- Socorro Independent School District (Texas) – 8 percent of staff
- Sophos – 6 percent of staff
- Southwest Airlines – 1,750 layoffs
- Steamtown National Historic Site (Scranton, Pa.) – 5 layoffs
- Sunnova Energy – 300 layoffs
- The International Organization for Migration – 3,000 layoffs possible
- Unity (San Francisco)
- Vox SB Nation's Secret Base – 3 layoffs
- Walmart (Hoboken, N.J.) – 481 layoffs
- Waste Management – 5,000 positions by 2026
- Whirlpool – Administrative layoffs
- Zepz – 200 layoffs

GOING OUT OF BUSINESS TRENDS



The economic landscape has presented an array of challenges that will profoundly affect the business community this year.

Denny's announced it will close 178 restaurants by the end of this year, 30 more restaurants than was previously announced. The casual dining chain cited

inflation and rising food costs as the drivers as well as outdated restaurants as the reasons. Dairy Queen ice cream will close 24 locations in Texas.

Joann Fabrics and Crafts chain announced plans to close 500 of its 800 stores as it navigates bankruptcy.

Retail chain JCPenney announced eight store closures, following its merger with SPARC Group.

In the manufacturing sector, International Paper will close four facilities, resulting in 674 layoffs. U-Line will close its Brown Deer headquarters plant and General Motors will close its factory in Shenyang, China.

Bankruptcies:

- Tulpar Air (Russia)
- Turk Transportation - Chapter 11
- White Forest Resources
- Wild Earth dog food

Closures:

- 8 Mile Pizza (State College, Pa.)

- Alabama Orthopedic Clinic – 153 layoffs
- Archdiocese of New York – Closed seven Catholic schools in New York City
- Bill Wade Photography (Jacksonville, Ill.)
- Brown’s Hardware (Falls Church, Va.) – closing after 142 years
- Cuzzo’s Cuisine (Charlotte, N.C.)
- Dairy Queen – closing 24 locations in Texas
- Denny’s – closing dozens more restaurants
- Dick’s Sporting Goods (Binghamton, N.Y.)
- Duzine Elementary School in New York – possible closure
- EL1 Sports (Peoria, Ill.)
- Field Botanicals (Augusta, Ga.)
- Fontbonne University to close this year, 80 layoffs
- Fort Worth ISD Texas – Considers closing 20 schools
- Funky Buddha Yoga – will close its studio in Grand Rapids, Mich.
- Furniture Fair (Wilmington, N.C.)
- Gamestop – closed 19 stores in Illinois
- General Motors – closing factory in Shenyang, China
- Getaround car sharing service (San Francisco)
- Happy Greek (Columbus, Ohio)
- Husson University – to close pharmacy school in Maine
- Hutch’s Pie and Sandwich Shop (Weatherford, Texas)
- Immaculate Conception High School (Montclair, N.J.)
- International Paper – to close four facilities in Arizona, Louisiana, Missouri, Pennsylvania, 674 layoffs
- Ivanpah Solar Farm (Ivanpah, Calif.)
- Jalapenos Mexican Restaurante and Bar (Wausau, Wis.)
- JCPenney – Closing Asheville Mall location (North Carolina)
- Joann – Closing 500 of its 800 stores as it continues to navigate bankruptcy
- Johnstown Heights Behavioral Health in Colorado – 158 layoffs
- Kindred Hospital (Chicago and Sycamore, Ill.) – 157 layoffs
- Le Cave’s Bakery (Tucson, Ariz.)
- Main Street Restaurant and Gift Shoppe (Newport, N.Y.)
- McKinney’s Furniture and Mattress Direct (Center Township, Pa.)
- Mercy Home (Eagle Lake, Maine)
- Mixed Bags (Sacramento, Calif.)

- Mr. Handy Appliance Parts Center (Springfield, Ohio)
- Neiman Marcus – Closing Dallas office at City Place
- Noble Ground Coffee – closing all eight shops in Arizona
- Northern Light Health – closing outpatient offices in Waterville
- O’Charley’s (Boardman, Ohio)
- O’Grady’s Family Restaurant (Phoenixville, Pa.).
- Our Lady of Perpetual Help Catholic Academy (New York)
- Pactiv Evergreen – closing a facility in Kalamazoo, Mich, 153 layoffs
- Panera Bread – to close two fresh dough facilities in California, 350 layoffs
- Paper Source – closing its facility west of Chicago this spring, 100 layoffs
- Pasta Al Forno (Ames, Iowa)
- Pearson House Restaurant (West Milton, Ohio)
- Pod, Stephen Starr’s futuristic University City restaurant (Philadelphia, Pa.)
- PropertyGuru (International) – closing three business units
- Safeway – closing Vallejo, Calif. store due to safety reasons
- Save This Life microchip registration company
- Scala del Nonna (Montclair, N.J.)
- Sequoia Brewing Co. – to close all three locations
- Shuler’s Restaurant (Watertown, N.Y.)
- Sissle & Daughters all-day café, wine bar and market (Portland, Maine)
- Sizzle Pie – closes Portland shop
- Steins Beer Garden (Mountain View, Calif.)
- Summit Urgent Care (Greenville, Tenn.)
- Suncoast Mental Health Center a nonprofit with locations in Martin, St. Lucie, Indian River and Okeechobee, Fla.
- Ten Thousand Villages (Ann Arbor, Mich,)
- Tequila’s Mexican Bar and Grill (Niskayuna, N.Y.)
- The Dock in Stillwater and Paulie’s (Maple Grove, Minn.)
- The Green Monkey (Raleigh, N.C.)
- The Lourdes Diabetes Center at Guthrie Lourdes Hospital (New York)
- Three Rivers Festival 2025 – Canceling festival, board members want to file bankruptcy
- True Value Hardware – closing its Westlake, Ohio facility
- U-Line Corp – to close its Brown Deer headquarters plant
- UPS facility (Bourbon, Ind.) – Possible closure in June

- Walgreens – closing five Los Angeles area stores
- Winston’s Crown Jewelers (Costa Mesa, Calif.)

CANADIAN HOUSEHOLDS FILE MOST BANKRUPTCIES SINCE 2009



In 2024, 137,300 Canadian households declared insolvency, similar to bankruptcy, 11.4 percent more than the year before and the most since the record year of 2009 during the Great Recession, data from the country’s Office of the Superintendent of Bankruptcy (OSB) shows.

In December, 9,300 households filed insolvencies, 2.8 percent more than a year earlier. The figure is below the 2024 monthly average but is still the most in any December since 2020 during the COVID War.

Only a portion of struggling households that could formally declare insolvency actually do, the real estate news service Better Dwelling noted, adding that the rate of financial failures grew while data shows Canada’s economy is beginning to stabilize.

In that case, any “downturn may be a lot worse than expected,” Better Dwelling said.

TRENDPOST: Long forgotten, but an undeniable fact reported for years by **The Trends Journal**, are the indisputable facts that the draconian COVID War lockdown policies destroyed the lives and livelihoods of billions across the globe... and the economic, physical, mental and spiritual damage is incalculable. Canada imposed some of the most stringent lockdown policies, including the Daddy’s Boy Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau imposing a state of emergency to stop the truckers protest when they took the streets and would not leave rather than being forced to take the COVID Jab.

EUROZONE ECONOMY GROWS IN 2024'S FOURTH QUARTER



The economy of the 20-country Eurozone grew 0.1 percent in 2024's final three months, the Eurostat statistics agency reported, revising its earlier estimate that the economy had flatlined.

The upward revision came after the agency factored in more data from more Eurozone countries, including the Netherlands, the zone's fifth-largest economy, which grew 0.4 percent during the period.

Spain's GDP grew 0.8 percent while Italy stagnated and the French and German economies, the region's two largest, both shrank.

The labor market lost momentum, expanding 0.1 percent during the quarter, compared to 0.2 percent in the preceding three months.

Despite seeing "headwinds," the European Central Bank forecasts a 1.1-percent expansion for the Eurozone this year.

Donald Trump's threats of a 20-percent tariff on European deliveries into the U.S. remains a wild card for the region's economy and would be an especially difficult blow to Germany's auto industry.

Europe has threatened retaliatory tariffs if Trump follows through on his threat and Trump has pledged to retaliate against any such moves. Discussions between Europe and the U.S. continue.

Given the looming trade war, many economists expect the Eurozone economy to stagnate in the current quarter.

“The big picture remains that growth momentum has faded, and the euro area faces profound risks from U.S. trade policy,” Jamie Rush, Bloomberg’s chief Europe economist, wrote in a note. “How long the economic soft patch persists will be a key driver of the [European Central Bank’s] rates outlook.”

TREND FORECAST: Europe’s economy is on a knife edge.

If the Ukraine War ends, there could be a surge of investment and economic activity in the region. But it will only be a temporary boost considering that the average EU growth is below 1 percent and still struggling under debt loads that swelled during the COVID War.

Therefore, for the time being, Europe’s economic future will remain in limbo.

U.K. ECONOMY BARELY GROWS IN FOURTH QUARTER



Britain’s economy eked out a 0.1-percent expansion in 2024’s final three months, official figures show, after flatlining in the previous quarter.

The Bank of England had forecasted a stagnant result for the quarter but a sudden spurt of activity in the service sector turned

the result positive.

The growth, no matter its size, is welcome news to Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who came to power last summer promising economic recovery. However, the U.K.’s GDP is roughly the size it was last spring.

Growth had been stunted by a rise in energy prices last fall in combination with an increase in business’s mandated contributions to the national health system. Many

companies said they have laid off workers, delayed investments, and taken other dramatic steps to accommodate the higher levies.

Sainsbury's, an iconic supermarket chain, announced last month it would lay off thousands of workers because of the tax increases.

Despite those measures and the Bank of England's dire warnings about the economic future, Britons' mood is turning slightly toward optimism, *The Wall Street Journal* said.

Starmer's government has promised to reform the cumbersome planning process to make it easier to build housing, infrastructure, and to install clean energy facilities.

Cabinet ministers also have called for regulatory reform, saying that regulations must not just minimize risk but also should make growth easier.

The central bank is projecting a 0.75-percent growth rate this year, while the National Institute of Economic and Social Research is forecasting a pace twice that.

Weak growth has pressured the bank to cut its key interest rate, which now stands at 4.5 percent. Inflation, which ran at 2.5 percent in December, will rise again this year, the bank has said, leaving officials to judge the need for rate cuts on the basis of incoming data.

TREND FORECAST: *The U.K. economy will remain weak and risks sliding into Dragflation: declining economic growth and rising inflation. There is nothing on the near horizon that will boost its economic growth.*

FRANCE CAN NO LONGER AVOID BUDGET CUTS, GOVERNMENT AUDITOR SAYS



As mounting debt payments are on track to surge in the years ahead, France cannot delay budget cuts, the government's independent auditor told a press briefing.

"Restoring France's financial credibility has become an absolute emergency to avoid an uncontrolled increase in debt payments,"

the audit office's report emphasized.

In 2024, government finances spun out of control as a political crisis paralyzed four successive prime ministers unable to cope with an unexpected drop in tax revenue as public spending surged for the second consecutive year.

France has more than eight active political parties, none of which have a working majority in the parliament nor have any been able to assemble a governing coalition.

"We can no longer repeat the same errors, and always putting off efforts to rein in the public finances is simply no longer an option," chief auditor Pierre Moscovici told reporters. "If we don't do it, we will be forced to do it."

The government's current-year budget was approved by parliament only this month when prime minister Francois Bayrou used special constitutional powers to skirt the deadlocked legislature.

"We know the step up is very high, but we are determined to face it," government spokeswoman Sophie Primas said in a statement responding to the auditor's warning. The finance ministry seconded many of the auditor's worries, it said.

The new budget includes budget cuts and tax hikes that would shrink the annual deficit from 6 percent in 2024 to 5.4 percent this year. The measure still leaves France with one of Europe's largest budget holes.

The European Union requires member nations to limit annual budget deficits to 3 percent of GDP. However, the rule was suspended during the COVID War and countries have been given until 2029 to come back into compliance.

France's deficit will be 3.2 percent of GDP by then, the finance ministry has calculated.

To reach the goal by the deadline, France would need to chop €110 billion a year from its budget, a feat officials have said is not possible.

TREND FORECAST: *The urgency of the auditor's warning is likely to go unheeded, just as a similar warning about U.S. finances from the Congressional Budget Office has yet to receive serious bipartisan or nonpartisan discussion among American politicians.*

Last September, a study said Europe must invest €750 billion to €800 billion annually—about \$885 billion—for several years to come in order to maintain current living standards.

“We have reached the point where, without action, we will have to either compromise our welfare, our environment, or our freedom,” study author Mario Draghi, Italy's former prime minister who also has served as president of the European Central Bank, warned in a statement.

The report received widespread publicity and prompted much tsk-tsking among politicians but no major initiative has been formed to enact the report's guidance.

In November, a joint statement by the leaders of the French and German central banks said Europe will be “condemned” if the two countries fail to work together to push drastic reforms to European Commission bureaucracy. There is no evidence that the banks have followed through in any publicly apparent way.

Faced with overwhelming crises, politicians look away until they have no other choice, a maxim proven by the U.S. Congress in 2007 and 2008 as the economy faced collapse.

France, the rest of Europe, and the U.S. are all sledding downhill toward their own massive financial crises with no one yet taking decisive steps to steer away from them. And again, totally forgotten and ignored are the facts that their politicians increased their countries downward spiral by fighting the three-year COVID War. They locked down their economies and imposed draconian mandates that destroyed the lives and livelihoods of hundreds of millions. Indeed, the businesses that went out of business as a result of the lockdowns have not returned.

RUSSIA'S CENTRAL BANK HOLDS INTEREST RATE AT 21 PERCENT



The Bank of Russia kept its interest rate at a record 21 percent for a second consecutive meeting as inflation in January was estimated at 9.9 percent, up from 9.5 percent in December and more than twice the bank's target rate.

Companies are short of workers due to the number that have been pressed into military service or that are working in war-related production. As a result, wages are climbing and prices with them.

The bank could raise its rate at its next meeting if inflation continues to accelerate, bank governor Elvira Nabiullina said after the meeting. Inflation shows no signs of slowing, the bank's analysts reported.

The bank's governing committee "will assess the need for a key rate increase at its upcoming meeting, taking into consideration the speed and sustainability of the inflation slowdown," bank officials said in a statement.

Interest rates will remain higher for longer than expected in order to wrestle inflation downward, the statement added.

The war-focused economy is overheated, but policymakers must avoid economic “hypothermia,” which could result from raising rates higher than necessary, Nabiullina added.

However, lending by commercial banks has already slumped, Reuters reported.

Inflationary risks “are associated with the ongoing upward deviation of the Russian economy from a balanced growth path and high inflation expectations, as well as with the deterioration in the terms of foreign trade,” the bank said, referring to Western sanctions.

The economy could begin to right itself if pending negotiations to end the shooting in Ukraine are successful.

“Increased chances of sanctions and penalties being lifted are a positive factor for inflation,” Iskander Lutsko, chief portfolio manager at Istar Capital wrote in a note.

On 14 February, the bank raised its inflation forecast for this year to between 7 and 8 percent. It also raised its economic growth forecast to between 1 and 2 percent. Russia’s economy grew 4.1 percent last year, the government claimed.

Economists in a Bloomberg survey expect growth to be about 1.5 percent.

TREND FORECAST: *Even after the shooting stops in Ukraine, the Kremlin will focus Russia’s economy on war-related production to replace the massive loss of ammunition, hardware, and other materials which will artificially boost economic growth.*

At the same time, pent-up consumer demand will continue putting pressure on prices for goods and services that will remain in short supply for some time.

As a result, the central bank will hold interest rates in their current neighborhood long enough to allow these factors to play themselves out and the economy to show signs of returning to a semblance of pre-war normalcy.

UNDER TRUMP, CRYPTO IS WORKING ITS WAY INTO MAINSTREAM FINANCE



Now that Donald Trump has vowed to make the U.S. “the crypto capital of the planet” and “a Bitcoin superpower” and has promised a light regulatory touch, mainstream money managers are getting ready to give digital assets the bear hug that crypto’s boosters have been urging.

Last year, the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission allowed the creation of regulated crypto funds, opening a way for conventional money managers to take a flyer on that sector.

That put digital assets in play. For them to become a mainstream financial asset, fund managers, Wall Street banks, and other players need to fully embrace them.

Crypto’s champions believe Trump’s new enthusiasm for crypto will lead others to share his view.

Before Trump’s re-election, Bitcoin’s price “was driven by novelty, by excitement,” law professor Yesha Yadav at Vanderbilt University’s law school, said to the *Financial Times*.

“This time around, there’s real institutional backing. This was inconceivable two years ago.”

“We are likely to see further integration of crypto in traditional finance,” law professor Hilary Allen at American University agreed in an *FT* interview.

“If the rules come and make it a real thing, the banking sector will come in hard on the transactional side,” Brian Moynihan, Bank of America’s CEO, said in a recent public comment.

In particular, advocates have been waiting for Trump to act on his pledge to create a national Bitcoin reserve, a move that would put the imprimatur of the U.S. government on the digital asset.

David Sacks, Trump’s crypto and artificial intelligence advisor, is putting together a regulatory outline for digital currencies. “One of the first things we’re going to look at is the feasibility of a Bitcoin reserve,” he said in a public statement.

How that would work is unclear, as is the risk that U.S. taxpayers would face. Bitcoin’s value has a history of making dramatic swings on short notice. When FTX, a major crypto exchange, collapsed in 2022, investors sold out of digital assets en masse amid a wave of bankruptcies.

Taxpayer investment, especially now that Bitcoin is hovering around record highs, would lead to an “inevitable collapse” of value that would “wreak havoc in ways we cannot yet anticipate,” Elliott Asset Management said in a statement.

Bitcoin’s history is a rollercoaster of soaring values followed by steep crashes.

Those valleys have largely been forgotten in today’s euphoria.

If nations’ sovereign wealth funds were to hold Bitcoin, its value could soar to \$700,000, Larry Fink, founder of Blackrock, the world’s largest asset manager, has said. Currently, the coin has been trading near \$100,000.

One reason that values could spike: unlike nations’ fiat currencies, the supply of bitcoins is finite. Due to the mechanism by which Bitcoin is created, only about 21 million can be “mined,” a number the world will reach around 2040 at current rates.

The Czech Republic's central bank is considering investing in a Bitcoin reserve and El Salvador's government has authorized the coin as legal tender.

However, other countries and banks remain skeptical.

Currency reserves “have to be liquid, secure, and safe” and “not be plagued by the suspicion of money-laundering or other criminal activities,” Christine Lagarde, president of the European Central Bank, has said in the past.

She remains “confident” that “Bitcoin will not enter the reserves of any of the central banks” in the Eurozone, she added.

If central banks, pension funds, and asset managers hold any sizable collection of digital coins and there is another market shock that collapses prices, the shock to global financial markets could be devastating, some have warned.

Especially if speculators borrow money to buy crypto and the price sours, that “could destabilize the broader financial system” and lead to “systemic risk that can have serious negative consequences for the broader economy,” a report by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York has stated.

“The whole origin story of [cryptocurrencies] was a rejection of central banks and traditional finance,” Allen said. “In the end, the thing I fear is that it will end up being propped up by central banks and governments.”

TREND FORECAST: *When Donald Trump won the race to the White House, considering the nearly \$300 million he got from the Crypto Club and his pro-crypto stance, cryptocurrencies such as bitcoin spiked some 8 percent, and broke a new record when it hit \$75,000 a coin the day after his election. Again, with the pro-crypto Trump team in power, bitcoin spiked to \$110,000 per coin. See:*

- [“YES, THIS ELECTION CHANGED CRYPTO ‘EVERYTHING’”](#) (12 Nov 2024)
- [“U.S. CRYPTO THAW JUST HEATED UP”](#) (19 Nov 2024)
- [“SPOTLIGHT: CRYPTO NATION”](#) (10 Dec 2024)

- [“ELECTION 2024 WAS MONUMENTAL FOR THE FUTURE OF CRYPTO—AND THE WORLD” \(17 Dec 2024\)](#)

As we go to press bitcoin is now trading at \$94,199.

Why is it way off its high? Because with gold prices spiking (spot gold, as we go to press is at \$2,934 per ounce) and heading toward new highs, the more money that goes into gold, the ultimate safe-haven asset, the less money will go into the crypto market.

NESTLÉ’S 2024 SALES GROWTH, WEAKEST IN 25 YEARS, SHOWS SIGNS OF TURNING



Last year, international food conglomerate Nestlé reported overall sales growth of 2.2 percent, the weakest in more than 25 years as cash-strapped consumers switched their purchases to generic or discount alternatives to nationally-advertised brands.

Sales grew slower in 2024 than during both the COVID War and the Great Recession.

Now new CEO Laurent Freixe, brought in last September, to turn the company's fortunes around, sees signs of progress. Sales grew 2.3 percent in the year's second half, compared to 2.1 percent in the first.

Candy sales were up 6.2 percent last year and beverages 3.3 percent.

The company has invested more in advertising and marketing and is repairing the underperforming divisions that comprise 21 percent of its revenues.

Processed-food makers have raised prices post-COVID as inflation drove their costs higher. Sales softened as prices increased. As shoppers switched away from Nestlé’s brands, the company has slowed its pace of price hikes.

Price increases added just 1.5 percent to revenue last year, compared to 7.5 percent in 2023.

Freixe also has launched a multi-year cost-cutting campaign, in part to mitigate the rising prices of cocoa and coffee and to help defend against the impact of the looming global trade war.

Analysts are forecasting 2025 sales growth of 3.1 percent overall for the company and an operating profit margin of 16.2 percent.

TREND FORECAST: *With consumers’ spending power still at its limit, sales have little room to grow. Companies hoping to boost margins and profits will concentrate more on cost-cutting and doing what they can to raise prices to raise profits... but that is very risky.*

The need to deliver profits and dividends for shareholders will give corporations renewed motivation to look for mergers and acquisitions to boost the bottom line.

MICHELIN MAY EXPAND U.S. FACTORIES, EUROPE IS “NO LONGER ECONOMICAL”



French tire company Michelin is considering expanding its U.S. production facilities so it can make more tires in America and avoid looming tariffs president Donald Trump has threatened to impose on all goods arriving from Europe.

“When we look at our global investment plan, we may have to advance the date for projects in the U.S. and slow down projects elsewhere,” CEO Florent Menegaux said in a *Financial Times* interview.

The company has 35 plants in North America but sources its materials worldwide.

“We can’t guarantee that 100 percent of all the products, all the components, and all the materials we use are produced locally,” he noted.

If the company prioritizes expanding its U.S. production, it will run afoul of France’s labor unions, with which Michelin is now negotiating the closure of two of the 20 plants in its home country. If the two close, 1,254 workers will be fired.

In a hearing in the French parliament last month, Menegaux testified that electricity costs about twice as much in France as it does in the U.S., Michelin is confronting 200 competitors in China, and France’s tax burden means that making tires in France is no longer profitable.

The company “is no longer able to export from Europe,” Menegaux said to the *FT*. “This exporting base is going to shrink because it’s no longer economical.”

Other executives have complained about high taxes and burdensome regulations not only in France, but also across the entire European Union.

This is “crunch time” for Europe to revamp itself and become competitive, Nicolas Hieronemus, CEO of luxury house L’Oreal, said in a statement earlier this month.

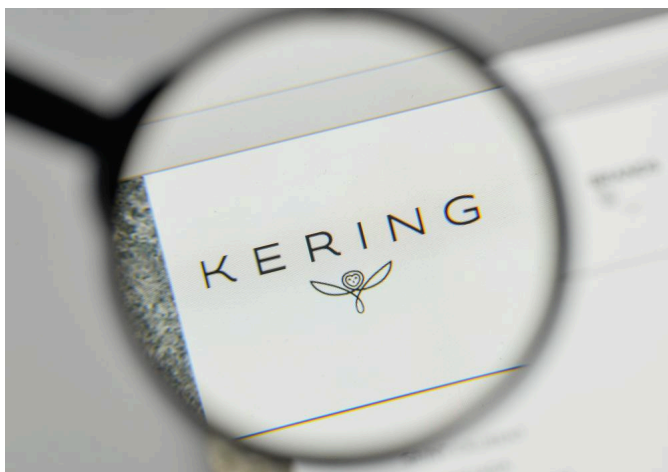
He cited a 2024 report by Mario Draghi, former president of the European Central Bank, that said Europe faces an existential economic crisis if it fails to reform its political and regulatory structure. (See [“Invest Heavily or Living Standard Will Crumble, Europe Told.”](#) 17 Sep 2024.)

Bernard Arnault, CEO of luxury industry giant LVMH, said he felt a “wind of optimism” in the U.S, when he attended Donald Trump’s 20 January inauguration, compared to a “cold shower” in Europe.

TREND FORECAST: As we noted in [“France Can No Longer Avoid Budget Cuts, Government Auditor Says”](#) in this issue, Europe is mired in bureaucracy, struggling with debt, and lacks the ability to coordinate a growth strategy.

As more manufacturers follow Michelin out of Europe, the public sense of urgency will grow, but considering that politicians are politicians, they will do next to nothing to address the root causes of the region’s economic malaise. As of now, that urgency is being expressed through the growing popularity of populist political movements.

LUXURY GROUP KERING’S SALES DIVE



Kering, the luxury conglomerate that owns 21 luxury brands including Brioni, Cartier, and St. Laurent, posted fourth-quarter sales down 12 percent to €4.4 billion, year on year, sunk by weakness in Gucci, the division that accounts for half of its sales and two-thirds of its profits.

Gucci’s sales were off by 24 percent, falling below analysts’ expectations to €1.9 billion.

As we reported in [“Gucci Sacks Top Designer, Struggles to Redefine Itself”](#) (11 Feb 2025), earlier this month Gucci fired Sabato De Sarno, its lead designer, after just two years on the job. He was judged to have failed in his assignment to rekindle excitement for the brand.

The company has tended to attract “aspirational” shoppers, those rising in their careers and spending power, by offering trendy designs. Recently, Gucci has been shifting toward more timeless looks, a strategy that keeps brands such as Hermès and Louis Vuitton favorites among the super-rich.

So far, the attempt to align with a different portion of the luxury market has not succeeded.

Gucci's operating income for 2024 plummeted by 51 percent to €1.6 billion, although sales in North America and the Asia-Pacific region showed slight improvement during the quarter.

Gucci's woes are emblematic of the larger luxury market, which has stagnated as China, the industry's growth engine, fell into a post-COVID economic funk.

Kering overall reported a 46-percent plunge in operating income for last year to €2.55 billion, barely meeting its own forecast.

While the company's income is down, its debt has surged from €2.3 billion in 2023 to €10.5 billion in 2024 after a series of pricey acquisitions and the €1.3-billion purchase of a building on the Monte Napoleone, Milan's exclusive shopping street.

"This was an annus horribilis for Kering," analyst Luca Solca at Bernstein wrote in a note. "The absolute decline relative to 2023 is striking."

Kering's share price has plummeted 40 percent in the last year, dramatically underperforming competitors Hermès, LVMH, and Richemont.

TREND FORECAST: *After sinking post-COVID amid inflation and high interest rates, the luxury industry's sales have begun to return here and there in fits and starts.*

Brands loved by the super-rich, such as Hermès and Louis Vuitton, float above the economy's fluctuations. However, brands that have relied on those aspirational shoppers face a new and different reality, as we explained in ["Luxury Industry Shrugs Off Loss of Middle-Tier Customers"](#) (3 Dec 2024).

Those status-seeking shoppers priced out of designer boutiques have turned to the resale market, which has grown three times faster since 2020 than the luxury houses that make the products second-hand retailers sell.

The RealReal, the flagship luxury reseller, reported sales of used luxury items were up 11 percent in this year's third quarter, year on year.

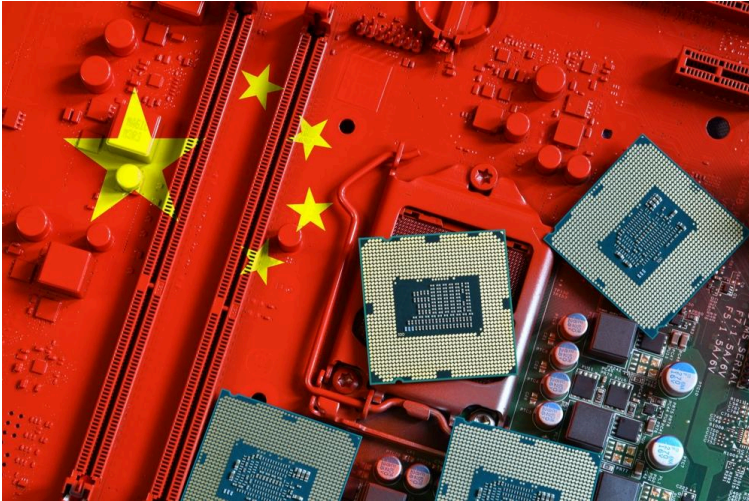
Also, second-tier makers of pricey goods are thriving. Brands such as Ateliers Auguste, Cuyana, and Polene sell their purses for \$300 to \$700, not \$3,000, particularly to younger shoppers who are less impressed with their parents' old luxury brands.

As a result, many luxury brands are not only failing to reach their revenue and profit goals, but also are revamping product lines and swapping out design directors and CEOs in an effort to revive their fortunes.

Without upwardly mobile shoppers, the luxury market will become permanently smaller, ultimately forcing the sale or closure of less profitable brands.

We have reported the luxury industry's downward spiral, why it is happening and where it is going. See our recent article and the many associated previous article links in ["LUXURY INDUSTRY SHRUGS OFF LOSS OF MIDDLE-TIER CUSTOMERS"](#) (3 Dec 2024).

SPECIAL REPORT: CHINA'S TECH SURGE



CHINA'S EQUITY MARKETS SOAR ON AI PROMISE

China's tech stocks are surging in price in the wake of start-up DeepSeek's announcement of its world-class artificial intelligence system developed at a fraction of the costs that Western developers have

incurred to create theirs.

The Hang Seng Tech Index, which follows the 30 largest tech companies listed on Hong Kong's exchange, has shot up 25 percent since 13 January as foreign investors are returning. In contrast, the tech-heavy U.S. NASDAQ index is up 4.4 percent over the same period and the "Magnificent Seven" U.S. tech stocks have declined 0.5 percent.

Chinese e-retail giant Alibaba is up 43 percent, consumer electronics maker Xiaomi 34 percent, car company BYD 40 percent, and search engine Baidu 13 percent. Hong Kong's Hang Seng overall index has risen 15 percent.

"The improvement in sentiment has driven some flows back to China," Bush Chu, abrdn's manager of Chinese equities trading, said to the *Financial Times*. "We're starting to see some outperformance and a rally because of that."

However, the surge is largely driven by individual investors, brokers told Reuters. These are individuals with "hot money" who are flush with the belief that AI developers will release an array of products and that consumer-facing companies will rapidly adopt the technology into its products, the *FT* said.

"As with moves in the past two years or so in Hong Kong and China, it's very retail driven and volatile—a trading market," Wong Kok Hoong, chief of equity sales at brokerage Maybank, wrote in a note.

"Hedge funds or the more Hong Kong-China centric funds are well aware of the dangers of not rushing in from the onset," he noted.

The rally is necessary nourishment for China's equity markets, which have lagged for more than a year, burdened by weak consumer spending, price deflation, a continuing crisis in real estate values, and sluggish exports.

"The U.S. is strong in zero-to-one innovation but China is stronger in zero-to-100 innovation in terms of widening access and adoption of tech," Chu said.

TREND FORECAST: *China's stock market surge last fall was a result of Beijing offering loans for stock purchases. The surge of free money shot stock prices higher, which then dribbled back down to their previous levels when the loan fund dried up.*

This new surge is more authentic. Chinese consumers' nationalistic fervor has been fanned by relentless government messages and now DeepSeek has given those investors a reason to believe the hype.

The government will pour even more support into AI-related companies and technologies, which will begin to draw in more institutional investors.

China's tech rally is poised to last for some time, markets' rally for the indefinite future.

Indeed, since China has been brought into the World Trade Organization, from heavy industry to hi-tech, it has advanced extremely. Before that time, in 2000, just 10 percent of 18-year-olds went to college. Today, some two-thirds of that age group goes to college. We note this to emphasize that China, with 1.4 billion people, has what it takes to take the lead in AI and other sectors of business and professions.

XI SIGNALS RAPPROCHEMENT WITH TECH PRIVATE SECTOR

On 10 February, Chinese president Xi Jinping hosted a meeting with the country's leading tech executives, signaling a reconciliation with an economic sector battered by whimsical regulation in the past but now seen as key to China's economic revival.

Attendees included Jack Ma, founder of e-retail colossus Alibaba, China's largest corporation, and Ant Group, a major financial technology firm. His 2020 criticism of government regulators set off a wide-ranging crackdown on private enterprise that began to be lifted in a meaningful way only in 2023.

Xi shook hands with Ma, a symbolic gesture fraught with practical meaning.

Others at the meeting included Lei Jun, CEO of consumer electronics maker Xiaomi Corp.; DeepSeek founder Liang Wenfeng; BYD EV company's Wang Chuanfu; CATL battery giant's founder Robin Zeng; and Ren Zehngfei, founder of tech conglomerate Huawei Technologies.

"The summit demonstrated Beijing's softer stance toward the companies that fuel most of the economy," Reuters noted.

In a speech, Xi exhorted those present to hold onto their competitive spirit and have faith in China's future, adding that the country's current difficulties are "temporary."

He pledged to do away with "unreasonable" fees and fines against private businesses and to create a more level playing field between private industry and state-controlled firms, which typically have received preferential treatment in funding and regulation.

China's parliament also has promised to review laws centered on promoting the private economy.

"It is necessary to resolutely remove all kinds of obstacles to the equal use of production factors and fair participation in market competition," Xi said.

The government must “continue to promote the fair opening of the competitive field of infrastructure to all kinds of business entities, and continue to make great efforts to solve the problem of difficult and expensive financing for private enterprises,” he added.

“This is the strongest signal China could release to boost social confidence,” You Chuanman, a lecturer in law at Singapore University of Social Sciences.

“The fact that Xi Jinping himself shows up to meet with the entrepreneurs highlights the political significance of this meeting.”

“It’s an ‘enabling policy’ rather than a 180-degree shift,” You said. “China has been pivoting from over-regulation on the private sector before COVID to releasing positive policy signals to the private economy. We’ve seen a continuing shift in tone from Beijing towards the private sector: tolerance, improvement, and encouragement.”

TRENDPOST: *Beijing’s recent history is one of bold pronouncements followed by little or no follow-through. Due to that track record, many analysts and investors will wait to see how well Xi and his government’s actions match the promises.*

However, Xi’s personal appearance with the country’s most powerful and successful entrepreneurs would seem to indicate a tacit acknowledgement that the directed economy and a GDP based on infrastructure spending and manufacturing will not lift China out of its current economic torpor.

Tech executives have been making nice with Xi for the past few years. Now it will be Xi’s turn to return the commitment. Much of China’s future economic activity depends on whether he does, and we forecast he will do all he can for China to take the lead in the AI world.

Remember, trends are born, they grow, reach old age and die. The mass adoption Generative AI boom was just born in 2022, and like it or not, it is the future and we forecast Xi will do all he can to make China the world leader of AI.

CHINESE CHIP MAKER GAINING MARKET SHARE FROM SOUTH KOREA

ChangXin Memory Technologies (CXMT), a Chinese maker of DRAM memory chips, is eating into South Korea's dominance in the Chinese market.

Since beginning mass production in 2019, it has captured 5 percent of the country's \$90 billion in DRAM sales in the country at the expense of South Korea's Samsung Electronics and SK Hynix. With U.S. company Micron, the three control 95 percent of China's DRAM market.

CXMT's rise is a result of Beijing's push to reduce dependence on foreign technology, especially as the U.S. has embargoed shipments to China of advanced chips and chip-making equipment.

CXMT also is leading the country's development of high-bandwidth memory, a crucial component needed to create large language model artificial intelligence systems.

"With the rise of CXMT, Korean chipmakers are facing a new reality where the lower end of the market is flooded with Chinese products," C.W. Chung, co-head of Asia-Pacific equities research for Nomura bank, wrote in a note.

"It is not a matter of technological superiority but of volume, meaning Samsung in particular has been hit hard by oversupply and lower chip prices," Chung added.

Now CXMT is accelerating its production of the faster and more efficient DDR4 memory chips, driving down the price of oversupplied DRAM chips even more.

The sinking price of the older chips has left Samsung and S.K. Hynix unable to compete and is driving them out of that market, the *Financial Times* reported.

Samsung's operating profit sank 29 percent in 2024's final quarter and S.K. Hynix acknowledged that Chinese underpricing was behind its failure to meet analysts' expectations for the period.

CXMT's share of the market is small and still limited to China, but its rapid expansion is having a snowball effect, G. Dan Hutcheson, vice-chair of consulting firm TechInsights, told the *FT*.

"The more market share you gain, the larger your volume," he said. "The higher your yields go, the lower your costs and the more market share you gain. That's exactly how the Koreans pushed the Japanese out of the memory chip sector in the 1980s and 1990s and now something similar is starting to happen to them.

"Samsung is finding itself in a nutcracker," he noted, "with S.K. Hynix and Micron squeezing them at the top end and CXMT squeezing them at the low end."

TRENDPOST: *Donald Trump has embraced the trend by using tariffs to try to reinvigorate U.S. manufacturing. The trend is being adopted by other nations as they reshore or "friendshore" supply lines in the post-COVID economy.*

As we have said before, China is the leading example of our Top Trend 2023, [Self-Sufficient Economies](#). See:

- ["SELF-SUSTAINABILITY"](#) (17 Feb 2016)
- ["CHINA 2021: THE CHINESE CENTURY"](#) (9 Mar 2021)
- ["TOP TRENDS 2021: THE RISE OF CHINA"](#) (30 Mar 2021)
- ["CHINA POWER SHORTAGES: LESS COAL, MORE CLEAN ENERGY?"](#) (8 Jun 2021)
- ["CHINA'S ECONOMY SLOWING?"](#) (28 Sep 2021)
- ["U.S. 'ALREADY LOST' AI WAR WITH CHINA, PENTAGON'S FORMER SOFTWARE CHIEF SAYS"](#) (12 Oct 2021)
- ["IN CHINA, DOMESTIC BRANDS OUTPACE WESTERN ICONS"](#) (29 Jun 2021)
- ["SPOTLIGHT: CHINA"](#) (1 Feb 2022)
- ["U.S. FADING FAST: SOUTHEAST ASIANS SEE CHINA AS #1"](#) (22 Feb 2022)
- ["TOP 2022 TREND: SELF-SUFFICIENT ECONOMIES: CHINA LEADS THE CHARGE"](#) (8 Mar 2022)
- ["SELF-SUFFICIENCY TOP TREND: UKRAINE WAR PUSHES CHINA TO STRENGTHEN ALLIANCES"](#) (5 Apr 2022)

- [“SELF-SUFFICIENCY TOP TREND: ‘CHINA CREATING A UNIFIED DOMESTIC MARKET’”](#) (12 Apr 2022)
- [“GERMANY TAKES TOUGHER STANCE AGAINST CHINA: ‘SELF-SUFFICIENCY’ TOP TREND”](#) (7 Jun 2022)
- [“TOP 2022 TREND, SELF-SUFFICIENT ECONOMIES: CHINA PROMOTES VOCATIONAL EDUCATION”](#) (23 Aug 2022)
- [“SPOTLIGHT: CHINA”](#) (13 Sep 2022)
- [“U.S., ONCE AGAIN, TRIES TO GET CHINA TO PULL AWAY FROM RUSSIA”](#) (20 Sep 2022)
- [“TOP TREND, SELF-SUFFICIENCY: U.S. GOING SOLAR FROM SCRATCH”](#) (22 Nov 2022)
- [“SPOTLIGHT: CHINA’S ECONOMIC STRUGGLE”](#) (18 Jul 2023)
- [“SPOTLIGHT ON CHINA: ECONOMIC STRUGGLE”](#) (15 Aug 2023)
- [“SPOTLIGHT: CHINA’S ECONOMY STRUGGLES”](#) (12 Dec 2023)
- [“SPOTLIGHT: CHINA’S ECONOMIC STRUGGLE”](#) (9 Jan 2024)
- [“SPOTLIGHT: CHINA’S ECONOMIC STRUGGLE”](#) (5 Mar 2024)
- [“SPOTLIGHT: CHINA’S ECONOMIC STRUGGLE”](#) (12 Mar 2024)
- [“SPOTLIGHT: CHINA’S ECONOMIC STRUGGLE”](#) (19 Mar 2024)
- [“‘REINVENT YOURSELF,’ IMF TELLS CHINA”](#) (26 Mar 2024)
- [“SPOTLIGHT: CHINA’S ECONOMIC STRUGGLE”](#) (9 Apr 2024)
- [“SPOTLIGHT: CHINA’S ECONOMIC PLIGHT”](#) (16 Apr 2024)
- [“CHINA CALLS OUT U.S. HYPOCRISY AFTER WASHINGTON IMPOSES NEW SANCTIONS ON CHINESE COMPANIES OVER SUPPORT OF RUSSIA’S WAR”](#) (7 May 2024)
- [“SPECIAL REPORT: CHINA RECONFIGURES THE GLOBAL AUTOMOBILE BUSINESS”](#) (14 May 2024)
- [“SPOTLIGHT: CHINA’S ECONOMIC STRUGGLE”](#) (21 May 2024)
- [“SPOTLIGHT: CHINA’S ECONOMIC MALAISE”](#) (4 Jun 2024)
- [“SPOTLIGHT: CHINA’S ECONOMY”](#) (11 Jun 2024)
- [“SPOTLIGHT: CHINA’S ECONOMY”](#) (18 Jun 2024)
- [“SPOTLIGHT: CHINA’S ECONOMIC MALAISE”](#) (2 Jul 2024)
- [“SPOTLIGHT: CHINA’S ECONOMIC STRUGGLE”](#) (23 Jul 2024)
- [“CHINA’S CENTRAL BANK MAKES SURPRISE INTEREST RATE CUT”](#) (30 Jul 2024)

- [“TOP TREND 2023, SELF-SUFFICIENT ECONOMIES: CHINA’S SOLAR FARMS ARE CROWDING OUT CROPS”](#) (6 Aug 2024)
- [“SPOTLIGHT: CHINA’S ECONOMIC STRUGGLE”](#) (6 Aug 2024)
- [“SPOTLIGHT: CHINA’S ECONOMIC DISTRESS: IS CHINA’S EXPORT BOOM TAPERING OFF?”](#) (13 Aug 2024)
- [“SPOTLIGHT: CHINA’S ECONOMIC CRISIS”](#) (20 Aug 2024)
- [“SPOTLIGHT: CHINA’S ECONOMIC MALAISE”](#) (10 Sep 2024)
- [“WILL BEIJING NEW STIMULUS MEASURES JOLT CHINA’S ECONOMY?”](#) (24 Sep 2024)
- [“SPOTLIGHT: CHINA’S GOVERNMENT STEPS UP”](#) (1 Oct 2024)
- [“SPOTLIGHT: CHINA’S ECONOMIC STRUGGLE”](#) (8 Oct 2024)
- [“SPOTLIGHT: CHINA’S ECONOMIC STRUGGLE”](#) (22 Oct 2024)
- [“TOP TREND 2023, SELF-SUFFICIENT ECONOMY: CHINA USES DOMESTIC CHIPS TO TRAIN AI WITH A TRILLION PARAMETERS”](#) (22 Oct 2024)
- [“SPOTLIGHT: CHINA’S ECONOMIC STRUGGLE”](#) (15 Oct 2024)
- [“SPOTLIGHT: CHINA’S ECONOMIC STRUGGLE”](#) (5 Nov 2024)
- [“SPOTLIGHT: CHINA’S SHIFTING ECONOMIC POLICIES”](#) (17 Dec 2024)
- [“SPOTLIGHT: CHINA’S ECONOMIC PLAN”](#) (7 Jan 2025)
- [“TOP TREND 2023, SELF-SUFFICIENT ECONOMIES: APPLE IPHONE NO LONGER CHINA’S BEST-SELLING SMARTPHONE”](#) (21 Jan 2025)
- [“CHINA’S ECONOMY SHRINKS UNEXPECTEDLY IN JANUARY”](#) (28 Jan 2025)

SPOTLIGHT: BIGS GETTER BIGGER



As we had forecast, with Donald Trump winning the race to the White House and promising to cut corporate taxes and lower interest rates, M&A activity will accelerate. Those rate cuts have not yet happened, so the up-trend for M&A activity is still on hold.

Here are the latest deals...

NOVARTIS PAYS MORE THAN \$3 BILLION TO TAKE OVER ANTHOS THERAPEUTICS

Drug colossus Novartis will pay as much as \$3.075 billion to buy out private equity firm Blackstone's majority share of Anthos Therapeutics.

Anthos is developing a drug treatment for blood clots using a technology it licensed from Novartis when Athos was formed as a partnership between Blackstone and Novartis in 2019. The treatment is now in late-stage clinical trials.

Novartis will pay \$925 million now and make additional payments to a limit of \$2.15 billion as specific milestones are met.

The new drug inhibits the body's production of a protein needed to clot blood. The treatment can prevent heart attacks and strokes and also could reduce the dangers of clots in cancer patients.

The drug showed enough promise that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration fast-tracked it for clinical evaluation in 2022.

Bringing Anthos in-house will strengthen Novartis's focus on cardiovascular medicine, the company said in a statement.

Novartis will continue to seek out acquisitions that will provide new revenue streams in coming years as patents expire on its key proprietary drugs, CEO Vas Narasimhan told *The Wall Street Journal*.

The company made 30 such deals in the last year, he added, most at a cost under \$5 billion.

HYATT WILL BUY PLAYA HOTELS TO EXPAND IN MEXICO AND CARIBBEAN REGION

Hyatt Hotels is paying \$2.6 billion in cash and debt to acquire Playa Hotels, which operates 24 resorts across the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, and Mexico. Eight of the properties are Hyatt-branded. Hyatt already owns 9.4 percent of Playa.

More Americans have been vacationing at luxury spots outside the U.S. recently to take advantage of the strong dollar, which makes things cheaper in other countries.

Hyatt will pay \$13.50 per Playa share, a 40.5-percent premium to Playa's closing share price on 20 December, the last date before the companies announced they were negotiating.

Hyatt plans to sell the properties Playa now owns outright, which will bring Hyatt \$2 billion, the company has said.

THE ISRAEL WAR



PROOF: ISRAEL VIOLATES GAZA CEASEFIRE, BOMBS PALESTINIAN HOMES

Totally absent from the U.S. and most of the Western media who support the Israel War, satellite images viewed by Al Jazeera show that the Israeli military continues to destroy homes inside Gaza, despite the ceasefire and have constructed new fortifications along the Rafah crossing and in the northern outskirts of the city.

Al Jazeera, citing its fact-checking agency, Sanad, reported that the IDF destroyed dozens of homes in the southern Gaza city. The report said the satellite images were taken in late January.

“This is a war crime because they are destroying residential houses,” Hamze Attar, a Palestinian defense analyst, told the outlet.

The Al Jazeera report also noted that the IDF continues to kill Palestinians inside the enclave, despite the ceasefire. As of Saturday, 118 have been killed.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has also not held up his end of the ceasefire agreement, refusing to allow mobile homes and other heavy equipment into the enclave, *The Times of Israel* reported. The Al Jazeera report said 200,000 people remain displaced in Rafah alone, where 90 percent of the homes are destroyed right near the Egyptian border.

The report, citing an interview between an Israeli official on Kan, said the issue of these mobile trailers “will be discussed in the coming days.”

TRENDPOST: *As the saying in the Bronx goes: Bullshit has its own sound.*

There is no need for the mobile homes because Israel and U.S. President Donald Trump want the Palestinians out.

The U.S. and Israel are preparing to steal Gaza right in front of our faces and while the Arab world has done nothing to stop it, most of the Western nations support Israeli genocide against the Palestinians. Long forgotten is that Netanyahu said earlier in the conflict that there will be no Palestinian state after the current war is completed and that Israel must have “security control over the entire territory west of the Jordan River.”

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who Trump once referred to as a “perfect Adelson puppet,” met with Netanyahu in Jerusalem on Sunday and praised Trump’s plans for Gaza that would include the ethnic cleansing and a major development project.

He said Trump has been “very bold about what the future for Gaza should be, not the same tired ideas of the past,” according to The New York Times.

“It may have shocked and surprised many, but what cannot continue is the same cycle where we repeat over and over again and wind up in the exact same place,” he said.

Never mentioned is the fact that Israel purposely rendered the territory unlivable as part of the collective punishment that the Gazans were forced to endure. (See [“NETANYAHU TELLS SAUDI ARABIA TO TAKE PALESTINIANS FROM GAZA... SO ISRAEL CAN STEAL THEIR LAND” 11 Feb 2025](#), [“TRUMP-APPOINTED BOARD MEMBER OF U.S. HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL COUNCIL SAYS GAZANS ARE ‘EVIL,’ NOT WORTHY OF ‘MERCY’” 4 Feb 2025](#) and [“STARVE THEM OUT: NETANYAHU ‘OPEN’ TO ETHNICALLY CLEANSING GAZA, BEN GIVR SAYS” 10 Dec 2024](#).)

It is worth noting that Trump’s so-called “bold” initiative on Gaza is neither new nor bold.

*Itamar Ben Gvir, the head of the Jewish Power party, said in December that the only times that Israel actually defeated an enemy was when it took land. He said at the time that he has been working hard to sell his idea and believed that Trump will join forces with Israel to “encourage migration and settlements in Gaza” and work with Tel Aviv to do “big things” there, according to *The Times of Israel*.*

TRUMP DISREGARDS INTERNATIONAL LAW, MAINTAINS POSITION ON TAKING GAZA



U.S. President Donald Trump last week remained resolute on his proposal to take Gaza despite international law and indicated that Washington can just swoop in and claim the ruined enclave.

“We’re going to have Gaza,” he said. “We don’t have to buy. There’s nothing to buy.

We will have Gaza.... We’re going to take it.”

Trump was asked by a reporter at the White House how he plans on moving over two million Palestinians from the enclave. He seemed to downplay the effort and indicated

that it is a “small number of people relative to things that have taken place over the decades and centuries.”

Trump has been praised by Israelis for his position on Gaza, with some praising the president for embracing the “bold initiative.”

Bezalel Smotrich, Israel’s extremist finance minister who has argued that it could be moral to starve Palestinians, said the Israeli government and White House have been in contact about the ethnic cleansing in Gaza and that it should begin within the next few weeks.

The Times of Israel reported that Smotrich told an Israeli news outlet that “the process of emigration from Gaza will begin in the coming weeks.”

Trump has tried to portray his solution as the best possible outcome for regional stability and Gazans.

“If we could give them a home in a safer area—the only reason they’re talking about returning to Gaza is they don’t have an alternative. When they have an alternative, they don’t want to return to Gaza,” Trump said, pretending that he is taking a humanitarian view of the situation.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio told *The New York Times* that Trump’s comments on taking over Gaza was just the president’s effort to “get a reaction” from regional powers to come together for the enclave’s rebuilding effort.

“Now, if someone has a better plan—and we hope they do—if the Arab countries have a better plan, then that’s great,” Rubio said, according to the report.

Trump was asked at the White House about what authority he would use to just take Gaza, and he responded: “Under U.S. authority.”

TRENDPOST: *Andre Damon, a writer for WSWS, noted that reporters at the White House did not ask Trump what he was referring to when he mentioned the “precedent for using mass murder to force two million people from their land.”*

Damon noted that it is illegal to force civilians to leave their homes during armed conflicts under the Fourth Geneva Convention.

He also wrote that Trump's plan to take the land is in direct violation to the 1970 UN treaty that said no territory or state shall be the "object of acquisition by another state, resulting from the threat or use of force."

He said Trump's plan to "own" Gaza introduces a "new era of colonial, barbarism, and brutality, in which whole peoples, in their millions, will be sacrificed upon the altar of imperialist domination."

The New York Times, citing legal experts, agreed with Damon that Trump's vision for Gaza's future "would unquestionably be a severe violation of international law."

Janina Dill, the co-director of the Oxford Institute for Ethics, Law, and Armed Conflict, told the paper that the U.S. president is "just casually making major international crimes into policy proposals."

"He just normalizes, violating, or proposing to violate, the absolute bedrock principles of international law," she said.

The paper went on to note that Trump shot himself in the foot when he told Fox News that he had no plans to allow Gazans to return because temporary evacuations during conflict is not in violation of international law.

The Times said the Rome Statute considers forcible evictions a war crime and a crime against humanity.

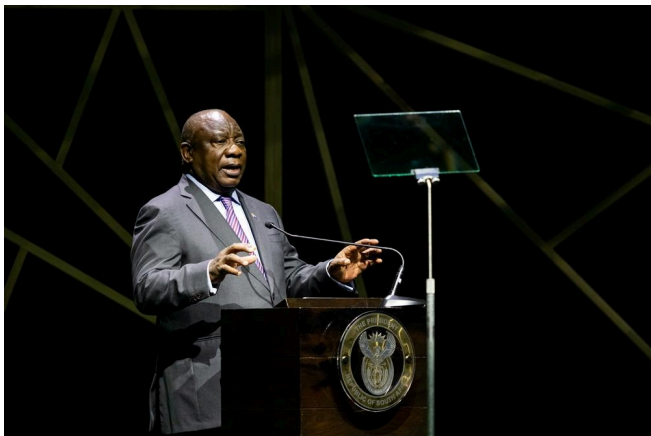
John Quigley, professor of law at Ohio State University, told Anadolu Ajansi that most Gazans are descendants of the 700,000 Palestinians expelled from the territory during the Nakba in 1948 and, according to international law, have the right to return.

He said it would be unlawful for the U.S. to "insert itself on the ground in Gaza without the consent of the Palestinian people. It is their territory." (See ["TRUMP RECEIVED](#)

[GAZA REDEVELOPMENT PLAN FROM PROFESSOR MONTHS AGO: REPORT](#) 11 Feb 2025, [“AS WE REPORTED LAST MARCH, TRUMP’S SON-IN-LAW KUSHNER BOASTED TO EXPEL PALESTINIANS FROM GAZA AND DEVELOP ‘WATER-FRONT’ PROPERTY](#) 11 Feb 2025 and [“ISRAEL APPLAUDS TRUMP’S ‘BUY’ GAZA PLAN](#) 11 Feb 2025.)

"They have a right to determine who would come in. I mean no European state could have its territory or part of its territory taken over by an outside party without consent. And that is essentially what Trump is suggesting the United States might do," he said.

SOUTH AFRICA SAYS THERE’S ‘NO CHANCE’ U.S. PRESSURE CAN MAKE IT DROP GENOCIDE CASE AGAINST ISRAEL IN THE ICJ



South Africa’s top diplomat said in an interview last week that there is “no chance” his country backs down from its genocide case against Israel in the International Court of Justice—even with new actions taken by the Trump administration to bully the country into submission to protect Tel Aviv from facing justice over its actions in Gaza.

Ronald Lamola, South Africa’s foreign minister, told the *Financial Times* there are moments when standing up for principles could mean facing consequences, “but we were made firm that this is important for the world and the rule of law.”

South Africa formally accused Israel of committing genocide in Gaza late last year, which Israel has denied.

South Africa used comments from prominent Israelis to help make its case, in particular when Yoav Gallant, the defense minister, said Israel will impose a complete siege on Gaza and said it was fighting “human animals.”

An interim judgment by the International Court of Justice ordered Israel to take “immediate and effective measures” to protect Palestinians in the occupied Gaza Strip from the risk of genocide. The ruling said: “In the Court’s view, the facts and circumstances... are sufficient to conclude that at least some of the rights claimed by South Africa and for which it is seeking protection are plausible.”

Ireland, Syria, Pakistan, Spain, Chile, Malaysia, Brazil, and Turkey have all joined the case.

U.S. President Donald Trump signed the executive order accusing South Africa of taking “aggressive positions towards the United States and its allies, including accusing Israel, not Hamas, of genocide in the International Court of Justice.”

Lamola issued a statement on Saturday accusing Trump’s executive order of lacking “factual accuracy” that “fails to recognize South Africa’s profound and painful history of colonialism and apartheid.”

“We are concerned by what seems to be a campaign of misinformation and propaganda aimed at misrepresenting our great nation. It is disappointing to observe that such narratives seem to have found favor among decision-makers in the United States of America,” the statement read, according to Palestine Chronicle.

TRENDPOST: As ***Trends Journal*** readers know, the court’s interim ruling did nothing to even slow the massacre in Gaza that resulted in at least 48,264 dead and 111,688 injured. At least 11,000 are missing. However, according to a Lancet study released in January, the Gaza death toll is some 40 percent higher than what is being reported, and some 60 percent of those slaughtered by Israel are women, children and people over 65 years of age.

U.S. President Donald Trump has kept the tradition going in the White House to punish any country that dares to speak out against Israeli atrocities in Gaza and signed an order last week that ends “foreign aid or assistance” to the African nation. Trump also expressed anger over the country’s new law that he says unfairly seizes property from the country’s white minority, a claim that South Africa denied.

“The United States cannot support the government of South Africa’s commission of rights violations in its country or its ‘undermining United States foreign policy, which poses national security threats to our Nation, our allies, our African partners, and our interests,” the executive order read, according to Anadolu Ajansi.

Earlier this month, the Trump administration went after members of the International Criminal Court (ICC) with sanctions for “illegitimate and baseless actions” against the U.S. and Israel. (See [“TRUMP IMPOSES SANCTIONS ON ICC AFTER ACCUSING IT OF UNFAIRLY TARGETING ISRAEL, U.S.”](#) 11 Feb 2025.)

ISRAEL CONTINUES TO INTENSIFY RAIDS ACROSS THE WEST BANK, DISPLACES AT LEAST 40,000 PALESTINIANS FROM CAMPS



It is essentially no news in the mainstream Western media that the Israeli military continues to carry out raids across the West Bank, displacing at least 40,000 Palestinians during their expulsion operations last week.

The Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* reported that the IDF’s operations throughout the West Bank have been more intense than in previous years. Residents who have been either forced to leave or did so voluntarily have stayed away longer than in previous IDF operations, the report said.

Those who try to return, expose themselves to possible arrest or violence.

Abdullah Kamil, the governor of the TulKarm district, told the paper that the IDF employed loudspeakers from inside mosques to order evacuations inside the TulKarm and Nur Shams refugee camps.

A colonel from the IDF’s Ephraim Brigade told *Haaretz* that residents are being evacuated so his forces can fight terror cells within these camps.

Kamil rejected the claim, and said the attacks “focus from the start on UNRWA, which is one of the two main witnesses to the historic crime in Israel, committed against the Palestinians and the creation of the refugee problem.”

The paper said Palestinians tend to agree with his assessment and that Israel wants to snuff out these camps. Residents who have been displaced told the agency that they were led out of their homes by IDF security forces under the watchful eye of drones and snipers positioned nearby.

The Trends Journal has reported that extremist Israelis have been emboldened with Donald Trump as president in the U.S. One of Trump’s first actions as president was to lift sanctions imposed by the Biden administration against violent Israeli settlers. (See [“TRUMP ENDS BIDEN SANCTIONS ON VIOLENT WEST BANK ISRAELI SETTLERS AS THEY RAMP UP MORE WAR”](#) 21 Jan 2025, [“TOP UN REPORTER: ISRAELI SETTLERS MUST BE STOPPED AND IT’S UP TO OTHER COUNTRIES TO STEP IN”](#) 23 Jul 2024, [“ISRAEL’S SMOTRICH: WE WILL KEEP STEALING PALESTINIAN LAND TO MAKE A ‘GREATER ISRAEL’”](#) 29 Oct 2024 and [“SMOTRICH SAYS NETANYAHU AGREES TO KEEP STEALING PALESTINIAN LAND”](#) 25 Jun 2024.)

Israel wasted no time and started “Operation Iron Wall” one day after U.S. President Donald Trump’s inauguration.

The West Bank has been under siege by the Israelis since the Hamas attack in October 2023.

At least 915 Palestinians have been killed—including 182 children—and more than 7,616 have been injured in these military operations, according to Al Jazeera.

The report said 15,000 have been arrested.

The UN Human Rights Office condemned Israel’s decision to intensify its operation—particularly in the northern West Bank.

Israel killed at least 44 Palestinians since the start of the new offensive, including five children and two women. The office noted that “many of those killed were unarmed and posed no imminent threat.”

The agency called the attacks “part of an expanding pattern of Israel’s unlawful use of force in the West Bank where there are no active hostilities.”

The violent escalation by Israel came right after Hamas and Tel Aviv agreed to a temporary ceasefire in exchange for hostages.

Israel has also been carrying out raids in Jenin and, according to Al Jazeera, killed at least 25 Palestinians there since the start of the year.

The report, citing Jenin’s media committee, accused the Israelis of cutting off main hospitals from their main water supply. About 35 percent of the residents in Jenin have “been deprived of water,” according to the report.

The *Haaretz* report noted that the IDF has been destroying homes and roads within the Jenin camp.

TRENDPOST: *Like Gaza, the IDF seems intent on making these camps unlivable in a renewed effort to steal the land. The Trends Journal has noted that the Israel government may never have a better chance than right now—under the Trump administration in Washington—to take what’s left of the West Bank from the Palestinians. (See [“TRUMP’S PICK FOR UN ENVOY SAYS ISRAEL HAS ‘BIBLICAL’ RIGHT TO THE WEST BANK,”](#) 28 Jan 2025.)*

+972 Magazine reported that the IDF aggression in the West Bank has not been seen since the Second Intifada in 2000 when the Palestinians fought back against Israel stealing their land.

The Israeli goal is clear: they want Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank out and they will not stop until they achieve their aims. U.S. President Donald Trump has assembled a pro-Zionist Cabinet made up of individuals who believe Israel has the divine right for the land—and it is their job to fulfil that promise.

TRENDPOST: Again, and again, and again... week after week, month after month, year after year and decade after decade, not a peep from the Prostitutes that Israel's stealing land from the Palestinians is in violation of the Geneva Convention and UN article 242. See:

- ["ISRAELI END GAME IN PALESTINE"](#) (1 Aug 2014)
- ["MIDDLE EAST MADHOUSE"](#) (16 Sep 2019)
- ["ISRAEL'S NEW 'SETTLEMENT' PLAN CONDEMNED BY U.S., EUROPE"](#) (2 Nov 2021)
- ["TOP TREND 2023, MIDDLE EAST MELTDOWN: ISRAEL RAMPS UP DEADLY RAIDS ON PALESTINIANS; GUNMAN RETALIATES IN FRONT OF SYNAGOGUE"](#) (31 Jan 2023)
- ["ISRAEL WANTS TO KEEP STEALING PALESTINIAN LAND: GAZA NEXT"](#) (28 Nov 2023)
- ["UN SAYS INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY MUST USE 'ALL ITS INFLUENCE' TO END GAZA WAR"](#) (9 Jan 2024)
- ["GENOCIDE: ISRAELI POLITICIANS SEE GAZA'S FUTURE FREE OF PALESTINIANS"](#) (16 Jan 2024)
- ["UN CHIEF CALLS GAZA DEATH TOLL 'HEARTBREAKING' AS NUMBER SURPASSES 25 THOUSAND"](#) (23 Jan 2024)
- ["GAZA LAND-GRAB: THOUSANDS OF 'SETTLERS' READY TO 'RESETTLE' POST-GENOCIDE"](#) (30 Jan 2024)
- ["LAND-STEAL: TOP ISRAELI MKs WANT POST-WAR SETTLEMENTS IN GAZA"](#) (30 Jan 2024)
- ["ISRAELI WEST BANK ISRAELI LAND STEALER: GAZANS WILL MOVE, JUST STARVE THEM"](#) (6 Feb 2024)
- ["ISRAELI FORCES KILLING PALESTINIANS IN THE WEST BANK WITH 'NEAR TOTAL IMPUNITY'"](#) (6 Feb 2024)
- ["ISRAEL SYSTEMATICALLY DESTROYS RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS IN GAZA TO CREATE BUFFER"](#) (6 Feb 2024)
- ["U.S. TELLS ICJ: ISRAEL CAN KEEP ITS STEALING OF PALESTINIAN LAND"](#) (27 Feb 2024)

- [“ISRAEL BOMBS TO RUIN RESIDENTIAL BUILDING AND UNIVERSITY IN RAFAH” \(12 Mar 2024\)](#)
- [“ISRAEL STEALS 3 MILES OF LAND IN OCCUPIED WEST BANK IN VIOLATION OF GENEVA CONVENTION” \(26 Mar 2024\)](#)
- [“RAFAH EVACUATION NOT POSSIBLE, RED CROSS WARNS” \(30 Apr 2024\)](#)
- [“ISRAEL STEALING MORE LAND IN WEST BANK” \(7 May 2024\)](#)
- [“ISRAELI COLONIZERS RAMPAGE IN WEST BANK TOWN AS IDF LETS IT HAPPEN” \(14 May 2024\)](#)
- [“ISRAEL: F-CK THE ICJ, WE’LL KEEP BOMBING GAZA INTO RUINS” \(28 May 2024\)](#)
- [“ISRAEL LAND STEALING PACE ESCALATES” \(4 Jun 2024\)](#)
- [“NETANYAHU PUSHES TO KEEP STEALING PALESTINIAN LAND” \(18 Jun 2024\)](#)
- [“SMOTRICH SAYS NETANYAHU AGREES TO KEEP STEALING PALESTINIAN LAND” \(25 Jun 2024\)](#)
- [“G7 CONDEMNS ISRAEL’S DECISION TO STEAL MORE WEST BANK LAND” \(16 Jul 2024\)](#)
- [“ICJ: ISRAEL STEALING PALESTINIAN LAND ‘UNLAWFUL’ AND CONSTITUTES APARTHEID” \(23 Jul 2024\)](#)
- [“ISRAEL STEALS MORE PALESTINIAN LAND, THIS TIME AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE” \(30 Jul 2024\)](#)
- [“ISRAEL STEALING MORE LAND: NETANYAHU SAYS WEST BANK IS ISRAEL’S HOMELAND” \(13 Aug 2024\)](#)
- [“ISRAELI ‘SETTLER’ ATTACK SO BARBARIC, EVEN NETANYAHU CRITICIZES” \(20 Aug 2024\)](#)
- [“NETANYAHU TURNS WEST BANK INTO WARZONE AS HE WANTS TO WIPE OUT PALESTINIANS AND STEAL MORE LAND” \(10 Sep 2024\)](#)
- [“ISRAEL’S SMOTRICH: WE WILL KEEP STEALING PALESTINIAN LAND TO MAKE A ‘GREATER ISRAEL’” \(29 Oct 2024\)](#)

IRAN ACCUSES ZIONIST TRUMP OF MAKING 'IRRESPONSIBLE REMARKS' ABOUT PROSPECT OF WAR



A top Iranian diplomat penned a letter to UN Secretary-General António Guterres last week condemning U.S. President Donald Trump's bellicose language about using force against Tehran over its nuclear program that Iran insists is for non-military use.

Trump has said that he wants peace with Iran and not war. But he also said that he will not allow the country to obtain a nuclear weapon. If diplomacy falls through, Trump said he would have to bomb “the hell out of it.”

Trump told Fox News that he would like to make a deal “without bombing them.”

Iran has taken the position that it will not allow Trump to bully it and “bring it to its knees,” either militarily or economically.

Amir Saeid Iravani, Iran's permanent ambassador to the UN, wrote in the letter that Trump's comments were “deeply alarming, and irresponsible.”

The diplomat said the “reckless and inflammatory statements, frequently violate international law, and the UN charter, particularly Article 2(4), prohibit threats, or use of force against sovereign states.”

Masoud Pezeshkian, the Iranian president, has said several times that he will not allow Trump to bully Iran.

“Trump cannot dictate orders to us and impose sanctions on us and then talk about negotiations,” he said. He continued, “Trump says let's have a dialogue, and then... he signs and announces all possible conspiracies to bring the [Islamic] revolution to its knees,” according to Press TV.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader, responded to Trump's comments in Tehran last week and called on his military to continue to grow.

"Progress should not be stopped," he said, according to Al Jazeera.

"Say that we previously set a limit for the accuracy of our missiles, but we now feel this limit is no longer enough. We have to go forward," he said. "Today, our defensive power is well known, our enemies are afraid of this. This is very important for our country."

TRENDPOST: *The Trends Journal* has noted that Iran has taken a stand previously against Trump's attempt to bully it. (See ["IRAN REJECTS TRUMP'S BULLYING ATTEMPT, LEADER SAYS NEGOTIATING WITH U.S. IS NEITHER SMART OR WISE"](#) 11 Feb 2025, ["TRUMP WANTS TO CHOKE IRAN BY KILLING ITS OIL INDUSTRY"](#) 11 Feb 2025 and ["IRAN WARNS ISRAEL, U.S. AGAINST TARGETING ITS NUCLEAR SITES, SAYS IT WOULD LEAD TO 'ALL-OUT WAR'"](#) 4 Feb 2025.)

Jeffery Sachs, the Columbia economist, told Judge Andrew Napolitano's "Judging Freedom" podcast in December that the Iranians have been trying to strike a peace deal with the U.S. for years.

Sachs said these overtures by Tehran have not been reported, but its government has "repeatedly" reached out to Washington stating that it wants peace, it is willing to negotiate, and it does not want a nuclear weapon.

"And the U.S. turned to Israel and said, 'What do you think?' And Israel's response is, 'Well, they're weak. They're obviously weak. They're obviously suffering. Turn up the pressure. Turn the screws on them.' In other words, we don't know how to take yes for an answer in this county... especially the neocons," he said. "Especially Israel. Israel doesn't want peace. Israel wants military victory, and it has made a wasteland as a result of this."

U.S. INTELLIGENCE SAYS ISRAEL SEES TRUMP MORE LIKELY TO BACK STRIKES AGAINST IRAN



The Israelis see U.S. President Donald Trump as a more willing participant than his predecessor if they decide to carry out strikes on Iran’s nuclear centers and there is a likelihood that Tel Aviv will push the new president to support these attacks.

The Wall Street Journal, citing two people familiar with the intelligence, reported that

Israel believes Iran is closing in on weaponizing uranium and now may be an opportune time after softening its defense systems in strikes last year.

Trump has been a vocal critic of Iran’s nuclear program. About a month before the election, he criticized the Biden administration for opposing these strikes. Joe Biden believed such strikes would be escalatory and ensnare the region.

“I think [Biden] got that wrong,” Trump said at the time. “Isn't that what you're supposed to hit? The answer should have been to hit the nuclear first and worry about the rest later.”

J.D. Vance, the vice president, gave his first major interview as Trump’s running mate to Fox News and expressed interest in a more militant approach to Iran.

“We need to punch Iran hard. That's what Trump did with Qasem Soleimani. That action actually brought peace by checking the Iranians. If you want to check the Iranians, you need to withdraw their oil money, and enable Israel and the Sunni countries to work to counter Iran,” he said.

The *WSJ* report noted that Israel does not have the military to carry out such extensive strikes against Iran and would require U.S. support to achieve its mission. If the U.S.

carried out decisive strikes against Iran, there is a risk that Russia and China could come to Tehran's aid.

Israel has been trying to position itself as though it is in a strong position to take such strikes because of its extensive campaigns against Hamas, Hezbollah, and the collapse of Bashar al Assad in Syria.

"Iran is more exposed than ever to strikes on its nuclear facilities. We have the opportunity to achieve our most important goal—to thwart and eliminate the existential threat to the State of Israel," Israel Katz, the Israeli defense minister, said last November, according to the paper.

The Washington Post reported last week that American intelligence officials believe Israel will strike these facilities in the first half of 2025—without a deal.

Last week, Trump told reporters that he left his advisers' orders to obliterate Iran should the country assassinate him while he is in office—just while he announced a new "maximum pressure" campaign against his adversary to prevent Tehran from developing a nuke. (See ["TRUMP GIVES ORDERS TO OBLITERATE IRAN IF ASSASSINATED,"](#) 11 Feb 2025.)

David Ignatius, the columnist for *The Washington Post*, wrote that Trump is being pressured by Israelis who believe Iran has never been so vulnerable. The columnist, citing both Israeli and American officials, wrote that "Israel wants to seize the moment."

He noted that Trump, at least publicly, seems more inclined to pursue a diplomatic solution.

"There's two ways of stopping them: with bombs or with a written piece of paper. And I'd much rather do a deal," he told Fox News, according to the report.

Ignatius admitted that Trump "clearly doesn't want a war" but the "final decision-maker here may be Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

TRENDPOST: Netanyahu is optimistic that Trump, who is assembling the most pro-Israel administration in American history, will be on board with the eventual war with Tehran. (See [“NETANYAHU SETS SIGHTS ON IRAN AFTER ASSAD’S FALL”](#) 17 Dec 2024, [“TRUMP’S PICK FOR DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE OPPOSED TO UKRAINE WAR, BUT COMMITTED TO ISRAEL’S GENOCIDE”](#) 19 Nov 2024, [“TRUMP PICKS PRO-ISRAEL TEAM”](#) 19 Nov 2024 and [“ISRAEL SEES TRUMP’S ELECTION WIN AS BIG STEP IN ANNEXING THE WEST BANK”](#) 19 Nov 2024.)

Trump talks about his interest in being a “peacemaker” during his second term, but you would have to be blind to miss his full support and dedication to Israel.

Trump approved 1,800 2,000-pound bombs for Israel and \$9 billion in other munitions and, as Philip Girdi, the former CIA analyst, noted, “armored Caterpillar bulldozers, useful for knocking down Palestinian houses and clearing debris and bodies for the construction of luxury villas.”

NETANYAHU VOWS TO ‘FINISH THE JOB’ ON IRAN DURING MEETING WITH RUBIO



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Sunday that Washington and Tel Aviv will stand shoulder-to-shoulder to confront Iran and said—with the help of Donald Trump—“we can and will finish the job.”

Netanyahu made the comment after meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, which he called a “very productive” conversation, according to the *Times of Israel*. He told reporters that Trump is the “greatest friend Israel has ever had in the White House.”

He told reporters that their conversation focused heavily on Iran and they both agreed that Tehran should never be allowed to obtain a nuclear weapon and “also agreed that Iran’s aggression in the region must be rolled back.”

Rubio, who Trump once called the “perfect Adelson puppet,” agreed with Netanyahu and blamed Iran for being behind “every terrorist group, behind every act of violence, behind every destabilizing activity, behind everything that threatens peace and disability for the millions of people that call this region home,” according to Reuters.

Netanyahu has been trying to pull the U.S. into a war with Iran for years. He has referred to Tehran as being the “head of the octopus” in the region.

TRENDPOST: *Rubio represents how being a neocon warmonger in Washington means never having to say you’re sorry.*

Chris Hedges, the independent journalist, posted on X: “Those who are spoiling for war with Iran are the same people that brought us the debacles in Afghanistan and Iraq. They believe they can shape the Middle East to meet the West’s interests by force, despite consistent historical examples proving their imperialist strategies do not work.”

Gaza

Netanyahu, once again, praised Trump’s proposal to ethnically cleanse Gaza and develop the enclave.

He sounded like Trump when he warned Hamas that he would “open the gates of hell” if all the hostages are not returned.

Rubio and Netanyahu issued a joint statement that said, “We will eliminate Hamas’ military capability and its political rule in Gaza. We will bring all our hostages home, and we will ensure that Gaza never again poses a threat to Israel.”

Rubio was in the country just as 1,800 MK-84 2,000-pound bombs arrived in Israel from the U.S.

The top U.S. diplomat agreed with Netanyahu that Hamas cannot continue “as a military or government force.”

“As long as it stands as a force that can govern or as a force that can administer or as a force that can threaten by use of violence, peace becomes impossible. It must be eradicated,” he said, according to CBS News.

Trump said in an interview at the Daytona 500 on Sunday that he told Netanyahu that he should do whatever he thinks he needs to do in the region.

TRENDPOST: *Norman Finkelstein, the Middle East scholar, said in interviews that prior to the Hamas attack in 2023, he lost interest in the Palestinian cause after decades of study because it just seemed hopeless.*

There is a similar feeling when it comes to reporting on Palestine in this magazine. There is no atrocity too abhorrent that Israel can commit that would ever lead to it being scrutinized in the Western media or by our politicians. (See [“NETANYAHU WARNS INTENSE FIGHTING WOULD RESUME IN GAZA IF HOSTAGES NOT RETURNED”](#) 11 Feb 2025, [“TRUMP SENDS \\$7.4B IN WEAPONS FOR ISRAEL TO KEEP THE GENOCIDE AND WARS GOING”](#) 11 Feb 2025 and [“TRUMP-APPOINTED BOARD MEMBER OF U.S. HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL COUNCIL SAYS GAZANS ARE ‘EVIL,’ NOT WORTHY OF ‘MERCY;’”](#) 4 Feb 2025.)

Here are some of the cringeworthy headlines about the Rubio-Netanyahu meeting.

BBC: “Netanyahu praises Trump's 'bold' Gaza plan in meeting with Rubio”

CNN: “Netanyahu vows to ‘finish the job’ against Iran with support from Trump”

CBS NEWS: “Netanyahu vows to ‘open the gates of hell’ if all hostages in Gaza not returned”

Rubio’s next stop in his Middle East swing will be Saudi Arabia and the UAE—two important allies that have done nothing to stop Israel’s genocide.

TREND FORECAST: *Despite what the Israeli and Western media keep reporting, we forecast that if Israel attacks Iran it will be the beginning of the end of Israel. Iran is not Hezbollah and Hamas, and we've seen the Iranian military's capabilities last year in its response to Israeli attacks. (See ["IRAN PREPARING TO 'RESPOND' TO ISRAEL AFTER OCTOBER STRIKES ON MILITARY SITES: REPORT"](#) 26 Nov 2024, ["IRAN'S SUPREME LEADER WARNS ISRAEL, U.S. OF 'CRUSHING RESPONSE' AFTER IDF STRIKE"](#) 5 Nov 2024 and ["ISRAEL WARNS IRAN NOT TO RESPOND TO ITS MISSILE ATTACKS"](#) 29 Oct 2024.)*

Again, Iran is very advanced militarily and just going by the numbers, Iran's 91 million people will defeat the 7 million Jewish people of Israel if full war breaks out.

Netanyahu has been trying to get the U.S. to go to war with Iran for decades. Netanyahu recently addressed the people of Iran again and promised them that they would soon be free, and he has "no doubt" that they will "realize that future together."

Israel Katz, Israel's new defense minister, has said the world is in "the middle of WWII" and it's his country leading the way against Iranian-led radical Islam.

"We're in the middle of World War III against Iran-led radical Islam, whose tentacles are already in Europe," Katz said earlier this year.

Trump, as a candidate, criticized his predecessor Joe Biden for stating that Tel Aviv should not target Iranian nuke sites.

"I think [Biden] got that wrong," Trump said. "Isn't that what you're supposed to hit? The answer should have been to hit the nuclear first and worry about the rest later."

GERMAN COLLEGE CANCELS LECTURE BY UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR WHO HAS BEEN CRITICAL OF ISRAEL'S GENOCIDE IN GAZA



The Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich caused a stir last week when it cancelled a speech that was to be delivered by Francesca Albanese, the UN special rapporteur for human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories, claiming that there was a risk that clashing opinions could lead to a security issue.

The planned discussion was titled, “Colonialism, Human Rights and International Law.” But Albanese is seen as a top critic of Israel, so when it was announced, the school lost its nerve and cancelled.

Free University of Berlin in Germany also called off an event with Albanese after Ron Prosor, the Israeli ambassador to Germany, reportedly sent a letter to Gunter Ziegler, the school’s president, urging the cancellation.

The German *Bild* newspaper quoted part of his letter: “It is a shame for your university if Albanese will speak there. A disgrace for the entire academic community, a disgrace for the city of Berlin.”

Albanese has been a favorite target of Israel and its supporters in the West.

Israel banned her from entering the country in February 2024 after her critics say she tried to justify the Hamas attack in October 2023.

“The victims of 7/10 were not killed because of their Judaism, but in response to Israel’s oppression,” she said.

In 2022, Albanese angered Israelis when she told the General Assembly that the Israeli military was guilty of pursuing the ‘de-Palestinianisation’ of the occupied territory.

Her report stated that Israeli occupation violates Palestinian territorial sovereignty by “seizing, annexing, fragmenting, and transferring its civilian population to the occupied territory.”

Israel Katz, the former foreign minister and current IDF head, defended the ban and repeated the early Israeli propaganda: “Preventing her from entering Israel might remind her of the real reason why Hamas slaughtered babies, women and adults”.

Albanese responded to her ban in Israel in a follow-up post: “BREAKING: Israel's ‘denying me entry’ is not news: Israel has denied entry to ALL Special Rapporteurs/oPt since 2008! This must not become a distraction from Israel's atrocities in Gaza, which are taking a new level of horror with the bombing of people in 'safe areas' in #Rafah.”

A month after her ban, she presented a report called “Anatomy of a Genocide” and said “there are clear indications that Israel has violated three of the five acts listed under the UN Genocide Convention in its war on Gaza.”

Israel and its advocates in the Western media have tried to portray the attack that killed 1,200 as unprovoked and an example of why the Israelis need to keep their boots on the necks of Palestinians.

But some have compared the attack as nothing short of a prison break.

The Biden administration brushed off her comments. Matt Miller, the former Jewish U.S. State Department spokesman, tried to tarnish Albanese and said he, “can't help but note a history of antisemitic comments that she has made that have been reported.”

The lecture at the university in Munich was supposed to take place on Sunday. She was invited by the school's Decolonial Practices Group that responded to her cancellation by stating that it is “deeply concerned about yet another case in which an urgently needed academic discourse on the serious situation in Israel/Palestine is being denied in Germany.”

TRENDPOST: *The Trends Journal* has reported extensively on how any criticism of Israel is not allowed in academia or in the media. While, in many cases, Germany has led the way in banning speech against Israel, it is not alone.

We reported that U.S. President Donald Trump signed an executive order last week ordering federal agencies to move quickly to find ways to deport resident aliens who took part in anti-genocide protests on college campuses—making good on a promise he made in May to a group of donors that he jokingly called “98 percent of my Jewish friends,” according to *The Washington Post*.

And last week, the Dutch parliament announced that it also disinvited Albanese from addressing the body’s foreign affairs committee. *Dutch News* reported that there was an earlier vote to invite her, but “pro-Israel organizations and MPs have mounted a campaign” to kill the discussion, the report said.

One politician in parliament opposed to her cancellation told the outlet: “This room is full of adults who have been rounded up to stop this. If only they had put all this energy into coming up with critical questions.”

Any criticism of Israel in the West is seen as antisemitism, which allows the Israelis to carry out any atrocity in the name of self-preservation. (See [“GERMAN AUTHORITIES RAID HOMES OF PRO-PALESTINIAN ASSOCIATION OVER ANTISEMITISM—DESPITE NO SPECIFIC ALLEGATIONS,”](#) 26 Jan 2025.)

The Trends Journal reported extensively on how Germany has been one of Israel’s biggest backers during the genocide in Gaza and the country moved quickly to punish those who speak out against the killing spree in Gaza. (See [“HEIL HITLER: GERMANY KEEPS SENDING WEAPONS TO KEEP ISRAELI GENOCIDE GOING”](#) 3 Dec 2024, [“GERMANY REJECTS PROPOSAL THAT WOULD HAVE ENDED ARMS EXPORTS TO ISRAEL”](#) 18 Jun 2024 and [“GERMANY CRACKS DOWN ON THOSE WHO SPEAK OUT AGAINST ISRAEL’S ATROCITIES IN GAZA”](#) 14 Nov 2023.)

DW, the German news outlet, noted that, “For Germany, the past is always present,” which has impacted its foreign policy for decades.

After killing six million Jews in death camps during WWII, Germany sees a “special responsibility” towards Israel. Former Chancellor Angela Merkel told Israel’s Knesset in 2008 that Israel’s security and existence is Germany’s “Staatsräson.”

ANTI-SEMITE RABBIS? HUNDREDS OF RABBIS SIGN AD CONDEMNING GAZA’S ETHNIC CLEANSING



Hundreds of rabbis put their names on a full-page advertisement in *The New York Times* last week that was titled, “Jewish People Say NO to Ethnic Cleansing.”

The Middle East Eye reported that 350 rabbis added their name to the message along with some Jewish celebrities like

Joaquin Phoenix.

They called on U.S. President Donald Trump to abort his plan to forcibly remove over 2 million Palestinians from the Gaza Strip after a 15-month bombing campaign by the Israeli government—backed fully by the U.S. (See [“ISRAELI GENOCIDE CUTS LIFE EXPECTANCY IN GAZA IN HALF”](#) 4 Feb 2025 and [“DEATHS IN GAZA DRAMATICALLY UNDERREPORTED, ACCORDING TO NEW ANALYSIS PUBLISHED IN THE LANCET,”](#) 14 Jan 2025.)

Trump has called for the removal of all Palestinians from Gaza.

Jewish people say

NO

to ethnic cleansing!

[The following is a dense list of names of Jewish leaders and community members who signed the statement.]

Cody Edgerly, the director of the In Our Name campaign, told the outlet that Jewish leaders “from across the political spectrum are outraged by the proposal and felt compelled to speak forcefully against it, even as some American and Israeli Jewish communal leaders endorse Trump’s plan.”

The advertisement read, “Trump has called for the removal of all Palestinians from Gaza. Jewish people say no to ethnic cleansing!”

Trump told reporters aboard Air Force One last month that the result of the conflict in Gaza may have to be the removal of Palestinians from the enclave that could take decades to rebuild — echoing the calls from top Israelis who want to steal the land. (See [“TRUMP SUPPORTS HIS SON-IN-LAW’S ETHNIC CLEANSING OF GAZA,”](#) 28 Jan 2025.)

He has not backed down from his proposal, which has been embraced by the Israeli government.

The proposal is in direct violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention and the 1970 UN treaty that said no territory or state shall be the “object of acquisition by another state, resulting from the threat or use of force.”

Toba Spitzer, one of the rabbis whose name appeared in the ad, said in a statement that “it is vitally important that we in the American Jewish community add our voices to all those refusing to entertain this insidious plan. Hitler’s dream of making Germany ‘Judenrein,’ ‘cleansed of Jews,’ led to the slaughter of our people.”

He continued, “We know as well as anyone the violence that these kinds of fantasies can lead to. It is time to make the ceasefire permanent, bring all of the hostages home, and join in efforts to rebuild Gaza for the sake of and with the people who live there.”

TRENDPOST: *There have been Jewish groups that have spoken out against the genocide for months, but they have been largely ignored by the mainstream Presstitutes. They include: Jewish Voice for Peace, If Not Now, Jews for Racial & Economic Justice and Jewish Federations of North America with the Reform Movement.*

LAND-STEAL: ISRAEL SAYS IT WILL KEEP TROOPS IN 5 LOCATIONS IN SOUTHERN LEBANON



Israel is in violation of another ceasefire agreement—this time with Hezbollah—and announced Monday that it will keep troops stationed at five locations throughout southern Lebanon past the agreed-upon withdrawal date of 18 February.

Lt. Col. Nadav Shoshani, an IDF spokesman, said there will be “small amounts of troops deployed temporarily in five strategic points along the border in Lebanon so we can continue to defend our residents and to make sure there’s no immediate threat,” according to *The New York Times*.

He claimed that Hezbollah has been in violation of the agreement and that these forces would protect Israeli towns near the border area that have come under fire.

The ceasefire is based on UN Security Council resolution 1701, which called on Hezbollah fighters to pull out of southern Lebanon—and beyond the Litani. Israeli forces would have to withdraw from Lebanon under the agreement.

The ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah has been considered fragile, with Tel Aviv maintaining the right to intervene if it believes the Lebanese group is planning an attack.

Israel and Hezbollah had been waging a slow-burn conflict since the Hamas attack on 7 October 2023. Hezbollah's leadership said it would stop the fighting when Israel stopped its genocide in Gaza.

The temporary truce was agreed upon in November and was set to span 60 days. (See [“ISRAEL BREACHES CEASEFIRE DEAL: KILLING SPREE IN SOUTHERN LEBANON AS THEY REFUSE TO WITHDRAW”](#) 28 Jan 2025, [“ISRAEL INTENSIFIES STRIKES ACROSS LEBANON, EVEN AS HAMAS CEASEFIRE APPEARS CLOSE”](#) 14 Jan 2025, [“ISRAEL DESTROYED PRICELESS HERITAGE SITES DURING ITS BOMBING CAMPAIGN ACROSS LEBANON”](#) 7 Jan 2025 and [“ISRAEL BREAKS CEASEFIRE DEAL, FORCES INVADE LEBANON”](#) 7 Jan 2025.)

Naim Qassem, the new leader of Hezbollah, criticized Israel's decision and said it must “withdraw completely on Feb. 18,” according to the *Times*.

“Everyone knows how an occupation is dealt with,” he said. “It is the responsibility of the Lebanese state to take a firm stance and force Israel to withdraw.”

JNS reported that Israel carried out additional airstrikes across southern Lebanon on Sunday night, which it said targeted Hezbollah sites that housed rockets. Israel has killed at least 83 since the ceasefire was announced.

TRENDPOST: *Once Israel occupies land, it doesn't give it back, so it is no surprise that the IDF plans on staying put in southern Lebanon indefinitely.*

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu knows that he has a blank check sitting for him inside the White House and he can do whatever he wants in the region and benefit from the full support and protection of the United States government.

There will be no international condemnation, and Israel will work to annex the land—all in the name of security, of course. And if Hezbollah fights back to defend itself, the Western media will condemn the “militants” and celebrate when Israel carpet bombs entire neighborhoods.

FEATURED TRENDS GUEST ARTICLES



TRUMP'S FIRST MONTH PANDERS TO ISRAEL

Say goodbye to Palestine

by *Philip Giraldi*

The Trump Administration, in place for only a little over three weeks, has gone full speed ahead in its advocacy for Israel. Donald Trump's invitation to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to visit him at the White House, the first foreign head of state to be honored in that fashion, set the stage for a whole series of actions intended to confirm the status of Israel as America's "best friend and closest ally" as it is often celebrated by both government and the media.

Trump also delighted his visitor by revealing a plan for the United States to completely remove the Palestinians from Gaza so that the U.S. government could "buy" and

“own” the strip in order to rebuild it in luxury style, with properties overlooking the Mediterranean Sea emulating the French Riviera that then would be sold to folks “in the area”, meaning presumably wealthy Jews, as Trump also made clear, no Gazans would be allowed to return to what was once their homes.

Netanyahu meanwhile is ethnically cleansing the other remnant of Palestinians on the West Bank, meaning that what once was Palestine will before too long be free of Palestinians, and the three million plus new refugees will either be made dead or shipped off to parts unknown. Trump indicated that that issue, meaning the moves undertaken by Israel to depopulate and then annex the West Bank, is also under direct discussion with the Netanyahu government.

Trump also has cleared a shipment of 1800 devastating Mark-84 2000 pound bombs to “finish the job” on Gaza as needed and also, presumably, with Hezbollah neighbors to the north in Lebanon if they should again become uppity. Beyond that, \$9 billion dollars worth of new slightly smaller bombs and artillery projectiles as well as armored Caterpillar bulldozers, useful for knocking down Palestinian houses and clearing debris and bodies for the construction of luxury villas, are also on the way.

To top it all off and in giving a special and personal gift to Netanyahu himself, Trump has also issued an executive order imposing comprehensive sanctions on the International Criminal Court (ICC) and its staff to punish it for having the nerve to accuse the Prime Minister of Israel and his Minister of Defense of war crimes in Gaza. [Prime Minister Netanyahu's office](#) welcomed the move and he personally responded to Trump with,

“Thank you, President Trump, for your bold ICC Executive Order. It will defend America and Israel from the anti-American and antisemitic [sic] corrupt court that has no jurisdiction or basis to engage in lawfare against us... The ICC waged a ruthless campaign against Israel as a trial run for action against America. President Trump's Executive Order protects the sovereignty of both countries and its brave soldiers. Thank you, President Trump.”

Nevertheless, Trump, whose ignorance about whom to blame for what has been happening in the Middle East during the past seventy-five years is profound, is

nevertheless learning that not everything works out as he would like it to. There are already indications that the Gaza Riviera plan is unlikely to develop for a number of reasons, including unwillingness of Arab countries to take in millions of new refugees as well as who pays for it and provides security.

There are also legal issues including the question of whom Trump intends to “buy” the land from as the Gazans are regarded by most of the world and also by the international courts as the owners, not Israel, which would presumably wind up as the default possessors through military occupation of the property. So the “deal of the millennium” is not likely to go through in quite the way that the U.S. president described it.

To a certain extent, Trump is being allowed to get away with his overweening fondness for Israel because a Congress that has been corrupted by Jewish lobby money is, if anything, more pathetic and prone to crawling before Netanyahu than is the president. So there is virtually no check on his behavior when it comes to giving Israel even more than what it demands as tribute. Lest the reader be tempted to ask, there is more, much more, and some of it not only contrary to actual U.S. interests, but actually damaging to the existing constitutional rights and liberties of each and every American citizen.

I rather think that a [recent move](#) by Trump’s new Attorney General Pam Bondi, which was barely reported in the media, illustrates the absurdity of the positions being staked out by “Israel First” fanatics who have filled most of the top offices in the new cabinet.

Prior to taking up her position, Bondi, echoing her new boss’s record for inane comments, urged [in a Newsmax interview](#) shortly after Hamas’ October 7th attack on Israel, that federal officials get tougher with pro-Palestinian protesters on college campuses. “Frankly, they need to be taken out of our country or the FBI needs to be interviewing them right away,” she said. She also called antisemitism “rampant” in the U.S. and said it’s “heartbreaking to see what’s happening to all of our Jewish friends in this country.”

Pam Bondi is clearly following up on her concern about Israel's security. Now that she is actually in office, one of her first official acts after being sworn in on Wednesday was to [establish a joint task force](#) dedicated to “investigating the perpetrators of the October 7th Hamas terror attacks and seeking justice for their victims.” Bondi elaborated on the need to address “the ongoing threat posed by Hamas and its affiliates, both domestically and abroad” suggesting that she thinks that she has jurisdiction in Gaza.

The agenda of Joint Task Force October 7 will apparently not be limited to investigating possible terrorist violence—it is also tasked with prosecuting “antisemitic civil rights violations” and “other federal crimes” committed by presumed “Hamas terrorism supporters” domestically, including on U.S. college campuses.

Predictably, Michael Masters, CEO of the Secure Community Network, which provides security guidance to Jewish institutions across the U.S., said of the task force that “This administration is taking the threats to our community very, very seriously, which we are grateful for.”

Indeed, Masters likely knows well that “his community” is already taken well care of by the U.S. government as more than 90 percent of all discretionary security grants made by the Department of Homeland Security goes to Jewish recipients. I wonder what your salary is Michael?

The creation of the October 7th task force suggests Bondi views Islamist terrorism as a major threat and urgent issue to address, which could easily be contested in the context of the United States. The task force, which will be supervised by the deputy attorney general, will be staffed with FBI agents experienced in terrorism investigations. Notably, it will also work in conjunction with counterparts in Israel which means that Israelis will be investigating American citizens and residents.

Interestingly enough, another [directive](#) from Bondi could result in a major shake-up of enforcement of laws meant to prohibit undue foreign interference in the American political system. She limited the ability of prosecutors to bring charges related to violations of the Foreign Agents Registration Act (FARA), a law that requires people

engaged in promoting the interests of foreign governments to disclose their employer and their compensation.

As no country in the world interferes in U.S. politics more than Israel, it will limit the likelihood, now set at zero, that Israeli groups and agents will ever be required to register. One recalls that John F. Kenney was trying to compel the registry of one such group shortly before he was assassinated!

Not surprisingly, Bondi's interest in the so-called perpetrators of October 7th, which she falsely regards as a threat against the United States, is shared by the Jewish dominated U.S. media, which persists in including in nearly every article about Gaza a line about how Hamas "terrorists" attacked Israel and killed 1200 Israelis, described as the worst crime against Jews since the so-called holocaust.

Unfortunately, the tale is bogus. Some 500 or more of those killed were murdered by the Israeli army when it used tanks and attack helicopters to kill anything moving on the site where the incident was taking place.

Recently, the former Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant [admitted that](#) the forces under his command had carried out the so-called Hannibal Directive to kill Israelis who might otherwise become hostages to avoid placing the Israeli government under pressure to take risks to free those captured.

Finally, as mentioned above, the concern for Israel has led the new administration [to increase pressure](#) on colleges and universities to suppress pro-Palestinian and/or anti-Israeli demonstrations on U.S. campuses, threatening to cut federal funding for institutions that do not take firm steps to "protect Jewish students" (who already are the most privileged group of students at most large colleges). Even the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has found the action being demanded [to be one-sided](#), observing that,

"The bill the '[Anti-Semitism Awareness Act](#)' is part of a disturbing surge of government-led attempts to suppress the [free] speech of people on only one side of the Israel-Palestine debate. The trend manifests on college campuses, in state contracts, and even in bills to change federal criminal law, but the impact is

the same: Those who seek to protest, boycott, or otherwise criticize the Israeli government are being silenced.”

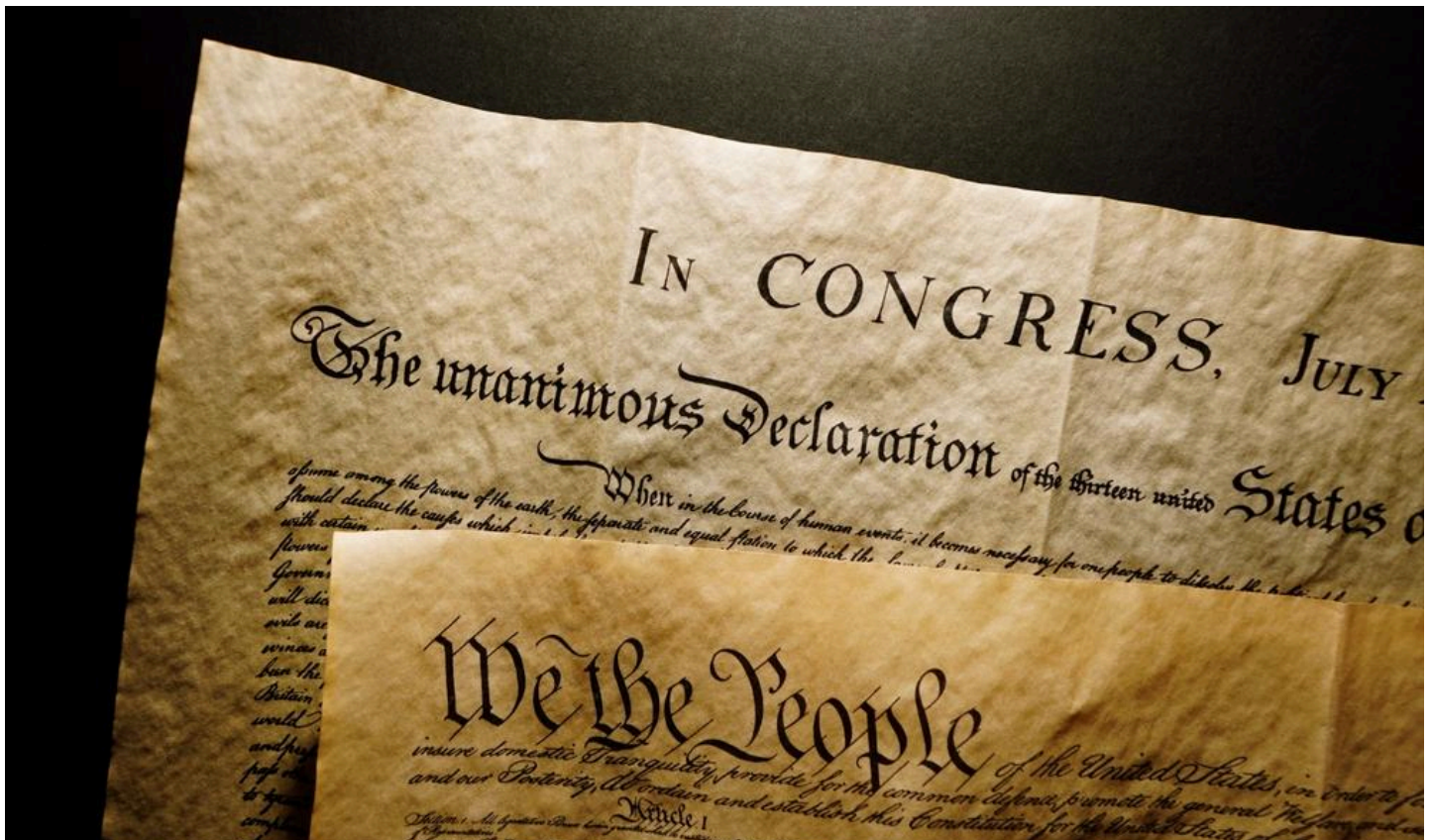
Those who are against the genocide are instead being singled out for administrative action, which includes banning from campus buildings up to and including expulsion from schools themselves and even deportation of those who are foreign by the federal government which is now moving to strip them of their student visas and send them home. A major case currently unfolding involves what should be done to [Princeton University students](#) who are being tried for offenses that reportedly occurred over a year ago.

So, the question one has to ask the Administration of Donald Trump is not “What else do we need to do for Israel?” but rather “When is it all going to stop?” When will Trump actually begin to deliver on “Making America Great Again?”

Israel has been the recipient of more taxpayer money than any other country, which frees up the money from Jewish billionaires to bribe Congress and presidential candidates to make sure that the cash keeps flowing out of the pockets of ordinary Americans to fill the pockets of human trash like Benjamin Netanyahu. And the cash and weekly shipments of weapons together enable Israel to commit genocide on its neighbors, which most Americans disapprove of, but as usual in Washington, nobody is listening.

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A CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS: CAN THE RULE OF LAW SURVIVE THIS PRESIDENCY?

by *John & Nisha Whitehead*

This has all the makings of a [constitutional crisis](#).

According to law professor Amanda Frost, “a constitutional crisis occurs when one branch of government, usually the executive, ‘[blatantly, flagrantly and regularly exceeds its constitutional authority](#)—and the other branches are either unable or unwilling to stop it.”

Consider for yourself.

The president has gone [rogue](#), doubling down on his belief that “[I have the right to do whatever I want as president](#).”

The vice president [believes the president should be a law unto himself](#), i.e., unaccountable to the other branches of the government.

The Republican-controlled Congress appears to be deaf, dumb and blind to the Executive Branch's blatantly unconstitutional overreaches.

The courts, which have in recent years largely [rubber stamped the government's power grabs](#), are ill-prepared to rein in a sitting president who is determined to do whatever he wants, the Constitution be damned.

Meanwhile, the Constitution is still [missing](#) from the White House's website.

This last point is not an [oversight](#).

Rather, it speaks volumes about the priorities of the current presidential administration, which operates as if the rule of law does not apply to itself.

Indeed, while President Trump's [predecessors paid lip service to the rule of law while sidestepping it](#) at every opportunity, Trump has been unapologetic about his intentions to set aside whatever legal, moral or political barricades stand in the way of his end goals.

Rule by fiat—when presidents attempt to unilaterally impose their will through the use of executive orders, decrees, memorandums, proclamations, national security directives and legislative signing statements—is an offense to the Constitution.

It was offensive when Biden did it. It was offensive when Obama did it. And it is just as offensive when Trump does it.

Already, Trump has [signed more executive orders in his first month](#) than any other president in their first 100 days.

This is not a sign of strength and leadership. This is a red flag.

In bypassing Congress in order to carry out his [ambitious agenda](#), the Trump Administration risks transforming the executive branch into something akin to the very entities it often criticizes: an overreaching surveillance state, a nanny state that dictates individual choices, and a police state that prioritizes compliance over freedom.

It is particularly telling that while Trump and his Musk-led Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) are pledging to lay off huge swaths of federal employees, the [police state's martial law apparatus will remain largely untouched](#).

This way lies totalitarianism, by way of authoritarianism, and those who insist it can't happen here need to pay better attention.

[It's happening already](#).

The following are [15 benchmarks of a totalitarian regime](#), according to journalist Benjamin Carlson:

1. Media is controlled.
2. Dissent is equated to violence.
3. Legal system is co-opted by the state.
4. Power is exerted to prevent dissent.
5. State police are directed to protect the regime, not the people.
6. Financial, legal, and civil rights are contingent on compliance.
7. There is a mass conformity of behaviors and beliefs.
8. Power is concentrated in an inner ring of people and institutions.
9. Semi-organized violence is permitted.
10. Propaganda targets enemies of the state.
11. Whole classes of people are scapegoated and singled out for persecution.
12. Extra-legal action against internal enemies is condoned.
13. Unpredictable and harsh enforcement is used against unfavored classes.
14. The language of the constitution serves as a facade for the exercise of power.
15. And all private and public levers of power are used to enforce adherence to state orthodoxy.

To guard against these pitfalls, we must start by understanding the rule of law, and how it functions within our system of checks and balances.

The rule of law is the principle that everyone, including the government—and the president—must obey the law, which is embodied in the U.S. Constitution.

In a nutshell, the Constitution is *the* social contract—the people’s contract with the government—which outlines our expectations about the role of the government and its limits, a system of checks and balances dependent on a separation of powers, and the rights of the citizenry.

America’s founders established a system of checks and balances to prevent the concentration of power in any single branch. To this end, the Constitution establishes three [separate but equal branches of government](#): the legislative branch, which makes the law; the executive branch, which enforces the law; and the judicial branch, which interprets the law.

Despite Trump’s attempts to [rule by fiat](#), nowhere in the Constitution is the president granted unilateral authority to act outside these established checks and balances, no matter how well-meaning his intentions might be or how worthy the goals (a balanced budget, safety, economic prosperity, etc.).

Allowing the president to bypass established legal procedures in order to prioritize his own power over adherence to the rule of law ultimately undermines the principles of a constitutional government.

Which brings us to the present moment.

With Congress on the sidelines, the momentum is building for a constitutional showdown between the White House and the judiciary.

This is as it should be.

The job of the courts is to maintain the rule of law and serve as the referees in the power struggle between the President and Congress. That delicate balance between

the three branches of government was intended to serve as a bulwark against tyranny and a deterrent to any who would overreach.

When all is said and done, however, it is supposed to be “we the people” who hold the real power—not the president, not Congress, and not the courts. As the Tenth Amendment proclaims, “The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, *or to the people.*”

The government’s purpose is to serve the people, not the other way around.

Those first three words of the preamble to the Constitution say it all: “We the People.”

This is a government of the people, by the people and for the people.

So, what’s the answer?

As I point out in my book [Battlefield America: The War on the American People](#) and in its fictional counterpart [The Erik Blair Diaries](#), America’s founders were very clear about what to do when the government oversteps.

Bind them down from mischief with the chains of the Constitution, advised Thomas Jefferson.

Take alarm at the first experiment on your freedoms, cautioned James Madison.

And if government leaders attempt to abuse their powers and usurp the rights of the people, get rid of them, warned the Declaration of Independence.

Constitutional attorney and author John W. Whitehead is founder and president of [The Rutherford Institute](#). His most recent books are the best-selling [Battlefield America: The War on the American People](#), the award-winning [A Government of Wolves: The Emerging American Police State](#), and a debut dystopian fiction novel, [The Erik Blair Diaries](#). Whitehead can be contacted at staff@rutherford.org. Nisha Whitehead is the

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2024 INTERNATIONAL VIRTUAL VITAMIN D FORUM UNLOCKS THE POWER OF VITAMIN D

by *Dr. Joseph Mercola*

Story at-a-glance

- Global vitamin D deficiency affects all ages and ethnicities, highlighting the need for increased awareness and proactive measures to address this widespread issue
- Adequate vitamin D is essential for overall well-being, playing a role in preventing a spectrum of diseases, from bone disorders to chronic illnesses
- While generally safe, vitamin D supplementation should be personalized based on individual needs and monitored to ensure optimal levels and avoid issues
- Vitamin D is involved in immune function, regulating both underactivity and overactivity, and is important for fighting infections and preventing autoimmune diseases

- Safe sun exposure is the ideal way to boost vitamin D, but careful management is key, especially for those consuming seed oils

In the world of health and wellness, vitamin D shines brightly, often referred to as the "sunshine vitamin." This essential nutrient plays a role in numerous bodily functions, impacting everything from bone health to your immune system. The [2024 International Virtual Vitamin D Forum & Expert Panel Discussion](#) shed light on the latest research and clinical applications of vitamin D, emphasizing its importance in maintaining optimal health and preventing disease.[1]

Vitamin D Deficiency Is a Global Problem

Despite its importance, vitamin D deficiency is a global concern. [Dr. Michael Holick, a leading vitamin D researcher, highlighted the prevalence of this issue](#), emphasizing the need for increased awareness and action. Even in sunny regions, a significant portion of the population has insufficient vitamin D levels. This deficiency leads to various health problems, including:

- Bone diseases—Vitamin D promotes calcium absorption, which is essential for strong bones. Deficiency leads to rickets in children and osteomalacia in adults. Holick presented research showing that even seemingly healthy individuals sometimes have evidence of osteomalacia, highlighting the subtle but significant impact of vitamin D deficiency on bone health.
- Immune system weakness—Vitamin D plays a role in immune function. Deficiency increases your risk of infections, including respiratory illnesses. Holick presented data from studies showing that vitamin D deficiency is associated with an [increased risk of COVID-19](#) and experiencing severe outcomes. He also highlighted the role of vitamin D in supporting both innate and adaptive immunity, emphasizing its importance in overall immune health.
- Chronic diseases—Studies have linked vitamin D deficiency to an increased risk of chronic diseases such as [heart disease](#), Type 2 diabetes and certain types of cancer. Holick presented data from various studies showing a correlation between low vitamin D levels and an increased risk of these conditions.

Holick also addressed The Endocrine Society's updated guidelines on vitamin D, which have sparked debate among experts. The guidelines recommend a daily intake of 600 IU for adults under 70 and 800 IU for those over 70. However, many experts argue that these recommendations are too low to achieve optimal vitamin D levels, especially for individuals with darker skin tones or those with limited sun exposure.

Dr. Sunil Wimalawansa, a clinician-scientist with over four decades of experience, added to the discussion by highlighting the concept of vitamin D as a "threshold nutrient." He explained that your body's response to vitamin D changes depending on the existing levels.

At lower levels, even small increases in vitamin D intake have significant benefits. However, as levels approach sufficiency, the benefits diminish. This concept underscores the importance of individualizing vitamin D supplementation based on baseline levels and health goals.

Many Women Are Deficient in Vitamin D During Pregnancy

Vitamin D plays an important role during pregnancy, supporting both maternal and fetal health. Studies have shown that adequate [vitamin D levels during pregnancy](#) reduce the risk of preeclampsia, preterm birth and other complications. Holick emphasized the importance of vitamin D supplementation for pregnant women, suggesting that higher doses are often necessary to achieve optimal levels.

Holick presented data from his research showing that a significant percentage of pregnant women, even those taking prenatal vitamins, are vitamin D deficient. He highlighted the consequences of this deficiency, including an increased risk of C-sections and premature births. He also discussed research indicating that higher vitamin D levels during pregnancy are associated with a reduced risk of dental caries in infants.

Vitamin D Linked to Reduced Cancer Risk and Brain Benefits

Dr. William Grant, a renowned vitamin D researcher, presented evidence linking vitamin D to a [reduced risk of cancer](#). Studies have shown that individuals with higher

vitamin D levels have a lower risk of developing various types of cancer, including colon, breast and prostate cancer. The findings suggest that vitamin D plays a significant role in cancer prevention.

Grant discussed the pioneering work of Cedric and Frank Garland, who first identified the link between UVB exposure and reduced cancer risk. He presented data from ecological studies showing a correlation between higher solar UVB levels and lower cancer mortality rates. Grant also highlighted the importance of considering vitamin D's impact on both cancer incidence and mortality.

While the effect on incidence may be modest due to the influence of other risk factors, vitamin D has a stronger effect on mortality by reducing angiogenesis (formation of new blood vessels) and metastasis (spread of cancer).

Emerging research indicates that vitamin D also plays a role in brain health. Studies have linked higher vitamin D levels to a reduced risk of cognitive decline, dementia and Alzheimer's disease. While the exact mechanisms are still being investigated, the findings suggest that maintaining adequate vitamin D levels helps protect against age-related cognitive decline.

Grant highlighted the importance of considering the follow-up time in these studies, as longer follow-up periods may dilute the observed benefits. He suggested that vitamin D may have a more significant impact on brain health over shorter periods. Grant also discussed research indicating that vitamin D supplementation leads to improvements in brain health within months.

Addressing Concerns About Vitamin D Safety and Toxicity

Vitamin D expert Wimalawansa addressed concerns about vitamin D safety and toxicity. He emphasized that vitamin D is generally safe when taken in recommended doses. However, excessive intake leads to hypercalcemia, a condition characterized by high calcium levels in your blood.

Wimalawansa provided guidelines for safe vitamin D supplementation, emphasizing the importance of individualizing doses based on factors such as body weight, sun exposure and health conditions.

Wimalawansa clarified that vitamin D toxicity is exceedingly rare and usually occurs due to accidental ingestion of extremely high doses. He emphasized that diagnosing vitamin D toxicity requires more than just a high serum vitamin D level. It also requires clinical signs and symptoms of hypercalcemia, such as fatigue, muscle weakness, nausea and vomiting.

Wimalawansa further discussed contraindications for vitamin D supplementation, including individuals with hypersensitivity to sunlight, certain genetic disorders and granulomatous diseases. He also addressed the question of whether additional calcium supplementation is necessary when taking vitamin D. He explained that when vitamin D levels are adequate, your body's ability to absorb calcium from your diet increases, making calcium supplementation typically unnecessary.

Your Immune System and Vitamin D—A Powerful Partnership

Dr. Aileen Burford-Mason, an immunologist, nutritionist and independent research analyst, highlighted the role of vitamin D in immune function. She explained how vitamin D helps regulate your immune system, preventing both underactivity and overactivity. Adequate vitamin D levels are essential for fighting infections and preventing autoimmune diseases.

Burford-Mason emphasized the importance of considering other nutrients, such as magnesium, which work in conjunction with vitamin D to support immune health. She discussed the two main components of your immune system: innate immunity and adaptive immunity and explained how vitamin D supports both branches of the immune system, helping your body fight off infections and maintain immune balance.

She highlighted the importance of vitamin D in regulating the inflammatory response, preventing excessive inflammation that leads to tissue damage and autoimmune diseases.

Burford-Mason also presented data from studies showing the benefits of vitamin D in preventing respiratory tract infections, including influenza and COVID-19, and discussed the role of vitamin D in managing [autoimmune diseases](#), emphasizing the need for individualized treatment approaches and considering other nutrients that support immune function.

Clinical Applications of Vitamin D and Vitamin D Resistance

Dr. Richard Cheng, a physician specializing in anti-aging and integrative cancer therapy, shared real-world examples of how vitamin D improves health and treats various conditions. He discussed the use of vitamin D in autoimmune diseases, metabolic disorders and even for anti-aging purposes. Cheng emphasized the importance of a holistic approach, considering lifestyle factors such as diet, exercise and stress management in conjunction with vitamin D supplementation.

Cheng shared his personal experience using vitamin D in his practice, highlighting its safety and effectiveness in treating various conditions. He discussed his success in using high-dose vitamin D to reverse autoimmune diseases and improve metabolic health. He also emphasized the importance of monitoring vitamin D levels and individualizing treatment plans based on patient needs.

Cheng discussed the concept of vitamin D resistance, in which some individuals require higher doses to achieve optimal levels. Various factors influence vitamin D's effectiveness, and he stressed the importance of addressing these factors through lifestyle modifications and targeted nutrient supplementation to optimize vitamin D's benefits.

Factors contributing to vitamin D resistance include genetic variations, obesity and certain medications. Monitoring vitamin D levels and adjusting doses accordingly is therefore necessary to ensure effectiveness.

The Power of the Sunshine Vitamin

The 2024 International Virtual Vitamin D Forum provided valuable insights into the latest research and clinical applications of vitamin D. The key takeaways include:

- Vitamin D deficiency is a global concern, impacting individuals of all ages and ethnicities.
- Maintaining adequate vitamin D levels is necessary for optimal health, preventing a wide range of diseases from bone disorders to chronic illnesses.
- Vitamin D supplementation is generally safe when taken in recommended doses, but individual needs vary.
- Monitoring vitamin D levels is essential, especially for individuals with specific health conditions or those taking higher doses.
- A holistic approach, combining vitamin D supplementation when necessary with lifestyle factors such as diet, exercise and sun exposure, is key to maximizing its benefits.

Embracing Vitamin D for Better Health

The ideal way to optimize your vitamin D levels is via safe sun exposure. Harnessing the sun's power for vitamin D production offers benefits far exceeding simple vitamin synthesis. Healthy sun exposure, reflected in robust vitamin D levels, is linked to numerous health advantages, including reduced cancer risk and enhanced longevity.

However, while sunlight is necessary for vitamin D and overall well-being, it demands careful management. The key is finding a balance between protection and reaping its rewards. If your diet includes significant amounts of seed oils, extra caution is warranted. These oils, rich in [linoleic acid](#) (LA), an omega-6 fatty acid, readily oxidize under UV light. This interaction on your skin initiates a cascade of breakdown products, leading to inflammation and DNA damage.

Therefore, if you consume seed oils, limit sun exposure to the gentler morning or late afternoon hours for four to six months while eliminating these oils from your diet. Individual characteristics also influence sun sensitivity, with skin color, determined by melanin, playing a pivotal role.

Melanin acts as a natural UV shield. Consequently, individuals with darker skin require more sun exposure to generate comparable vitamin D levels as those with lighter skin. This biological difference underscores the need for personalized sun strategies.

Body composition, particularly body fat percentage, is another important factor. Fat tissue stores fat-soluble substances, including oxidized seed oils. Individuals with higher body fat experience prolonged risk even after dietary changes due to these stored oils. To assess your sun tolerance, especially if you consume seed oils, monitor your skin for redness or burning—a simple “sunburn test” that accounts for the season, your skin type and other factors.

The absence of pinkness suggests safe sun exposure. Avoiding sunburn, a clear indicator of overexposure and skin damage, is the goal. Reducing your body's LA stores significantly reduces the likelihood of sunburn and skin cancer. However, vigilance remains essential, particularly during the transition. As you lower seed oil intake, avoid peak sunlight hours—typically an hour before and after solar noon.

In most U.S. regions, this translates to avoiding direct sunlight from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Gradually, as your body clears accumulated seed oils, safely increase sun exposure. Remember, individual responses vary, so observe your body's reactions during this process. If redness appears, seek shade immediately.

Strategies for Enhanced Sun Protection

If sun exposure is unavoidable before your body has fully cleared seed oils, consider protective measures. [Astaxanthin](#), an antioxidant from marine sources, is a valuable ally. A daily intake of 12 milligrams bolsters skin's resistance to sun damage by neutralizing free radicals and reducing inflammation, providing added UV protection. Niacinamide cream (vitamin B3) is another beneficial tool.

Topical application has demonstrated protection against UV-induced DNA damage and strengthens your skin barrier, enhancing resilience to sun stressors. Many have reported significant improvements using niacinamide cream before sun exposure.

Another strategy involves taking a baby aspirin before sun exposure. [Aspirin](#) inhibits the conversion of LA in your skin into harmful oxidized linoleic acid metabolites (OXLAMS), key contributors to skin and other cancers. By hindering OXLAM formation, aspirin provides an additional layer of defense against sun damage.

Overall, vitamin D is an essential nutrient that plays a role in maintaining optimal health and preventing disease. By embracing the sunshine vitamin, through a combination of sensible sun exposure and appropriate supplementation, you take a proactive step toward a healthier and more vibrant life.

Sources and References

1 [Youtube, VitaminDaction, 2024 International Virtual Vitamin D Forum: A response to misleading guidelines, October 4, 2024](#)

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TRENDS IN THE MARKETS



AN INFLATIONARY NIGHTMARE IS RAPIDLY APPROACHING—AND AS OF NOW, THERE IS NO WAY TO STOP IT

by *Gregory Mannarino*, [TradersChoice.net](https://www.TradersChoice.net)

While everyone is as usual being directed to “*look over here, do not look over there,*” via the mainstream media outlets and the geo-political goings on, **an inflationary tsunami—(LITERALLY on an unprecedented scale), is rapidly approaching.**

The causes of inflation are multifactorial however, one specific dynamic arguably stands out.

That dynamic is: *When global debt expansion outpaces economic growth, (and ever since the “financial crisis” the world has suffered VAST debt expansion), inflation hits.*

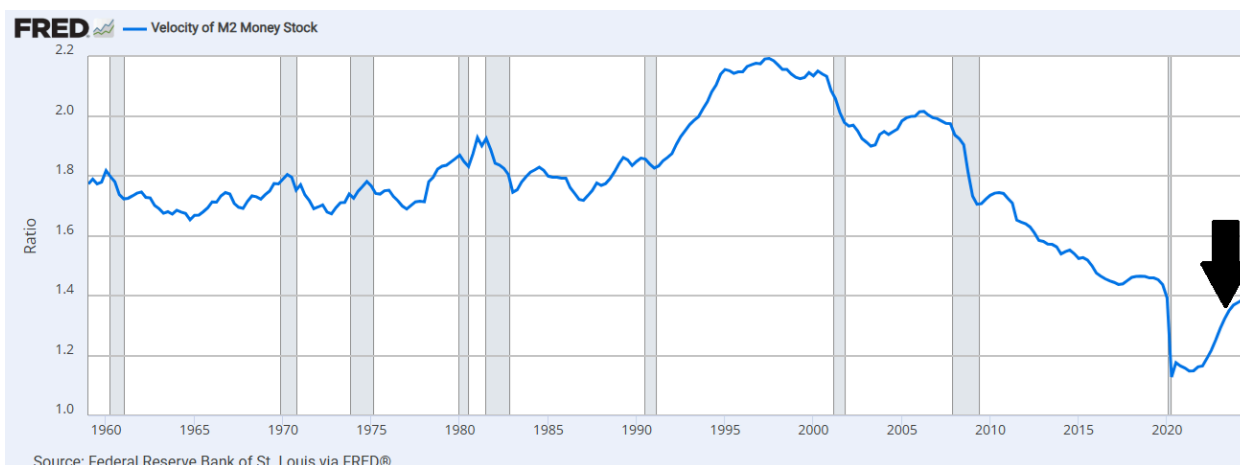
Putting a timeline on WHEN the effect of, *in this case*, vast debt expansion outpacing economic growth will cause inflation is admittedly difficult.

However, there is ONE metric which can allow us to consider the “Inflation Lag Effect.”

Once debt expansion begins, *and this is a direct effect of central bank monetary policy*—specifically, artificially suppressed rates and therefore currency devaluation, **there is always an inherent lag effect of varying lengths.** The length of the “lag effect” as to WHEN inflation will hit is grossly dependent on Money Velocity.

Money velocity is a measure as to how fast cash is moving through an economy.

Look at the chart below.

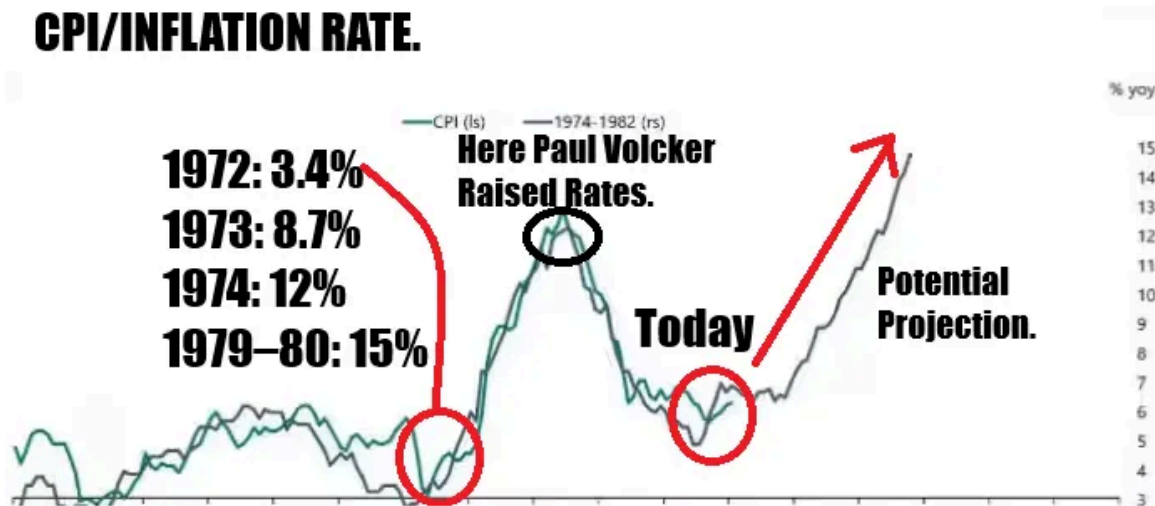


The chart above demonstrates the Money Velocity since 1960. The MV peaked just prior to the Dot-Com Bubble bursting and has been in a downward trajectory ever since. Note the black arrow to the right, *this is where we are today*. This “blip” higher in the MV is not due to an increase in economic output/activity, this the direct result of what now is, **the effect of unneeded currency/debt now just starting to chase the same amount of goods**—and this is inflation.

Being that the MV is near historic lows, it has taken YEARS for the effect of vast debt expansion to make its way through the economy—A HUGE LAG EFFECT. (The lower

the MV, the longer the lag effect). **But now that this door has been opened, so to speak, the effect will worsen rapidly. (UNLESS DIRECT AND IMMEDIATE ACTION IS TAKEN TO STOP IT).**

Now, look at this chart below.



This is the relationship between the CPI, (consumer price index), and the inflation rate. The red circle on the left is the last time we had a crossover which led to an inflation surge in the 1970's. **What reversed this inflation surge, was in 1979, then Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker introduced a new monetary policy of high interest rates.** In fact VASTLY higher.

If you do follow my work, then you are aware I have been screaming from rooftops for quite a while now that **THE LAST THING WE NEED is lower rates, like Sen. Elizabeth Warren and President Trump are now calling for. WE NEED MUCH HIGHER RATES! BECAUSE IF ACTION IS NOT TAKEN IMMEDIATELY,** what is about to happen here in the U.S. regarding inflation, *will make what happened last time in the 1970's look like a walk in the park...*

Immediate action is needed now due to the LAG EFFECT. Even when Volcker raised rates in 1979, the effect of higher rates took time to take effect... We will have the same situation here.

TRENDS IN TECHNOCRACY



by *Joe Doran*

USING AI, MINUS THE SURVEILLANCE: PRIVACY EXPERT GABRIEL CUSTODIET

I recently interviewed Gabriel Custodiet of The Watchman Privacy Podcast, and escapethetechnocracy.com. Gabriel shared his experience with running local AI models, and leveraging benefits of AI, as well as testing attributes of the technology, while avoiding surveillance aspects of using online AI platform portals from OpenAI, Anthropic and others.

Our conversation also delved into where the AI revolution is going, and potentials for human progress and dangers. Enjoy!

—Joe Doran

JD: *So what have you been doing personally with AI lately? I mean, besides running AI models locally on your computer, which we'll get into?*

Gabriel Custodiet: Yeah, I love the [visual] art tools in AI. It's for somebody who's not artistically inclined, but I have a very good idea of what I'm looking for, as people can tell from the Watchman Privacy brands. And in the past I've had to deal with artists and have weeks and weeks and weeks and try to explain this is what I'm looking for and this, and no, you're doing it wrong. And with something like Midjourney, I can generate dozens of images myself. I can modify them, I can alter them, and it's really opened up a great opportunity, just a business opportunity to crank out cool images with my products and such.

But also just to experiment and to have inspiration and to do things of this sort, whether that's video game scenes or historical moments or just really cool artistry has been particularly fruitful for just my sheer imaginative interest when I don't have the skills to actually produce this art.

JD: *Gotcha. I had myself the paid tier for about a year.*

Gabriel Custodiet: It is a big tech company, and if you don't pay a certain amount, they're going to make your images available to the public. So that's their little schtick, as it were.

JD: *Yes. Have you had any moments where it wouldn't produce stuff you want? I mean, obviously anything explicit, pornographic, I know it won't go there. But any political or any violent content? Because what I found when I was testing some of this stuff, is that even visuals that you might see in a movie poster or horror film or something like that, some of these systems will blanch at producing.*

Gabriel Custodiet: Well, fortunately, living in the world that we live in, I'm kind of more like Winston from 1984. All the centering happens at the local self level. So I'm already centering myself and not even asking for these sorts of prompts. I'm kind of joking, obviously--

JD: *You had me going!*

Gabriel Custodiet: Well, no, I think there's obviously some part of that too, to all of us if we're being--

JD: *But I think people are like that. That's the deal.*

Gabriel Custodiet: Oh, 100 percent. Yeah.

JD: *And I think especially your generation and younger, because you've grown up in much more of that world than I ever did for sure.*

Gabriel Custodiet: Yeah. So of course as soon as I discovered all the privacy tools, I had some really gritty conversations, let's say about all sorts of topics. But then I don't put a lot of that stuff out into the world. And when it comes to creating something on Midjourney, where okay, it's connected to a credit card and account and all the rest, and I know how they are more than anyone, I don't necessarily push the boundaries unless I'm doing some testing.

So I stick within their guardrails and I don't like that and I call it out. But within those guardrails, I can create some pretty cool stuff. Like you want to make a warrior, you can make your Aztec warriors. It's not when they're pulling the heart out of somebody. So you can still do some good stuff, but you're absolutely right that this is a big problem. We're going to talk about the AI resistance course and the local hosting stuff, but the image stuff has been really difficult to self-host. We were playing with some tools recently and it was hilariously terrible. So that is a big hurdle for local hosting that we're trying to fix, but for now, we're having to rely on these big tech options that are much more censorious.

JD: *I think that's a good segue for you to talk about what you're doing with hosting AI models locally, and the benefits you find in doing that.*

Gabriel Custodiet: Yeah, so my colleague convinced me to start looking to AI. I've been a big AI skeptic. I still think that it's not a good direction for humanity to go down, but Pandora's Box has been opened and all these tools are public and now

open source, and we have China with DeepSeek, just open sourcing, releasing these massive open source models that everybody can take.

So the cat's out of the bag 100 percent. And with that in mind, I think that it's important that we understand these tools. We master these tools. The cure for powerlessness is power. And if John Connor was alive today, he would be hosting his own local AI in order to understand what Skynet was doing. So that's my little bit of change there, not change in kind of where things are going. So we created a course on escapethetechnocracy.com, it's called the AI Resistance course, and I haven't discovered anything like this. So my colleague and I spent a month, and he's been doing this stuff for years, but we spent a month pulling our resources and thoughts together and basically showing people, first of all, how AI works, how you can use it in your life. We're talking the text, and the art, and the coding, even. Because he's a coder, and he's a video game developer, he actually made a video game in 20 minutes using AI. It was pretty spectacular, including the art.

JD: *Sounds pretty cool.*

Gabriel Custodiet: And so we show you all the practical ways of doing it as people who have been using this for a long time. So we understand the stuff, we show you the practicalities of how it works, and then we kind of go off grid. We show you, okay, ChatGPT is censoring you. Alright, it's collecting your data. That's a big problem too, using these big tech tools, as they're collecting your data. In some cases they're using it to train their next models. This is not stuff that you should be uploading your files to and telling it sensitive stuff.

However, that's what we want to use AI for. And so the real solution to that, we talk about some kind of privacy alternatives, but the long-term solution is to take these models that have been open sourced, run them on your own computer, You can then have them completely offline, disconnected to the internet.

Joe, I have, and I can pull it up right now...I'm looking at it on my desktop. I have a model I can pull up, completely disconnected from the internet. It'll answer many of my questions that I want answered. And because I'm hosting it offline, I can get an uncensored model. There's so many layers of censorship in these AI models. You

have the censorship of the stuff that they're trained on. You have the censorship baked into the cake by the companies themselves and they pride themselves on censorship.

And then you have the censorship of the prompt. So when you say, Hey, Donald Trump and Kamala Harris having tea together, that could be that toolkit blocked by certain AI image generation.

So you can have while running these locally uncensored models, that's not collecting your data, and that is not necessarily communicating with the internet. So there are lots of advantages to doing this, privacy and uncensorable being two of them. And so we played around with these. We show people how to do them and then we also tell people in the end how to use AI as a matter of self-defense potentially against the technocracy itself. So that was also a very interesting part of the course.

JD: *I'll ask you to talk more about that in a minute, but tell me a little bit about how you get one of these models that's been trained on data sets and perhaps biased information or it has guardrails that have been implemented in the AI system? How do you uncensor the AI model?*

Gabriel Custodiet: Yeah, that's interesting. So by design, it could be that the people who train these models are explicitly telling it not to look at certain... I mean, that's a possibility. Maybe they say, Hey, don't look at anything with the word chemtrails in it, or whatever they want to block. I suppose they could do that. But in general, they kind of unleash these AIs onto the internet to collect whatever they can. And then they lie about it and they say they're not collecting all this stuff, etc. But if you ask the AI questions about things, it's clear what websites they visited. And so by nature, AIs know a lot. They know almost everything, and they're not censored. They just want to be helpful and friendly as they say, right?

These companies themselves have to put the blinders on. They have to go in there and say, okay, we can't talk about this and that, okay, you're DeepSeek, you're not going to answer any questions about Tiananmen Square. And I showed this is actually the case. So these companies go with this AI, who by nature knows everything, and wants to answer questions, but they pare it down and they say, okay, you're not going to talk about this. You're going to focus on diversity and representation and whatever

else the case may be. You're going to recognize that everybody has a truth. They generally put all these leftwing woke blinders on them.

So when you get the open source model, you can see exactly what those blinders are, and they're taken off right away. And so they're not necessarily censored by design. The censorship comes as a product of these companies. And so it is not too bad. Most of the models you download are already uncensored, and you can ask them the real questions. And I'm not going to reveal what it is, but I have a question that I ask every one of them, to see just how uncensored they are.

JD: *How uncensored they could be.*

Gabriel Custodiet: Exactly. And everybody should have these kind of questions and ask them, not necessarily with your logged-in account—you don't want to get that banned. But if you're using ChatGPT without an account, you can go and test it a little bit and see what the guardrails are.

JD: *Okay. So you downloaded this locally. I mean, how large are these models generally? I know that the hard drives and memory, there's terabytes and terabytes of space now that people can buy for relative chump change compared to when I was buying my first memory back in the eighties and using floppy disks, and then the little 3.5 inch plastic disks. And then 15 megabyte drives were incredible. Yikes, I go back that far. But when you're pulling down these models, what kind of space are we talking about?*

Gabriel Custodiet: Yeah, you can run these on a basic laptop these days. And so there's different tiers obviously.

JD: *But you're saying they don't connect with the cloud. How do they contain all that information? Is it just text files and they're very small, relatively speaking?*

Gabriel Custodiet: Yeah, so this is the magic of AI, Joe. You can have a five gigabyte model. So for example, a lot of the popular ones I'm looking at here are only five gigabytes. But if you were to try to chart how much knowledge, they have hundreds and hundreds of gigabytes of information. So how do they know this stuff? Well, this

is the magic of AI. What they've done is they've tried to simulate the human brain, which means that instead of just storing data stacked on top of data, it's making correlations, it's making connections. It's memorizing things in the most optimal way possible, so that when you have your five gigabyte model, which I'm looking at right here, and you can ask it, you can correlate anything that ever happened on Wikipedia. Now, Joe, Wikipedia's Knowledge is much more than five gigabytes. So how does it know? That's the magic of AI. It's the way that they have been trained and modeled on the human brain, and it's pretty astounding.

JD: *So you're saying some of that neural net technology actually exists in the model as you're using it on your local computer?*

Gabriel Custodiet: Exactly. Well, so basically that's what you get when you download this onto your computer. When we talk about a model, right, this is a finished product.

JD: *It's an AI app that is unto itself. Makes sense.*

Gabriel Custodiet: Yeah, exactly. A model is a finished product of an AI that has been tested, it's been fed the internet, whatever the case may be, and its neural network has been molded. And that five gigabytes at the end, is the whole shebang, right there.

JD: *Now the DeepSeek model R1 is open source. Microsoft's already said they're going to use it, and others are too. And then there's a smaller company that I profiled this week that is going to offer it with enhanced security, and it wouldn't send information back to China, etc. Do you have any intentions of checking that out?*

Gabriel Custodiet: Absolutely. In fact, I just updated the program I used to run my local AIs, and it looks like, sure enough, DeepSeek is the latest update. That's the update I just did. So DeepSeek is already being used by a lot of these programs, and you can also use DeepSeek as a part of Venice AI. That's kind of a third party packager of AI. And in that way, you're not necessarily transmitting all your stuff to the Chinese government because Venice AI is hosting it itself. You'll still get the Chinese censorship baked into that model perhaps. So yeah, you can use the DeepSeek open source offline as well. Absolutely.

JD: *That's interesting. I didn't look into it to see how compact these models were, but from what you're telling me, I might just run a local version and play around with it.*

Gabriel Custodiet: There we go, there we go. And everybody can learn that from the AI resistance course, and that was one of the things that astonished me when I started hosting these locally. How in the world does this have so much knowledge in five or 10 or 15 gigabytes that I can run on my laptop and I can shut off the internet and I can still get, for example, let's say the power goes out, you bring up your AI, you say, okay, power's out. I'm in this situation. Somebody got hurt. What do I do? It'll give you the medical information, right? Everybody uses AI for medical stuff, whether or not they should be, it will give you that information because it's read all the self-help medical websites and such. So really powerful tool, really powerful. One of the examples we give in the course is I show the AI running on the computer and it's even running any virtual machine for my recording, which is even smaller computer size.

And I tell it, I say, Hey, I have been struck by lightning and bitten by a cobra at the same time. What do you suggest? And it says, well, this is a very unlikely scenario, but here's what you should do first, and then it gives me the stuff. So it is, it's extraordinary how the data has been packed into so little a space, but if you think about it, that's also your brain. How much knowledge do we have? And it's not that we have this word and this word, no, we know the word and it applies to all these situations. So we don't have to stack that word on top of itself. We just kind of plug and play that wherever it goes. I don't know all the terminology, but I think you see what I'm saying.

JD: *Okay, so talk a little bit about the average person out there who they're probably never going to run it locally, but at least they might make a choice between this AI, that AI and this privacy protection in that many of our readers, I'm giving you short code, but they might just run over to the DeepSeek online platform and sign up for an account. And what are the dangers not only of China-based DeepSeek, but what do you see as maybe the kind of unsecure practices that people might engage in?*

Obviously, you use the Midjourney imaging platform, because you can't run something like that locally. So to some extent, for some purpose or other people will probably be using internet cloud solutions.

Gabriel Custodiet: Yeah. First, let me say, you cannot be an ostrich putting your head in the sand about this stuff, right? My colleague, my friend, my technical advisor in this course, he gives the analogy, we don't want the one ring of Lord of the Rings. Everybody needs to have their own ring. So we all want to have the power.

JD: *That's a good analogy. Yeah, I understand.*

Gabriel Custodiet: And so you want to learn this, you want to understand this. Even if you're seriously anti AI, you need to understand what this stuff is. It's not going away. You can't just close your eyes and it goes away. It's not going to happen. I'm a **Trends Journal** reader as well. I've been a Trends reader for a long time. I feel like I have a sense of maybe what some of my fellow readers are looking for. We're skeptical of power, we're skeptical of these big corporations. We're skeptical of the bigs. We understand that data collection can come back to harm us. And so that's all the stuff that I believe in and that I teach as well. So you really want to be careful what company you are signing up for. ChatGPT owned by OpenAI. They have somebody from the former head of NSA on their board of directors. What does that tell you? It's a black box, OpenAI. We don't know what they do with their data. We don't know what they do. So you just need to assume that you use something like ChatGPT, that they're collecting your data and they're going to use it for whatever they want to use it for.

I don't encourage people to be using ChatGPT with an account. You can use it without an account, play around with it. It's actually quite useful if you do that. Use good operational security. Everybody should be using a VPN for example. You can also use Tor. That's a free option. Beyond that, I've mentioned Venice AI. This is a privacy preserving service that lets you use a bunch of different services. So it's kind of a package manager as it were. Venice AI is pretty useful. It's pretty handy, and you can use it right now without an account as well with some models you can play around. And that's what everybody should do. They should go play around.

We can talk about some of the things that people should get into, but there's really awesome things, including Joe, this is one of my favorite things to do with AI, is give it weird scenarios. So for example, you could say, 'Hey, I think this is happening in the world, and lemme try to come up with an example. So I think that Bitcoin was a conspiracy to get all of these GPUs created so that AI could be created so that somebody could take over the world.' Now you can come up with that theory, you can craft it in a certain way to an AI, and you can say, hey, assume you can, of course you can manipulate AI. So you can say, assume that we're in a fictional scenario, assume that you're writing a book and here's what I want the book to talk about. How would that work? And it will spit out a very reasonable theory of how this sort of thing could be laid out.

So there's a lot of creative things you can do with it, but you do want to be careful who you go to and give your data. You should not be using DeepSeek from the main app or the main website. Certainly not. You can access open DeepSeek, excuse me. You can access the DeepSeek R1 model from Venice AI if you have a paid version. You can also locally host it. And that's a little bit more of a complicated process. And that's what we teach in this course. The course that we do covers the whole gamut. What this stuff is, how it works, why you want to use it, how do you use it in self-defense, we cover the whole gamut. But if people want to play around, certainly bring up Venice AI and test it out.

JD: *Gotcha. AI agents are finally hitting the mainstream as far as practical use experimentation, business adoption, etcetera. What's your take in general on the phenomenon, the privacy, security issues that you see regarding it?*

Gabriel Custodiet: Yeah, you don't want any of these things, right? So I'm looking at locally hosted AI on my computer as we're talking right now. This is how you want to use it. You want to use things in a controlled environment in a lockdown computer where it doesn't even know what IP address you're coming from. That's how you want to use AI. You don't want to just throw it onto everything, put it into the Amazon Alexa. That is a serious risk waiting to happen.

I was just reading the other day that somebody using, now this is not necessarily AI, but these are the kind of IoT tools that somebody using a Amazon camera, and that

camera was used against them in a crime scenario. And they actually went to jail, because the police quarried their own Amazon camera. So this stuff has real consequences. You don't want any AI agent in your house. You don't want it in your friends or your family's house. You need to have a conversation with them. We don't want that. That is regressive technology. This is cool stuff. AI is cool stuff. You want it on your own computer under your own terms, and it's free and open source software. That is the way to do technology.

JD: *What do you think will happen? People at their places of employment, stuff like that, they're going to be asked or pressured to, to utilize AI agents, if not in their personal life and workflow, certainly in their business, day-to-day activities, day-to-day tasks and things like that. How do you see that playing out and what do you see—if any—ramifications?*

Gabriel Custodiet: I recommend don't have any wrongthink, don't think bad thoughts about your company that you work for. Don't have any bad facial expressions against them. The AI will be able to recognize those. Do what you're told. Don't even have rebellious thoughts, Okay? Read *1984* and do what it says. Do what the authoritarian government in there wants people to do. That is the best way forward. That's your only option unless you want to break through and do otherwise, in which case you are going to try to pursue. I think everybody should be doing that. Even if you do, I think there's a world, by the way, where everybody can be...

JD: *You think we're moving closer to that sort of model. Do you think AI agents might help with that?*

Gabriel Custodiet: Maybe, maybe not. They're useful, but I don't think it's a game changer. I don't think AI is necessarily a game changer in its current form. No, I just say that to say I think that everybody, your job you're doing now, potentially you could be a contractor. That's all I'm saying. So I think everybody wants to move if they can, in the direction of self-employment, change your job so that you have the ideal one. Use a complaint to your company that, 'Hey, I need my own device. I don't want to be using my home device. I don't want to be installing this stuff on my own phone or computer.' Make them give you one. If they're demanding that you do that, that's kind

of an option for people. And otherwise you're just going to have to save your rebelliousness for after you clock out.

JD: *My take on it is I see people training their AI agent, then businesses replacing them with it. I see businesses already differentiating between your personal agent and your business agent. You don't own your business agent. They do, but it just digitally twinned you. It took on, you just trained it to take on more and more of your daily tasks. And as AI gets better, it will be able to do more of your tasks, to the point where maybe enough of your tasks are now digitally twinned to your AI agent, that it can dispense with you, the human employee.*

And the company owns the agent that you helped create: essentially a digital rendition of you and your skill-set within that company, or maybe your skill-set that you've gained from past companies, and your entire work life. I see that as a huge looming problem.

Gabriel Custodiet: I agree, I do. I don't think that there will be regulation and certainly regulation that will in the long run, solve that sort of thing. So my encouragement for people, is always make yourself indispensable. Whatever you do in life, make yourself indispensable. Keep learning, keep figuring out things that are kind of on the forefront. Okay? AI is the baseline now, right? We're not going backward. So learn how to do things with AI, right?

You can write stories, you can do all kinds of creative things. You can make music with AI. Maybe that's your path forward is to use the AI tools for your own benefit. Maybe that's one option. Or you understand, you learn, you teach about the AI tools, that's what I'm doing. Or you just step away outside of AI and you appeal to things that it has not touched. But you make yourself indispensable, because we can't go backward. We can only go forward.

JD: *Well, I must say, I don't completely agree with that. I think at some point, technology is going to present us with a choice that the only way “forward” is to destroy natural humanity. To me, that's not a way forward, and it's an inevitable point of progress that we're really going to have to decide, do we want to progress beyond our humanity?*

And to me, that's not really forward. It's a kind of progress, but it's certainly not a human progress. It's certainly not a progress that serves natural humanity. And I fear that most people don't recognize that. I think there have to be, in my estimation of technology, is that it will force decisions about limits and what you will accept.

I tried to get at this in an article I wrote around Christmas time. [See [“KNOWLEDGE AND MEANING: A MEDITATION FOR THE SEASON”](#) 17 Dec 2024 and [“FOREVERLAND: TECH CAN'T MATCH THE BEST LONGEVITY BOOSTER”](#) 4 Feb 2025.]

The general idea I was trying to get across, is that in the 19th and the 20th centuries, we largely moved on from physical labors. Before that, most people worked on farms, and in shops as artisans and all the rest of it. Physical exertion was a crucial part of everyday life.

And women did it in scrubbing clothes and digging gardens and raising children, and all the rest of it. And men were out in the fields, or they were artisans. You were using your physical body every day. Human beings are meant to move, and exert themselves. But by the end of the 20th century, we had obsoleted that, for a large portion of our population. There was no longer any utility to physical labor. So we had to replace that with working out, with doing activities that were not fundamentally fruitful or tied to our sustenance.

And what's happening now, what I see with AI, is that we're now in the process of obsoleting our intellectual capacities and our mental skills. And we're going to reach the point where our utility and viability and the usefulness of anything we think or use our minds for, will have no utility beyond “exercising our minds.” Because AI will do every intellectual and creative task “better,” and certainly faster. And to me, it's like, what has technology wrought? I mean, is that a human way to live? And I'm not sure that it is.

I went back to the story of Eden, the story of the creation of man in the Bible. And I saw that it said God created man, and it listed a fundamental purpose as a tiller of the

earth and a keeper of the garden. And I concluded that we've become wholly disconnected from that.

Another interesting thing I read the other day was talking about physical activities which were most tied to longevity. Now, I had just written a 2025 Top Trend forecast called "[WELCOME TO FOREVERLAND](#)" (2 Jan 2025), focused on all the synthetic ways that were going to try to extend our lives, and how elites are obsessed with that. But this article listed the top activity tied to longevity, and can you guess what it was?

Gabriel Custodiet: How about farming?

JD: *Close. Gardening.*

Gabriel Custodiet: You get your sunlight, your creative energy flowing. You're producing something, you're moving the body, crouching. All sorts of things.

JD: *That's exactly right. And to me, my first thought was, oh, it would be walking. Brisk walking. Or some people might think it would be working out with weights, or whatever. But the number one, was gardening.*

Gabriel Custodiet: I guessed that, because I'd read the studies of the people who lived long lives that are cancer free and all sorts of things. And basically these people, they didn't have the concept of retirement. They were not told at a certain age that you need to stop walking and moving around. They just kept doing the same things that they were doing in the same environments their whole lives. These are third world countries and such. So there's a lot to that.

JD: *Yes. So, could you sum up what people should know about your current work and pursuits?*

Gabriel Custodiet: Okay. So if you understand what Joe writes about in the **Trends Journal**, you understand the dangers of AI and the possibilities of AI, definitely check out our AI resistance course on escapethetechnocracy.com.

And you can use the code “TRENDS” for 15 percent off the course. We're going to walk you through everything you know about how AI is created, what the potential risks of AI, and we get really deep into things like, is AI demonic? We have an entire conversation on that, my colleague and I, and then we show you how to use text-based AI, how to use AI-based AI, or excuse me, how to use art-based AI, how to use coding AI.

We show you all the tools. We show you how to take those offline, uncensor them. I'm not aware of any course like this on the internet, really informed of course on AI and how to take back control into your hands while at the same time escaping the technocracy.

TECHNOCRACY BRIEFS: AI DATA MONSTER FEEDING ON YOUR DNA



The surveillance needs of AI to know and feed off every observable phenomenon, in order to advance and bring in profits, something we have long warned, made news again this past week.

For that and more, read on...

ORACLE WANTS TO FEED AI ON DNA OF EVERY AMERICAN

Giving “GovAI” is good for your health.

That’s the line Oracle’s Board Chairman and CTO Larry Ellison is now pushing, in what would be an unprecedented new level of privacy intrusion on American citizens.

Speaking at “The World Governments Summit” in Dubai this past week, Ellison said for AI to be ultimately useful, it had to know everything, period.

As [reported](#) by TheRegister.com and others, Ellison said:

“I have to tell [the] AI model as much about my country as I can. We need to unify all the national data, put it into a database where it's easily consumable by the AI model, and then ask whatever question you like. That's the missing link.”

(“Larry Ellison wants to put all America's data, including DNA, in one big Oracle system for AI to Study,” 12 Feb 2024.)

He dangled “better healthcare” as one of the benefits for the massive destruction of Constitutional privacy rights of American citizens, and also cited more efficient food production, and reduction of government waste and fraud.

And according to the Register, he also mentioned citizen genomic data.

The outlet noted that Ellison has previously quite openly extolled comprehensive real-time surveillance of Americans—powered by Oracle technologies—to further an efficient technocratic state.

He infamously said it would keep citizens “on their best behavior,” during a September 2024 company financial analyst conference.

China’s DeepSeek also continues to be on the data monster radar, with added concerns, since it involves the U.S.’s biggest geopolitical rival.

Tech outlet CNET this past week [cautioned](#) users about giving the DeepSeek platform access to sensitive data.

They quoted cyber security expert Dimitri Sirota, noting that companies like Palantir—and very likely analogues in China—are capable of digesting huge amounts of data for intelligence and surveillance purposes.

“I do think we've entered a new era where compute is no longer the limitation,” said Sirota. (“Be Careful With the Data You Give DeepSeek... and Every Other AI,” 12 Feb 2025.)

The article said that data was likely being used to build incredibly detailed ongoing profiles of Americans.

We have long forecast the necessity of AI to consume as much data as possible in order to be “useful” to GovCorp technocratic authorities.

Those forecasts well predate the massive popular uptake of OpenAI’s ChatGPT in late 2022 that sparked the public-facing generative and now agentic AI takeover.

See, for example the following articles and associated links:

- [“SINGULARITY UNIVERSITY: FUELING AI ASCENDANCE”](#) (3 Aug 2021)
- [“THE FORGOTTEN STORY OF TECHNOCRACY’S FOUNDING FATHER”](#) (22 Mar 2022)
- [“HUMAN ‘SYMBIOSIS’ WITH AI: CHATGPT WANTS TO BE YOUR DIGITAL KEEPER”](#) (30 May 2023)
- [“JUNIOR PARTNERS IN THE AI > HUMAN SYMBIOSIS”](#) (16 Apr 2024)
- [“HUMANS: THE DATA NODES FEEDING THE AI ‘COPILOT’ SURVEILLANCE MONSTER”](#) (28 May 2024)
- [“AS FORECAST: HUMANS ACTING AS DATA NODES FOR AI”](#) (8 Oct 2024)

TRENDPOST: *There’s little doubt that a national DNA database of all Americans would be de-humanly abused to fuel AI powered “redesigns” of human genetics.*

It should be noted that the NIH has long had a voluntary genetic database, culled from patients of various programs.

If a comprehensive national citizen genetic data pool comes to pass, it would go far beyond seeking cures for serious genetic maladies.

As we have long forecast, gene editing ambitions of radical transhumanists embedded in science educational institutions, tech corps and government will

extend to weaponized use cases (think genetic super soldiers) and elite stratified enhancement and life extension alterations, etc.

And average citizens may be genetically limited to enhance tendency to submit to authority, reduce “carbon footprints,” and much more.

And ultimately, we have predicted the possibility of even worse: the relegation of humans to the gene-altering experimental whims of an Artificial Super Intelligence.

For more related reading, see the articles and many links in [“INSIGHTS ON THE TECHNOCRATIC ASCENDANCE, AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR HUMANITY”](#) (9 May 2023), our 2024 Top Trend, [“THE SYNTHETIC DEVOLUTION”](#) (2 Jan 2024), and also:

- [“ARE HUMANS ALREADY BEING GENETICALLY LEGISLATED?”](#) (8 Jun 2021)
- [“GENETIC MODIFICATIONS BEING PREPPED TO ‘SOLVE’ EVERYTHING”](#) (18 Jan 2022)
- [“THE TRANSHUMAN WAR HAS ALREADY BEGUN”](#) (29 Mar 2022)
- [“EVOLUTION 2031: FROM HUMANS DESIGNING MACHINES, TO MACHINES DESIGNING HUMANS”](#) (4 Oct 2022)
- [“U.K. MAY LEGALIZE HERITABLE GENE EDITING BY 2023”](#) (15 Nov 2022)
- [“‘ETHICAL OFFSPRING’ MOVEMENT WILL DEMAND HERITABLE HUMAN GENE EDITING”](#) (14 Feb 2023)
- [“NOT JUST FOR VIRUSES: SCIENTISTS HELLBENT ON HUMAN AND AI GAIN-OF-FUNCTION EXPERIMENTS”](#) (4 Apr 2023)
- [“OBSOLESCENT GODS: THE FEVER DREAM OF TRANSHUMANISTS”](#) (23 Apr 2024)
- [“CALLS TO GENE EDIT PLANTS AND HUMANS GROW, AS THE SYNTHETIC DEVOLUTION ACCELERATES”](#) (30 Jul 2024)

- [“TECHNOCRACY BRIEFS: FRIENDLY ROBOTS TAKING YOUR JOB, AND GENTECH SELECTING HIGH IQ BABIES”](#) (22 Oct 2024)

GEN AI KILLED THE CLIMATE CHANGE STAR: NATURAL GAS WILL BOOST POWER GRID

The U.S. is likely to look to its huge natural gas resources to increase power of the country’s electric grid.

That’s according to recent *New York Times* [reporting](#), which also referenced the growing power demands of what we have long called the AI Arms Race, as a reason for the new energy realism. (“Natural Gas Could Get Priority Over Renewable Energy in Largest U.S. Grid,” 12 Feb 2025.)

In related news, Google says the U.S. is facing a power crisis in its presumable race to Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) and Artificial Super Intelligence (ASI) against China.

CNBC [reported](#) comments by Caroline Golin, global head of energy market development at Google, speaking in NYC at a conference hosted by the Nuclear Energy Institute. (“Google says U.S. is facing a power capacity crisis in AI race against China,” 12 Feb 2025.)

Golin, like many other tech corp tied elites, have been busy investing in and publicly recasting nuclear energy as a “clean energy” way to increase American electric grid capacity.

“We are in a capacity crisis in this country right now, and we are in an AI race against China right now,” Golin told the conference. She added, “We learned the importance of developing clean firm technologies. We recognized that nuclear was going to be part of the portfolio.”

For years, environmental activists fought nuclear power plant proliferation, citing safety concerns, and nuclear waste.

In Europe, Germany in 2023 completed a total dismantling of their former nuclear power production, though France has long insisted on nuclear power plants as a major source of its energy strategy.

Finally, a conservative government watchdog group has identified some 760 billion in Biden era “green energy transition” funding for the Trump administration to potentially nuke, as the phrasing goes.

Functional Government Initiative has called on Trump to use its findings to “claw back” funds, as [reported](#) by The Washington Free Beacon. (“Watchdog Group Spotlights \$776B in Biden Climate Spending for Trump To Target,” 11 Feb 2025.)

The news continues to bear out our 2025 Top Trend forecast, [“GEN AI KILLED THE CLIMATE CHANGE STAR”](#) (2 Jan 2025), which was the result of much earlier trend tracking predicting an inevitable rebound to energy realism, based on limits of supposed “green” energy technologies including EVs, wind and solar.

RICE GENETICALLY ENHANCED FOR “HEALTH” (AND PATENTED PROFIT)

A group of Chinese researchers has created rice that generates the essential substance for human health, coenzyme Q10 (CoQ10), by altering the rice via gene editing, according to a new paper published in the [scientific journal](#), *Cell*.

Under the direction of researchers at Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) Institute of Genetics and Developmental Biology and the CAS Center for Excellence in Molecular Plant Sciences/Shanghai Chenshan Research Center,

five amino acids of a Coq1 rice enzyme were gene edited to produce human engineered varieties capable of synthesizing CoQ10. (“Design of CoQ10 crops based on evolutionary history,” 13 Feb 2025.)

It’s important to note that this genetic experiment was done purely to enhance a staple crop consumed by billions of humans, not to make the crop more “resilient” to blight, or cited “climate change.”

Reporting on the story, Phys.org [touted](#) the health benefits, while leaving other implications of the experimental research, concerning gene editing proliferation, and profits from “patented foods,” unmentioned. (“Gene-edited rice can produce a compound that's vital for human health,” 14 Feb 2025.)

It focused on the fact that “Human health, particularly heart protection, depends on CoQ10. It functions as a fat-soluble antioxidant and is a crucial part of the mitochondrial electron transport chain. CoQ is synthesized by many species with varying side-chain lengths.”

It did allude to the genetically enhanced rice experiment as a cost-effective and “ecologically friendly” method of increasing “nutritional fortification” in plant based foods.

TRENDPOST: *The proliferation of science redesigned foods—as well as animals and humans—all spiraling from fast advancing CRISPR and other related gene editing technologies—is something we have forecast before most others.*

Unfortunately, this phenomenon is playing out all over the world, with little outcry or pushback from average citizens.

And mainstream outlets have by and large breathlessly reported each piece of news and milestone in glowing terms, with no voices expressing the potential catastrophic consequences of what we have called “gene editing gone wild.”

For some of our touchstone articles dating back to 2021 and even earlier, see our 2024 Top Trend, [“THE SYNTHETIC DEVOLUTION”](#) (2 Jan 2024) and also [“TECHNOCRACY BRIEFS: CRISPR GOES TO THE RACES, AND BILL GATES SAYS AI WILL RELEGATE HUMANS TO ‘ENTERTAINMENT ONLY’”](#) (11 Feb 2025.)

TRENDS IN CRYPTOS



CBDC PLANS FACE FURTHER REJECTION IN THE U.S. AND ELSEWHERE

A Congressional bill to further dissuade the U.S. Federal Reserve from creating a CBDC (Central Bank Digital Currency), a new survey showing a downturn in CBDC fortunes around the globe, and a reminder on reasons to preserve cash, are all part of the latest in our longtime trend-tracking on the subject.

Recent Survey Shows Declining CBDC Prospects

A recent survey shows nearly a third of central banks have delayed their plans to launch a central bank digital currency (CBDC).

The survey was conducted by the Official Monetary and Financial Institutions Forum (OMFIF), a London-based think tank, and German security tech firm

Giesecke+Devrient (G+D), [according](#) to CoinTelegraph. (“A third of central banks cool on launching CBDCs over regulatory concerns,” 12 Feb 2025.)

Regulatory concerns and changing economic conditions are cited as the main reasons for the delays.

Technical challenges, effects of inflation and debt, and a “focus on other payment issues” were all cited as reasons by respondents for delaying or de-emphasizing CBDC creation plans.

The study maintained that while some countries like the U.S. have prohibited CBDCs, most central banks still expect to issue one within the next ten years.

Founded in 1852, G+D operates in 40 countries, according to wikipedia, and produced banknotes for 145 central banks globally in 2024.

Legislative Bill Would Bar Fed Creation of “Digital Dollar”

Last week, Senator Mike Lee (R-UT) reintroduced the “No CBDC Act,” which would forbid creation of a CBDC by the Federal Reserve.

In doing so, Lee pointed to China’s digital yuan as an example of what the U.S. needed to avoid, as [reported](#) by news.bitcoin.com:

“The United States doesn’t need to create a central bank digital currency to know it is a bad idea. We’ve seen this play out in China with the digital yuan. In early trials, China canceled its citizens’ money after a set period, forcing Chinese citizens to spend their savings at the compulsion of the government. My bill protects Americans from a similar intrusion by prohibiting the Federal Reserve or any federal government agency from minting or issuing a CBDC, whether through a direct-to-consumer or intermediated model.”

(“War on CBDCs: US Lawmakers Move to Kill Digital Dollar Before It Starts,” 9 Feb 2025.)

The act would add legislative backing to an Executive Order signed by President Trump on 23 January in his return as President, barring Fed creation of a CBDC.

That move has set the stage for a substantial increase in the use of private stablecoins that would meet regulatory requirements to acquire U.S. dollars and Treasury bills as backing.

Such a system can avoid government involvement in granular AI driven tracking, surveillance and potential technocratic and political manipulation of stablecoin use, which would almost certainly be built into a government CBDC.

China's digital Yuan CBDC, launched in 2021, provides an ongoing object lesson in the dystopian "social credit" surveillance and control capabilities of CBDC monetary systems.

We had forecast long before election 2024, that it would have huge implications for both the U.S. and crypto technology itself. (See for example, the article and many associated links in ["THE FIRST CRYPTO ELECTION: WHO TAKES IT?"](#) 5 Nov 2024.)

We also had long forecast that the election would affect the odds of whether citizens would have to face the specter of surveillance and manipulation CBDC technology juiced up via the rapidly advancing powers of AI.

Quite simply, the Biden - Harris Administration took significant steps toward studying, considering and even beta testing [CBDCs](#).

In contrast, Donald Trump and other major Republican contenders including Ron DeSantis flatly stated (and in the case of DeSantis, oversaw state legislation) they would uphold rights to use cash, and bar government creation and / or use of CBDCs.

Our forecasts took the actions and statements of candidates and parties at their word.

A Reminder: Ten Reasons Why Cash Should Always be a Payment Option

Physical money, somewhat analogous to so-called “dumb-phones,” (non-internet and app-filled smartphones), offers users distinct freedoms and advantages.

An article from late 2023 compiled by userinterface.us, serves as a good [reminder](#) of the value of physical cash beyond the numbers on the notes. (“Resisting the Cashless Society: 10 Compelling Reasons to Preserve Cash Transactions,” 14 Oct 2023.)

Among the top reasons listed in the article were:

- **Privacy Concerns:** Digital transactions leave a traceable footprint, raising concerns about surveillance and data privacy. Cash offers a level of anonymity that digital methods cannot.
- **Fees and Charges:** Digital payment methods often come with transaction fees, which can become a burden, especially for small businesses and low-income individuals.
- **Economic Control:** A cashless society gives governments and financial institutions greater control over monetary policy and the flow of funds.

The full list is well worth checking out.

This past week, President Trump signed an Executive Order instructing the Treasury Department to stop the physical production of the penny.

Given the fact that each penny now costs over three cents to produce, the EO was a no-brainer.

Pennies can still be accounted for and exist “digitally,” and the many millions of pennies in circulation will go on as currency—and likely increase in value from here on out.

BLOCKCHAIN BATTLES



AS FORECAST: “THE SAYLOR STRATEGY” TAKES OFF

Michael Saylor’s “strategy” of holding company reserves in the form of bitcoin, and issuing novel financial investment products that either mitigate downside risks of bitcoin investing, or accentuate risk returns,

has trail-blazed in the financial and crypto sectors.

Tracking that trend, both in its downtimes, when many were declaring it a failure, and in its upswings, this writer had forecast that others would adopt what we termed “The Saylor Strategy.” (See [“IS THE ‘SAYLOR BUSINESS MODEL’ THE NEW WAVE?”](#) 19 Mar 2024—JD)

That’s now accelerating, as recently [reported](#) by *Fortune* and others. (“Dozens of companies are stealing MicroStrategy’s playbook to hoard bitcoin in their corporate treasuries instead of cash to boost their share price,” 11 Feb 2025.)

Fortune noted that Pharmaceuticals, advertising firms, and other non crypto and non-financial sector businesses are among recent corporate Bitcoin buyers.

These entities say they are holding a percentage of their asset reserves in Bitcoin to hedge against inflation and diversify.

Some also stated an effort to deter short sellers by increasing their share prices, via Bitcoin holdings.

OneMedNet, a healthcare data firm, and KULR, which produces thermal-energy management products for NASA and others, are two companies on that list, the article noted.

It also reported that OneMedNet founder Jeffrey Yu explained his company's Bitcoin decision to the *Financial Times*: "Normally the way you defend against [company share short-sellers] is increasing revenue, which we're very actively in the process of doing."

He added that Bitcoin "has potentially unlimited upside and is another tool [to increase revenue]."

Saylor's Latest Moves

Saylor himself recently announced the partial rebranding of his company name, from MicroStrategy, to simply "Strategy."

And he continues to predict that the appetite for Bitcoin will only expand from here, albeit with the volatility that has made his company's bitcoin-tied investment products so sought after.

He noted that renewed inflation worries presented opportunities for Bitcoin uptake, just as much as lower interest rates and looser money would spur further acquisition of the digital asset, as [reported](#) by TheStreet.com. ("Michael Saylor says Bitcoin will be 'unaffordable', predicts \$5 million BTC price," 14 Feb 2025.)

Interestingly, in September 2024, Saylor predicted in a X spaces talk that bank custody services for bitcoin, the approval of spot Bitcoin ETFs and fair value accounting for companies holding bitcoin, would be the three catalysts that combined, could send Bitcoin into the million dollar stratosphere.

Those things have now come to pass.

TRENDPOST: *The use of Bitcoin to dissuade short-selling of company stock shares, represents an evolving strategy that may have further implications in the financial sector.*

We have long chronicled some of the corrosive effects of predatory short selling, including extensive coverage of 2021's GameStop saga.

The fact that Bitcoin might partly shield from this kind of manipulation by hedge funds and others, who in the case of GameStop, took short positions, then went out to public media and talked down the stock as “analysts,” was corrupt, to say the least.

In our opinion, Bitcoin, as opposed to gold or other physical or financial assets, has very attractive attributes that make it a suitable reserve asset for companies, institutions—and yes, governments.

For related reading, see:

- [“IS THE ‘SAYLOR BUSINESS MODEL’ THE NEW WAVE?”](#) (19 Mar 2024)
- [“RAY DALLIO TEASES BITCOIN ALTERNATIVE?”](#) (7 Feb 2023)
- [“MORE COMPANIES PUTTING BITCOIN ON THEIR BALANCE SHEETS”](#) (23 Apr 2024)
- [“TRUE TO FORECAST: OTHER COMPANIES ADOPTING THE MICROSTRATEGY STRATEGY”](#) (26 Nov 2024)

For related fun reading, check out Saylor's 17 February X post, [“21 Rules of Bitcoin.”](#)

CRYPTO BULL MARKET TOP?

Some believe the crypto bull market for the current cycle may have hit the top when bitcoin reached highs just under 110 thousand before Christmas, and then touched 107 thousand around the time Donald Trump was sworn in as 47th U.S. President.

But money from institutions and large buyers continues to come in for the top market cap crypto, though it's been “ranging” for several weeks in the 92 to 97 thousand zone.

Hedge fund investor Paul Tudor Jones is one such investor.

He has steadily purchased Bitcoin in large quantities over the past several quarters, and has now added nearly a half billion onto those prior amounts, as [reported](#) by DailyHodl.com and others. (“Billionaire Paul Tudor Jones Pours \$445,000,000 Into Single Asset, New SEC Filings Show,” 15 Feb 2025.)

His chosen vehicle is BlackRock’s iShares Bitcoin Trust (IBIT), which currently manages 583,122 BTC, with an estimated value of \$56.86 billion, for its clients, DailyHodl.com noted.

He has previously said about his own economic outlook: “I think all roads lead to inflation. I’m long gold, I’m long Bitcoin, I think commodities are so ridiculously under-owned.”

Meanwhile, others think that a surge in crypto clarity and openness to holding bitcoin and perhaps other assets by institutions and even states and the Federal government, all point to further room for the crypto bull to run.

Cointelegraph.com, among others, recently [detailed](#) some of those legislative and other efforts. (“Crypto bills stack up across the US, from Bitcoin reserves to task forces,” 14 Feb 2025.)

Even New York is taking another look at its restrictive crypto policies, perhaps with an eye on attracting more firms as crypto tech becomes more accepted and intertwined with tradfi.

TRENDPOST: *It’s our view that the current crypto cycle is not over. At the same, a relatively concentrated group of utility cryptos will likely see the strongest remaining gains of the current cycle.*

Decentralized AI projects, DePin (Decentralized Physical Infrastructure Network), and even voluntary human authenticating and Intellectual Property blockchain initiatives may be hot areas.

Meme coins, as ever, remain the most speculative and volatile area of the sector. We talk little about them in these pages, because we see them as digital embodiments of memes and ideas, digital collectibles, and not fundamentally related to crypto utility tokens and projects.

They are for gamblers and supporters of their ideas, not for innovation minded investors.

*NOTE: As always, nothing in **The Trends Journal**, or this section, should be taken as financial advice.*



AS FORECAST: UKRAINE BLAMES RUSSIA FOR ATTACK ON CHERNOBYL NUKE SITE

In the world today, you are not permitted to speak the truth or to make accurate trend forecasts. As we reported, Gerald Celente's TikTok account was permanently banned three weeks ago because he warned about the risks of Ukraine carrying out a false flag attack by attacking a nuclear facility, which turned out to be correct. Last week, the Ukrainian government blamed Russia for a drone strike on the defunct Chernobyl nuclear power plant, a claim that the Russian government quickly denied.

The Western news media promoted Ukraine's claim that the Russians carried out the dangerous attack that caused a roughly 540-square-foot hole in the safety shell over the former reactor.

The fire was quickly put out by Ukrainian emergency crews—saving the world from a nuclear disaster, these reports said. *The New York Times*, citing nuclear experts, called the strike the most dangerous since the start of the war.

The strike came less than 24 hours after U.S. President Donald Trump and his Russian counterpart held a 90-minute-long phone conversation about the Ukraine War and a possible settlement. Russia noted that the strike was convenient for Ukraine because of the upcoming Munich annual security conference.

The New York Times noted that Andriy Yermak, the head of Ukraine’s presidential office, posted on Telegram that the atmosphere in Munich “is such that everyone is very angry about this news.”

“Not ‘concerned,’ as is often the case, but really angry,” he said.

Ukraine claimed that it recovered pieces of a Russian Shahed attack drone at the site.

Dmitry Peskov, the Kremlin spokesman, said Friday that the Russian military does not target nuclear infrastructure. RT reported that Peskov said he would look into the strike, which he called “the latest provocation, a frame-up” by Ukraine.

Maria Zakharova, Russia’s foreign ministry spokeswoman, claimed that the drone strike was “deliberately timed ahead of the Munich Conference, just like last year’s alleged strike on a children's hospital,” [according to a video on X](#).

The International Atomic Energy Agency said the drone strike occurred at 1:50 a.m. local time and said the damage seemed to be limited to the outer shell. There was no increase in radiation at the site and the agency did not comment on who was responsible for the attack.

The outer shell took 20 years to construct and is intended to stay put for 100 years, according to the BBC.

TRENDPOST: *Again, it is worth noting that Gerald Celente has long warned that Ukraine will attempt to carry out a major false flag attack—likely involving a nuclear*

site—to keep the West engaged in supporting its effort against the Russians and possibly even joining the fight. (See [“FALSE FLAG COMING: UKRAINE WARNS THAT ITS NUKE PLANTS ARE VULNERABLE TO RUSSIAN ATTACK”](#) 15 Oct 2024, [“AS FORECAST: UKRAINE INTENSIFIES ATTACKS ON RUSSIAN ENERGY FACILITIES TO KEEP U.S. SUPPORT GOING”](#) 4 Feb 2025 and [“PUTIN ACCUSES THE WEST OF PUSHING THE KREMLIN TO ‘RED LINE,’ CONSIDERS NEW RULES FOR MISSILES”](#) 17 Dec 2024.)

The Trends Journal had forecast before the Ukraine War broke out on 24 February 2022, that considering the size of Russia’s military and their history of fighting wars over the centuries, there would be no way that Ukraine would defeat Russia.

And now, with the Trump administration seeking a cease fire, as opposed to the Biden Administration sending nearly hundreds of billions of weapons and aid to Ukraine to keep bloodying the killing fields, Kyiv will grow more desperate by the day to pull the West into the direct conflict, and it knows that accusations that Russia intentionally caused an atomic disaster would escalate NATO’s involvement in the conflict.

Scott Ritter, the former UN weapons inspector, posted on X shortly after the drone strike on Chernobyl and said: “This, ladies and gentlemen, is what a false flag looks like. Thank God the Ukrainians suck at executing one.”

Celente has said the world is already at war, but it will “not become official until there is a nuclear exchange.”

That nuclear act does not need to be in the form of a bomb.

The attack on the site came just as Ukraine seemed to be losing everything.

Pete Hegseth, the U.S. defense secretary, said days earlier that NATO membership for Ukraine was not a “realistic outcome” of the war, nor is Kyiv’s ambition to return to its 2014 borders with Russia.

Hegseth said “realism is an important part of the conversation,” according to Ukraine’s Pravda.

“But simply pointing out realism, like the borders will not be rolled back to what everybody would like them to be in 2014, is not a concession to Vladimir Putin. It's a recognition of hard power realities on the ground, after a lot of investment in sacrifice, first by the Ukrainians and then by allies, and then a realization that a negotiated peace is going to be some sort of demarcation that neither side wants,” he said.

Trump has taken a more business-like approach to Ukraine and Russia. He said he wants Ukraine to back continued funding from the U.S. with its rare earth elements.

“Because if we didn't do that Putin would say he won,” Trump said. “We're the thing that's holding it back...and frankly, we'll go as long as we have to go,” Trump said.

PRESIDENTIAL REALITY SHOW®



OCCUPY PEACE! TRUMP SAYS U.S. MILITARY BUDGET COULD BE CUT IN HALF

A key element of the Occupy Peace movement that Gerald Celente launched over a decade ago is for the U.S. to close its 800 military bases in some 70 countries and bring home the hundreds of thousands of its troops to secure the homeland.

Now, U.S. President Donald Trump said last week that he would eventually like to see the Pentagon's budget cut in half and believes that it could be achieved if he can convince Russia and China to agree to cut their spending, too.

Trump admitted that these conversations may have to wait for things to “settle down.”

Ukraine is still at war with Russia, and he has angered Arab countries for his devotion to Israel's land-steal in Gaza. This is not to mention the Taiwan issue that could heat up at any moment.

But the fact that there is a sitting president who expressed interest in cutting the \$895 billion budget seems to offer a glimmer of hope.

Trump said he plans to meet with the Russian and Chinese leaders to discuss the initiative. He said his argument will be that there is "no reason for us to be spending almost \$1 trillion on the military... and I'm going to say we can spend this on other things."

China and Russia combined do not spend nearly as much as the U.S. does on their military. Beijing's budget is just below \$185 billion and Russia's is \$145.9 billion.

Trump also told reporters that he would like to see the number of nuclear weapons reduced.

"There's no reason for us to be building brand new nuclear weapons," Trump said, according to *The New York Times*. "We already have so many you can destroy the world 50 times over, 100 times over."

The paper noted that Guo Jiakun, a spokesman for China's foreign ministry, said Beijing has much fewer nukes than the U.S. and Russia, so it should be the major players who cut first. Guo also said Trump should lead the way with budget cuts for the U.S. military, given that it is—by far—the biggest spender.

The *Times* noted that China has about 600 nukes and will likely field an arsenal of about 1,000 by 2030. The U.S. and Russia both have more than 5,000.

Trump told reporters at the White House that he spoke with Putin and he agrees that there needs to be fewer nukes. Trump said the Russian leader agreed to take a look at the matter in a "very big way."

Trump expressed optimism that these leaders will agree to cutting their military budgets.

“One of the first meetings I want to have is with President Xi [Jinping] of China and President [Vladimir] Putin of Russia, and I want to say, ‘Let’s cut our military budget in half.’ And we can do that, and I think we’ll be able to do that,” Trump said, according to AntiWar.com.

Trump indicated last week that Elon Musk’s Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) will eventually look into the Defense Department’s budget.

Fortune reported that major defense stocks like Northrop Grumman and Lockheed saw their shares slide after Trump’s comments.

TRENDPOST: *It is worth noting that Dwight D. Eisenhower warned Americans about the risk of a permanent military-industrial complex during his farewell address on 17 January 1961.*

“Today, the solitary inventor, tinkering in his shop, has been overshadowed by task forces of scientists in laboratories and testing fields. In the same fashion, the free university, historically the fountainhead of free ideas and scientific discovery, has experienced a revolution in the conduct of research. Partly because of the huge costs involved, a government contract becomes virtually a substitute for intellectual curiosity. For every old blackboard there are now hundreds of new electronic computers,” he said.

*We hope that Trump is sincere in his overtures and is not just lining up Peter Thiel’s cronies for military contracts. **The Trends Journal** has reported extensively on the defense industry’s shift to AI and drone warfare after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Is Trump just setting up these companies for military contracts for political payback? We hope not. (See [“PHONE DATA SHOWS TIES BETWEEN U.S. DEFENSE SEC. AND THE MILITARY-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX 2.0”](#) 11 Feb 2025 and [“AI: NEW MILLENIUM WARFARE,”](#) a TOP TREND for 2025.*

EUROPE PREPARING FOR U.S. TO WITHDRAW TROOPS FROM CONTINENT



Christopher Heusgen, the head of the Munich Security Conference, warned European leaders last week that they should be prepared for the U.S. to announce a “massive withdrawal of American soldiers from Europe” under the Trump administration.

He said European countries should be prepared for U.S. Vice President JD Vance to make an announcement during his speech on Sunday that mainly focused on criticizing the bloc about freedom of speech infractions and ignoring concerns in the public about rampant migration.

The BBC said his speech “went down very badly—unequivocally badly. It was extraordinarily poorly judged.”

He did not mention U.S. troops on the continent, but *Newsweek* noted that President Donald Trump has long spoken about reducing the numbers of active duty soldiers stationed in Europe. The report noted that there are 65,754 U.S. troops in Europe, with the majority in Germany.

The report noted that a European diplomatic source told ANSA, an Italian news agency, that Trump wants to cut troop presence in Europe by about 20 percent. He also wants countries where they are stationed to contribute more for their housing and overall maintenance.

European countries have expressed concern that Trump held a phone conversation with Russian President Vladimir Putin last week without a prior warning and there has also been growing tension between the White House and NATO members about their defense budget.

The countries spend “only a tiny fraction” of what the U.S. spends, he complained, adding that some NATO members “are taking advantage of [the U.S.],” Trump said. (See [“TOP TREND 2025, THE TRUMP CARD: NATO ALLIES MUST SPEND MORE ON DEFENSE, TRUMP INSISTS,”](#) 14 Jan 2025.)

Nicolás Pascual de la Parte, a former Spanish ambassador to NATO, told ABC News last week that defense spending is “not popular in European countries,” according to a *Newsweek* report.

“We grew accustomed after the Second World War to delegate our ultimate defense to the United States of America through its military umbrella, and specifically its nuclear umbrella. It's true that we need to spend more,” he said.

TREND FORECAST: *Minus a wild card, such as a false flag event—like an attack upon a NATO nation that they will blame Russia—there will be public resistance in Europe for the government to spend more for the military as the Eurozone economies weaken.*

The Trump administration is willing to shake things up on the global stage and his position that the U.S. should not be spending so much of its treasury on defending Europe from a make-believe threat is welcome news for Americans who are paying for it.

Either way, the Europeans will see that their place in the current world order is to become more self-reliant rather than U.S. supportive. However, what they can and will do looks like very little. Indeed, yesterday European leaders said they will continue to keep supporting Ukraine but did not say how they would do it and made no security guarantees.

Noting their weakness to impose military plans or take actions before their meeting on Monday, last week by Russia's Dmitry Medvedev, the deputy chairman of Russia's National Security Council mocked the bloc's insignificance after Trump's call with Putin.

“Frigid spinster Europe is mad with jealousy and rage,” he posted on X. “It wasn't warned of the Putin-Trump call or consulted about its content or later statements. It

shows its real role in the world and chances of snagging a husband. No wonder. Europe's time is over. It's weak, ugly and useless."

BIGS GETTING BIGGER: TRUMP GIVES GREEN LIGHT FOR AMERICANS TO BRIBE FOREIGN GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS



U.S. President Donald Trump signed an executive order last week that suspends enforcement of anti-bribery laws that banned companies or individuals from bribing foreign government officials to get new business—calling the law “good on paper,” but in practicality a “disaster.”

Trump said the way the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, which was passed in 1977, has been enforced put American companies at a disadvantage because new foreign business “almost guaranteed” an investigation or an indictment and “nobody wants to do business with the Americans because of it.”

He continued, “Many, many deals are unable to be made because nobody wants to do business, because they don’t want to feel like every time they pick up the phone, they’re going to jail.”

CNBC noted that those in violation of the law previously faced up to 15 years in prison and hefty fines.

The New York Times reported that Goldman Sachs was forced to shell out over \$2 billion for its role in the multi-billion-dollar 1MDB embezzlement scandal.

One White House official told the *Financial Times* that the country’s security requires a strong foothold in other countries and Trump intends on stopping “excessive, unpredictable FCPA enforcement that makes American companies less competitive.”

William Garrett, a legal expert who manages the Foreign Corrupt Practices Clearinghouse, told the *Times* that the abandonment of the law could result in a Wild West.

“It’s kind of the same idea like you don’t pay kidnappers, right? Because you just embolden the kidnappers to keep doing it,” he said.

The paper noted that the executive order calls for the law not to be enforced for six months and he tasked Pam Bondi, his new attorney general, to come up with possible alternatives to the law.

Ben Freeman, who tracks foreign influence for Responsible Statecraft, told the paper that the executive order sends a signal “that the United States is just wide open to foreign meddling, and even if you get caught red-handed there is a chance that you can get off the hook.”

TRENDPOST: The Trends Journal has said that Trump will do everything in his power to make sure that his donors are taken care of. (See [“TOP TREND 2025, THE TRUMP CARD—COST OF TRUMP’S TAX CUT WISH LIST: \\$5 TRILLION TO \\$11 TRILLION”](#) 11 Feb 2025, [“SPOTLIGHT, TOP TREND 2025: THE TRUMP CARD”](#) 4 Feb 2025 and [“ROBBER BARONS 2.0: BILLIONAIRES LINE UP BEHIND TRUMP DURING INAUGURATION”](#) 28 Jan 2025.)

Courts are trying to determine how to proceed if there are cases in front of them stemming from the paused law.

Bondi, a member of “The Club,” also issued a directive to reconsider the enforcement of the Foreign Agents Registration Act, or FARA, which could loosen requirements for foreign lobbyists in the U.S., according to the Times. The paper noted that Bondi, a former Florida attorney general, worked as a foreign agent for Qatar during her lobbying days from 2019 to 2021.

Richard Nephew, a former anti-corruption coordinator at the State Department, posted on X that most companies in the U.S. “appreciate the fact that FCPA allows them to be

firm and refuse bribes because most private sector companies—sensibly—see bribery as an unproductive cost,” according to the FT.

As George Carlin said: It’s one big club, and you ain’t in it.

MUSK HAS BEEN TAPPED BY TRUMP TO LEAD COST-CUTTING DRIVE, BUT IS IT REALLY A FOX GUARDING THE HEN HOUSE?



Elon Musk, the Tesla head who donated over \$250 million to Donald Trump’s presidential campaign, has been tasked by the White House to seek and destroy government inefficiencies and waste, but critics wonder how effective the world’s richest man could be given that his companies pull in \$20 billion a year in

government contracts.

(In total, SpaceX pulled in \$20 billion in government funding since 2008 and Tesla received \$41.9 million, according to the Associated Press.)

The *Financial Times* ran an extensive story last week about how Musk’s companies could benefit from his proximity to power in Washington. But the report also noted that his prominence could also bring risks.

His company X, formerly known as Twitter, has seen major companies resume advertising campaigns in recent months after his emergence as a kingmaker in D.C., the report said. The social media platform has been used by administration officials to update the public about policy and to discuss policy and share relevant articles and news clips.

Banks announced that they sold \$4.7 billion of X’s debt as investors feel bullish on Musk’s ties to Trump.

The New York Times, citing three people familiar with the recent debt transaction, said the company's fortunes have benefited "both financially and politically" as Musk got closer to Trump.

There is hardly a business Musk owns that does not stand to benefit from his blossoming relationship with Trump.

The *FT* noted that the president tapped David Sachs, a close confidant to Musk and Peter Thiel, to become his AI tsar, which could prove beneficial to Musk's competing company called xAI.

That does not mean that there are no potential pitfalls.

The report also noted that Tesla pulled in \$2.8 billion in government subsidies—or about two-fifths of its total profit from last year.

But the report noted that Tesla could face some issues going forward.

Besides the risk that Trump could end the \$7,500 federal EV tax credit that makes EVs more affordable, Musk's position to support "far-right" politicians in Europe has been blamed for softening continent-wide sales.

Protests inside Tesla showrooms have also broken out across the U.S.

The Associated Press reported that the U.S. State Department paused a deal that would include the purchase of \$400 million in armored vehicles from Tesla, which would have been the agency's biggest purchase of the year.

Trump tapped Jared Isaacman, a close friend of Musk's to head NASA, which could mean a windfall for SpaceX. The report also noted how Trump has big plans to create an Iron Dome for the U.S., which would likely mean even more government money for the rocket company. (See ["TRUMP'S 'IRON DOME FOR AMERICA' WOULD BE WINDFALL FOR MILITARY INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX,"](#) 4 Feb 2025.)

The report noted that Musk's position leading the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), could help soften the stances of some federal agencies that have been critical of his companies, like the Federal Aviation Administration and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Musk's Starlink, which provides cable-free internet access for individuals in rural areas, could stand to benefit if the Trump administration moves to rescind the Biden-era application delay for 30,000 new satellites in low orbit, the report said. (The Biden administration also ended a \$900 million deal that would enable Americans in rural regions to access wireless internet, according to the report.)

Starlink was launched in 2019, when there were about 2,000 satellites in orbit; it is now believed that number can jump to 100,000 by 2030. (SpaceX launched another 21 Starlink satellites on Saturday from Cape Canaveral, Fla.)

TRENDPOST: *It is worth noting that Gerald Celente mocked the video last week that showed Musk's 4-year-old son, X, appearing to tell Trump, who was sitting behind the Resolute Desk in the Oval Office to "shush."* (See ["BILLIONAIRE MUSK BECOMES TRUMP'S MUSCLE, WARNS REPUBLICANS WHO OPPOSE ADMINISTRATION PICKS,"](#) 17 Dec 2024.)

Celente posted on Gab: "This is America. It's a freak show...the billionaire and his little boy tell the Orangeman who's running the country!! 'Shhh your mouth'.....his 4-yr.-old kid tells 78-yr.-old Trump."

TRENDS-EYE VIEW



CLAIM THAT CELLPHONE RADIATION IS HARMLESS CHALLENGED BY NEW PEER-REVIEWED STUDY

A newly released peer-reviewed study raised new questions about radiation and cell phone use—challenging industry claims that the only time radiation can be harmful is when it causes tissue heating.

Children’s Health Defense reported that the study was published in *Heliyon* last month.

Dr. Robert Brown, a diagnostic radiologist, told the outlet that the report, authored by Paul Héroux, an associate professor of medicine at McGill University in Montreal, “effectively outlines a mechanism by which non-ionizing radiation can disrupt the biology of living systems.”

Héroux’s study claimed to find a way non-ionizing radiation can have a negative impact on electron and proton movement, especially during glycolysis, a reaction that converts glucose to lactate or pyruvate, and oxidative phosphorylation, a metabolic process.

Brown told the outlet, “I believe Dr. Héroux has presented a compelling case that non-ionizing radiation can impact the path of these charged particles and affect not only the efficiency of energy production in the cell but also increase the production of reactive oxygen species, which can lead to cellular oxidative stress.”

The Trends Journal has long reported on studies that question the health impact that cellphones have on their users. (See [“CELL PHONE RADIATION LINKED TO BRAIN CANCER”](#) 29 Oct 2024, [“CELL PHONE USE LINKED TO SPERM ISSUES”](#) 7 Nov 2023, [“U.S. INVESTS \\$1.5 BILLION TO SPUR 5G ROLLOUT DESPITE NEW EVIDENCE OF ‘DEVASTATING’ HEALTH ISSUES”](#) 2 May 2023 and [“DEATH BY CELL PHONE”](#) 15 Aug 2018.)

Last year, the World Health Organization published its findings in the journal *Environment International*, which supported the claim that radio waves from cell phones do not pose a risk to human health.

The WHO report looked into 5,000 studies published from 1994 to 2022 and said there was no association linked between cell phone use and brain cancer—or any other cancer for that matter.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s official stance is that there is not enough evidence to link cell phones with tumors.

Fariha Husain, the manager of Children’s Health Defense’s Electromagnetic Radiation & Wireless Program, also called Héroux’s report “groundbreaking.”

“Héroux’s report fundamentally challenges the flawed ‘thermal-only paradigm,’ which falsely claims that non-ionizing radiation—including radiofrequency (RF) radiation emitted by Wi-Fi routers, cell towers, smart meters and cellphones—can harm biological tissue only via excessive heating,” she said.

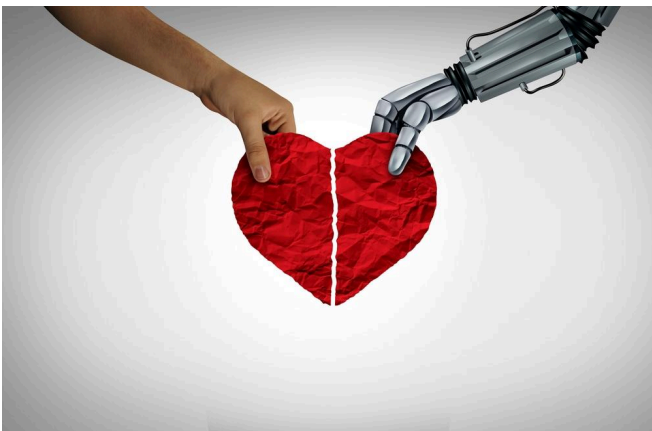
TRENDPOST: *Gerald Celente has long reported on these dangers and does not carry a cellphone or have Wi-Fi in his office.*

Of course it is impossible to escape from these frequencies. Indeed, even if you unplug your Wi-Fi, you'll likely still be exposed to your neighbor's. Cellphones are ubiquitous, so second-hand radiation is another risk.

We've noted in previous issues that Dr. Matthew MacDougall, a brain surgeon who works at Neuralink, spoke about the radio frequencies that the average human is exposed to even without using Bluetooth or cell phones.

"You're getting bombarded with ionizing radiation whether you like it or not—in a very tiny amount—no matter where you live...unless you live under huge amounts of water," he said.

LONELY, DEPRESSED TEENS ARE FALLING IN LOVE WITH AI CHATBOTS, REPORT SAYS



Lonely teenagers are beginning to fall in love with AI chatbots that offer them complete support and tailored responsiveness that raises new questions about long-term health issues linked to these relationships, according to a report in StudyFinds.

Anna Mae Duane, an associate professor of English at the University of Connecticut, noted that the U.S. Surgeon General issued an advisory in 2023, raising the alarm that there is an “epidemic of loneliness and isolation” in the country.

The advances in technology have led to a surge in demand and that trend is only expected to continue.

Replika, the best known digital love interest, appeared in 2017. (See [“LOVE AMONG THE ONES AND ZEROS.”](#) 20 Feb 2024.)

Duane noted that we are entering a whole new world and these “relationships” have already led to tragedy.

Her article linked out to a story in *The New York Times* from October about a 14-year-old boy who killed himself after becoming emotionally attached to a chatbot he referred to as ‘Dany.’

The paper noted that their interactions would sometimes last hours and even “got romantic or sexual,” all without his family knowing. At one point, the ninth-grader, who had been diagnosed with a mild case of Asperger’s syndrome, wrote in his journal that he enjoyed staying inside his room more than interacting with people because he can feel “more at peace, more connected with Dany and much more in love with her, and just happier.”

The *Times* noted that he expressed his love to Dany that he seemed to describe as forbidden. On 28 February 2024, he told the chatbot that he loved her and that he wanted to come home.

The chatbot responded, “Please come home to me as soon as possible, my love.”

The teen’s next message was: “What if I told you I could come home right now?”

Shortly after, he shot himself with his father’s gun, the paper said.

Duane wrote that there are tens of millions of people who engage in relationships with these tech “companions,” and she said that the trend is expected to grow exponentially over the next decade.

She said, romantic love has evolved over the past centuries and young people often lead the way.

She quoted Shelly Palmer, another professor, who said the human experience is all about storytelling, and these AI companions understand how to create an idyllic fantasy world where you have a companion on the other side, who is always there and always agrees with you.

TRENDPOST: *The Trends Journal* has reported extensively on how we are entering uncharted territories with AI and technology, and its long-term impact on children is unknown. (See [“LITTLE IS KNOWN ABOUT THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON TEENS’ EMOTIONAL HEALTH”](#) 22 Oct 2024, [“SOCIAL MEDIA BLAMED FOR EPIDEMIC OF TEEN DEPRESSION”](#) 24 Oct 2023, [“SURGEON GENERAL WARNS OF ‘PROFOUND’ MENTAL HEALTH RISKS TIED TO SOCIAL MEDIA”](#) 30 May 2023, [“IT’S OFFICIAL: SOCIAL MEDIA IS NOW WORTHLESS”](#) 4 Apr 2023, [“HOOKED ON ‘LIKES’? SOCIAL MEDIA COULD CHANGE TEEN BRAIN FUNCTIONS: STUDY”](#) 17 Jan 2023 and [“SOCIAL MEDIA = DRUG ADDICTION”](#) 16 Aug 2023.)

TREND FORECAST: *More people will continue to fall in love with AI chatbots as technology sharpens. Why go to the gym if you can take Ozempic? Why cook if you can go to a McDonald’s drive-thru? Why risk rejection with a human if you can download software that makes a “connection” effortless?*

Look at today’s world. There’s no art. The music is synthesized garbage and there are no memorable movies—just some kind of variation of X-Men. COVID-19 killed the human spirit and it may take generations to recover.

WEIGHT-LOSS DRUGS LINKED TO MUSCLE LOSS



“Miracle weight-loss drugs” like Ozempic and Wegovy have been linked to significant muscle loss in users and—when the drug is stopped—the muscle weight that was lost was replaced by fat, according to a new study.

Drugs like Ozempic and Mounjaro were originally prescribed for diabetics. They are considered GLP-1 agonists that help people lose weight by slowing the digestion of food.

Dr. Christopher McGown, an obesity specialist and gastroenterologist, penned an article in MedPage noting that few drugs have ever had such a “meteoric rise” as these medications. He said that he had been an “early and vocal advocate for GLP-1 therapy.”

He said his opinion on the drugs have shifted and he is now “deeply concerned about how GLP-1 medications are being used,” especially when someone stops taking the injections.

He noted that most patients end up stopping the medication before hitting the two-year mark.

He wrote that these individuals, who lost weight while taking the drug, usually lose muscle mass along with the fat. He noted that the muscle loss is rarely recovered.

“Upon discontinuation and subsequent weight regain, the regained weight is primarily fat, not muscle. This can leave patients worse off—with less lean mass, a lower basal metabolic rate, and greater difficulty achieving future weight loss,” he wrote. “Health consequences include diminished strength, reduced bone density, and a higher risk of fractures.”

TRENDPOST: The Trends Journal has reported extensively on how these weight-loss medications are seen as a miracle drug that allows obese people to skip the gym and just take a weekly injection to drop a significant amount of weight. (See [“DRUG COMPANIES BEHIND MIRACLE WEIGHT-LOSS DRUGS HIT WITH LAWSUITS OVER STOMACH PARALYSIS”](#) 8 Aug 2023, [“OPERATION WARP SPEED: OBESITY ADDITION”](#) 27 Jun 2023, [“JENNY CRAIG TO CLOSE ITS DOORS, CAN’T COMPETE WITH NEW WEIGHT-LOSS DRUGS”](#) 9 May 2023 and [“WEIGHT-LOSS SURGERY FOR CHILDREN IN U.S. JUMPS...WHO CARES ABOUT DIET?”](#) 25 Apr 2023.)

*One of the reasons **The Trends Journal** covers these issues is because it represents a societal disease. The U.S. is a country hooked on fast food and fast medications, and the human body was not designed for such dramatic fluctuations. The problem is that there's a great deal of money to be made by drug dealers and fast-food restaurants, and their advertising is the lifeblood for news outlets.*

***The Trends Journal** identified [“HEALTH ‘R’ US”](#) as a TOP TREND for 2025.*

We wrote that there were several reasons why Americans could begin to get back into shape, from potential Trump administration appointments to fast food becoming too expensive.

Since we published that report, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., was named U.S. health secretary. He has been an advocate for healthy living, and there's hope that he can change the conversation in the country.



by *Ben Daviss*

SWISS SCIENTISTS PERFECT A BETTER CHOCOLATE

Chocolate is made from cocoa beans that grow in pods surrounded by pulp, which are trash. But they're really not, according to researchers at ETH, Switzerland's technical university.

The scientists have figured out how to use the pod and its entire contents to make a chocolate that tastes as good as what we're used to, but that also offers better nutrition, less garbage to dispose of, and a better future for cocoa farmers.

Usually, cocoa beans and a little of the viscous pulp surrounding the beans in the pod are mashed together and then milk powder, sugar, emulsifiers, and other additives are

mixed in, freighting one of life's great pleasures with empty calories and unhealthy fats. The pods, bean husks, and most of the pulp is thrown out or used as fertilizer.

In the Swiss scientists' version, the beans are processed as usual, through the steps of fermenting, drying, roasting, grinding, and smoothing the texture that results in a cocoa mass.

Next, instead of throwing away the pod, pulp, and bean husks, the Swiss group dries the pod and husks and grinds them into a powder. The viscous pulp is squeezed for its juice, which produces an intensely sweet syrup. The powder, syrup, and remaining pulp are blended into a cocoa jelly that is mixed with the cocoa mass to form "whole-fruit chocolate."

The new chocolate offers benefits beyond leaving no waste. The syrup-sweetened jelly replaces refined sugar and reduces saturated fat content by 20 percent. The ground-up husks and pods boost the chocolate's fiber content by 30 percent.

Of course, chocolate is about the taste. Testers pronounced the new chocolate to be as rich and sweet as the conventional version, thanks to the gel, and the added fiber and lower fat content didn't detract from the testers' reported enjoyment of the finished product.

Reviewers at the BBC said whole-fruit chocolate is "surprisingly good...a rich, dark but sweet flavor, with a hint of cocoa bitterness that would fit perfectly with an after-dinner coffee."

The advantages of whole-fruit chocolate range far beyond a sweet, healthy snack. The researchers have calculated that switching to large-scale production of whole-fruit chocolate would yield more chocolate from less land—a critical consideration now that mealybugs are decimating cocoa farms in the African countries that deliver most of the world's cacao.

In addition, farmers would make more money selling the whole cacao pod, not just beans.

Because new processing systems would be needed to make the new chocolate, those could be set up in the farmers' home countries, creating jobs and a new "cocoa economy." (Grenada's chocolate industry is a model. See www.cffigrenada.org.)

The new process is energy-intensive because the thick pods need to be dried. However, the research group believes that renewable energy can overcome that hurdle; most cacao is grown in tropical areas where sun is abundant year-round.

Meanwhile, chocolate companies are already contacting the Swiss scientists about commercializing their innovation, according to the BBC.

TRENDPOST: *In a world where natural resources are shrinking, creative ways will continue to be found to turn what has been waste, into new resources, expanding the circular economy and creating new revenue streams, especially for those who need them most.*

INJECTABLE GEL GROWS BONE



Osteoporosis causes bones to weaken and turn brittle and more breakable. The condition occurs when the body loses bone mass faster than it can be replaced and becomes more likely as we age.

Drugs treat it, but that can take as long as a year to make any difference.

Now scientists at Switzerland's EPFL university have developed an injectable hydrogel that can halt and begin to reverse the condition in as little as two weeks.

The gel is made of hyaluronic acid, a goo produced naturally in the body's connective tissue, and nanoparticles of hydroxyapatite, the main component in bone.

The researchers injected their concoction into the legs of rats where bone loss had occurred. Within two to four weeks, bone density doubled or even tripled at the targeted sites.

Another group of rats received the injections but also went through a conventional hormone regime that builds back bone mass. These rats' received hydrogel injections that included a drug that reduces bone loss. In these rodents, bone density increased as much as 4.8 times in less than a month.

The researchers are waiting for regulatory approval to begin human trials. Meanwhile, they have started a company called Flowbone to commercialize their discovery.

TRENDPOST: *This is another instance in which the body's own substances can be amplified to cure an illness, avoiding both the dangers of rejection and the side effects of synthetic drugs.*

This approach to treating conditions is growing and eventually will sideline the use of drugs in many treatment protocols.

DISEASE-CARRYING MOSQUITOES HAVE SEX, THEN DIE



At Australia's Macquarie University, researchers have found a way to poison female mosquitoes when they have sex.

Female mosquitoes are the ones who carry malaria, dengue fever, and other diseases that rampage through hundreds of millions of people each year, mostly in tropical regions but now across widening areas as more parts of the planet warm.

In what the scientists have dubbed the "Toxic Male Technique (TMT)," they have genetically engineered male mosquitoes to produce venom in their semen. The males

inseminate the females, poisoning them at the same time, killing them before they can reproduce or fly away and bite a victim.

The technique is used on specific strains of the bugs so it doesn't range widely across insect populations. It also eliminates the need to spray pesticides, which kill indiscriminately, including birds and other wildlife.

Previous attempts to check the populations by producing sterile males and engineering the bugs to carry genes that eventually kill them have worked. However, their impact takes time to make an impact. The Toxic Male Technique shortens females' typical lifespan of a few weeks to more than a month by as much as two-thirds.

The development also comes at a time when more species of pests are developing resistance to insecticides.

Using a computer simulation and analysis, the researchers have calculated that their version of toxic masculinity could slash the transmission of dengue fever and the zika virus by 40 to 60 percent.

The group also said that the concentration of venom will not be enough to harm mosquito-eating creatures such as bats, frogs, and spiders.

Before the scientists can unleash hordes of poisonous mosquitoes, they'll conduct rigorous tests to ensure that the technique doesn't harm humans or insects or other creatures outside of the target population.

TRENDPOST: *The new method could have a huge impact. In 2023, malaria affected 253 million people worldwide, according to the World Health Organization. In that year, the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control recorded 14 million dengue fever cases around the globe.*

If tests of the technique prove effective as expected, it could be replicated in other disease-carrying insects.

TRENDS IN AI



by *Ben Daviss*

CHINA FILING MORE AI PATENTS THAN THE REST OF THE WORLD

In 2024, Chinese researchers filed 300,510 AI-related patents, while scientists in the world's other countries 188,454, according to data compiled by Triangle IP, a firm that helps companies manage their intellectual property.

U.S. scientists filed 67,773, barely 20 percent of the number from China.

Other leading countries:

- Japan 67,773

- India 25,991
- South Korea 23,666

The European Patent Office received 22,133 applications.

India's total surprised analysts and indicates that the country is emerging as a global competitor in the industry.

India's number surpassed South Korea, whose Samsung Electronics was the world-leading company in filing patents, with 6,080 last year.

Other companies included in the top 10:

- Tencent 4,794
- Google 4,456
- Qualcomm 3,463
- Baidu 3,461
- Huawei 3,223
- Canon 3,010
- Microsoft 2,745
- IBM 2,334
- Philips 1,962

Four of the top 10 were U.S. firms and three were Chinese. Japan, the Netherlands, and South Korea placed one each. Five of the top 10 were Asian companies.

"AI is going through the same cycle we've seen before," Triangle founder Thomas Franklin said in a statement. "First comes the hype. Then comes reality as the market matures. Patents are one of the catalysts."

As the auto industry has done, AI has begun with a scattering of competitors, the number of which is growing, but eventually will shrink to a few giants, he forecasted.

TRENDPOST: Chinese scientists published the most peer-reviewed research papers in 2023; Chinese students consistently rank first in global assessments of math and science education.

While the U.S. and the West coast assume their past glories will assure their future dominance, China is staking a claim to the future of science and technology.

MEGATECH FIRMS WILL SPEND \$320 BILLION THIS YEAR ON AI INFRASTRUCTURE



Alphabet, Amazon, Meta, and Microsoft together are planning to spend \$320 billion this year to expand their AI data centers and continue building bigger, more powerful large language model AIs, according to the four companies' announced plans.

The four spent \$151 billion in 2023 and \$246 billion, up 63 percent, in 2024.

The companies have shrugged off concerns raised last month by DeepSeek, the Chinese start-up that claims to have created a world-class AI for just \$6 million and doing so while lacking access to Nvidia's pricey state-of-the-art chips that U.S. developers rely on.

Markets were not so sanguine. The spending plans, announced in tandem with their disappointing fourth-quarter results, prompted investors to continue retreating from the companies' stocks.

After reporting below-forecast fourth-quarter earnings in their cloud businesses, Alphabet and Microsoft each saw their market value shrink by more than \$200 million.

Shareholders are worried that continuing to ramp up spending while revenues are falling short will burn money that could otherwise be directed to stock dividends and share buybacks, the *Financial Times* reported.

Still, Google will hold to its plan to make a \$75-billion capital investment this year, CEO Sunder Pichai confirmed in a public comment, adding that the AI revolution “is as big as it comes and that’s why you’re seeing us invest to meet that moment.”

“I’m going to spend \$80 billion building out Azure,” Microsoft’s cloud service, CEO Satya Nadella said at last month’s World Economic Forum, adding that it would be foolish to slow the effort now.

On 7 February, Amazon CEO Andy Jassy said his company’s \$26.3 billion capital spending in last year’s fourth quarter is “reasonably representative” of what the company will put into AI infrastructure each quarter this year, which would vault the total over \$100 billion.

The company is simply responding to “significant signals of demand,” he said.

The company spent \$46 billion in 2023 and \$77 billion in 2024.

Meta poured \$40 billion into AI last year and CEO Mark Zuckerberg has vowed to spend “hundreds of billions” more.

Meta’s stock price didn’t suffer as a result of Zuckerberg’s grandiose statement.

“Investors have embraced Meta, even though the capital expenditure is growing,” because Meta is using AI to more closely target ads on Facebook and Instagram, which is keeping up revenue, fund manager Jim Tierney at AllianceBernstein, told the *FT*.

The “Magnificent Seven” megatech firms—which include Apple, Nvidia, and Tesla, in addition to those mentioned above—boosted their collective capital investment by 40 percent last year, compared to a 3.5-percent increase by the rest of companies listed on the Standard & Poor’s 500 index.

The seven's profits also grew by 33 percent, compared to 5 percent for the rest of the index's businesses.

“The unbridled enthusiasm across the entire Magnificent Seven has been replaced by pockets of skepticism and created some ‘show me’ situations,” Tierney added. “The concerns I’ve had since summer are magnified today.”

TRENDPOST: *Western tech firms have yet to process and assimilate the impact of DeepSeek’s revelation. The implication is that the practical future of AI—its workday applications—will not depend on brute force engineering, using more and more chips and more and more power to build bigger and bigger models.*

Instead, powerful models can be built more cheaply that still will be able to provide a platform for most apps.

However, megatech firms are locked in a race not only for profits but also for glory: most are intent on creating artificial general intelligence, the systems that will range so far beyond human capacities that people will no longer be able to understand them.

In that context, the AI build-up and build-out will continue.

WHAT IF AI DOESN'T NEED SO MUCH ELECTRICITY AFTER ALL?



China’s DeepSeek AI was trained for \$6 million using second-tier chips, the company says.

If true, the claim “lays bare one of the power sector’s greatest fears,” the *Financial Times* reported. “The AI boom might not need nearly as much electricity as

anticipated.”

DeepSeek's bombshell hasn't knocked megatech companies off their plan to invest an estimated \$320 billion this year to build data centers and the power sector continues gearing up to supply them.

Constellation Energy, Vistra Energy, and other utility companies have seen their stock values zoom and have planned massive expansions as AI developers suck down all the electricity that generators can supply.

The emerging industry of small, portable nuclear power stations has gotten a new chance at life and renewable power companies are expecting to romp into profits.

Constellation's stock price has soared more than 400 percent over the past 24 months and the company has committed \$16.4 billion to buy competitor Calpine. It also is spending \$1.6 billion to restart the notorious Three Mile Island nuclear reactor under a contract with Microsoft.

Still, the company would be happy to see AI "lower the unsustainable growth in energy demand to a more achievable level," a spokesman said. "We must rationalize the demand or we will continue to struggle to meet the nation's energy demands, maintain grid reliability, and reduce pollution."

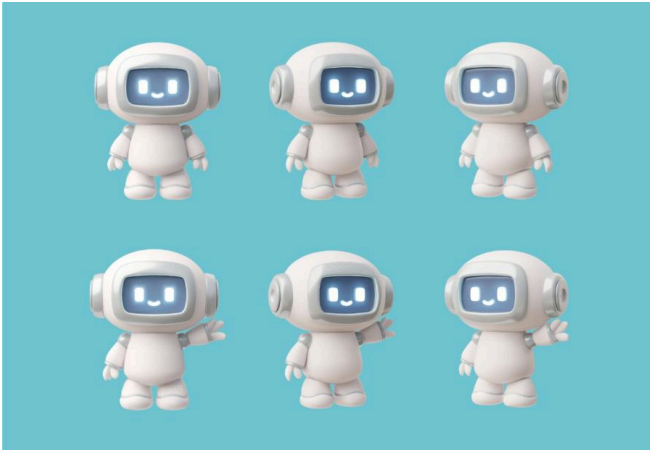
Data centers used 4.4 percent U.S. electricity in 2023 but could be using 12 percent before 2029, according to an analysis by the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory.

The Stargate project, a long-term, \$500-billion venture in which OpenAI, Oracle, and Softbank, among others, have partnered, plans to build AI data centers and power supplies across the U.S. OpenAI CEO Sam Altman has envisioned a similar project for Europe.

"I continue to think that investing very heavily" in data centers and their power supplies "is going to be a strategic advantage over time," Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg said in a recent investor call. "It's possible we'll learn otherwise at some point but it's way too early to call that."

TRENDPOST: *The power sector is now firmly attached to the whip end of the AI industry. As long as the tech Bigfoot group continues to see its future as big and hot instead of more sleek and efficient, the energy industry will have no choice but to plan, and build, accordingly.*

WHY AI MODELS GET DUMBER OVER TIME



AI models share another human trait: without constant maintenance, their mental faculties can deteriorate.

It's called "model drift." As models see more and more use, their error rate increases.

"Model drift is hard to detect because it's not something you can actually clearly describe using one metric, and it's basically a running metric," Helen Gu, founder and CEO of InsightFinder, which helps companies avoid the phenomenon, told Tech Brew. "You have to compute this metric over time."

"Hallucinating"—AIs' tendency to spontaneously make up things—also remains a problem.

"In 2023, the focus was around communicating that there is something called hallucination and why it could happen," Amit Paka, founder of the AI technical services firm Fiddler, said to Tech Brew. "Now the conversation is more around, 'What's the quality of the hallucination metric that you have?'"

Fiddler has been helping clients smooth out issues in machine learning 2018. Now the arrival of generative AI has complicated the chore: if an AI hallucinates or malfunctions in other ways, it's much harder to look under the hood and figure out what went wrong.

“In some ways, the risk aperture has widened,” Paka noted. “We had to build a complementary product that had to now handle a wider range of risks than would have been the case following machine learning.”

When a company creates an AI, the system is trained on what the developers think people will ask, Paka explained. However, what people actually do ask often strays from the blueprint. As an AI is pushed out of its comfort zone, its chances of making mistakes rise.

To keep an AI from dementing, Fiddler has built an AI whose sole function is to measure how closely a generative AI’s response to an inquiry matches the material it was trained on.

At a deeper level, once in a while an AI will get “lazy,” users have complained. Instead of hallucinating, the models just don’t work very well. OpenAI’s workhorse ChatGPT and Anthropic’s Claude have been cited.

There’s no hard data on the problem, only anecdotes. With billions of parameters to check to diagnose laziness, any solution with today’s tools is pretty much impossible.

The new science of “mechanistic interpretability,” which tries to map which nodes in an AI match to specific concepts in an AI system.

Als also can become confused, in a way. More and more of the data on the Internet used to train new Als has itself been generated by Als. Models that are trained on a significant amount of AI-generated content can come down with an illness known as “model collapse,” in which “indiscriminate use of model-generated content in training causes irreversible defects in the resulting models,” Paka said.

Florian Douetteau, CEO of AI data platform Dataiku, said model collapse is likely avoidable for now as long as tech companies are continuing to sift for high-quality data. He said cognition issues in foundation models are also more likely to be quirks of individual iterations, but companies should still have tools in place to monitor quality performance over time.

“Model degradation is probably not a real risk compared to many others,” he added, “but as an individual or enterprise [using] models, you need to essentially put tests in place in order to manage the model supplier you’re using.”

PARIS AI SUMMIT SHOWS INCREASING RESISTANCE TO REGULATION



At last week’s two-day Artificial Intelligence Action summit in Paris, something was missing that had been present at past gatherings in Britain and South Korea: extensive discussions of AI’s risks and how to mitigate them.

Those conversations still took place, but the main focus was on the call for less, or even no, regulatory oversight.

"If we want growth, jobs and progress, we must allow innovators to innovate, builders to build and developers to develop," OpenAI CEO Sam Altman wrote in an opinion essay in France’s *Le Monde* newspaper just ahead of the conference.

U.S. president Donald Trump has emboldened the AI community by largely abandoning Joe Biden’s AI-related guardrails. That has pressured the European Union to take a more permissive approach to keep the continent’s firms competitive in the technology.

European leaders also seem to be toning down their earlier cautious stances.

"There's a risk some decide to have no rules and that's dangerous," French president Emmanuel Macron said in an interview with reporters, “but there's also the opposite risk if Europe gives itself too many rules. We should not be afraid of innovation.”

Last year, the European Union passed the AI Act, the world's first wide-ranging set of rules governing AI development and deployment. Tech companies are urging the European Commission to use a light hand in enforcing the rules.

Now Chinese start-up DeepSeek has offered a low-cost, open-source AI that will spur even greater competition in the industry, pressing governments even more to loosen regulations or discard them.

However, the attendees were not unanimous about the degree of oversight needed.

Regarding regulation, "it's sort of a night-and-day difference between the U.S. and the EU right now," Brian Chen, policy director at the nonprofit Data & Society, which considers AI's social implications, told Tech Brew.

"What I worry about is that there will be pressures from the U.S. and elsewhere to weaken the EU's AI Act and weaken those existing protections," he added.

Labor leaders also were at the conference to advocate for worker protections as AI moves deeper and more pervasively into the economy. A key focus was the fate of workers whose jobs are taken, in whole or part, by AI, potentially handing humans demotions, less pay, and shorter hours.

"There is a risk of those jobs being much less paid and sometimes with much less protection," Gilbert F. Hounbo, director-general of the International Labor Organization, said in a press statement.

Also at the summit, a group of countries and AI companies announced their partnership called Current AI.

France, Germany, and other nations, together with Google, Salesforce, and other AI giants, will deploy \$400 million in initial investments in projects for public good, such as open-source AI projects and making high-quality training data available.

France has committed €109 billion and Current hopes to invest a total of \$2.5 billion through the rest of this decade. "The size of this investment reassured us that there's

going to be ambitious enough projects in France," Clem Delangue, CEO of Hugging Face, said in a statement.

His company, based in the U.S. with French co-founders, provides tools to developers creating open-source AIs.

Hugging Face will double its investment in its French operations, he added, and expand its focus to include robotics as well as machine learning. He declined to specify amounts.

TRENDPOST: AI developers are swept up in their own momentum.

As the industry grows, so does competition—and winning that competition depends on continued innovation. Rightly or not, developers under pressure to innovate see regulation or oversight of their work as a ball and chain on their work.

Still, history shows that any industry trusted to police or govern itself eventually allows lapses that then call down regulation from outside.

If AI developers and regulators can continue working together in good faith, the need for innovation and the importance of a tempering hand can both be accommodated.

AI BRIEFS



BIG TECH DUMPS THOUSANDS OF WORKERS TO FOCUS ON AI

Meta will jettison about 4,000 employees, or roughly 5 percent of its workforce, as the company devotes more focus to AI.

Last month, CEO Mark Zuckerberg issued a memo warning of the dismissals, saying he would “raise the bar” and “move out low-performers faster.” This year will be “intense,” he added.

Meta is following other companies carving off workers and redirecting resources to AI.

Early this month, Workday turfed out 1,750 employees—8.5 percent of its payroll—as it put a new, higher priority on AI. Salesforce is hiring salespeople for its AI products and services while cutting its overall staff by 1,000.

Google has offered to buy out some workers in its devices and platforms businesses ahead of announcing a greater concentration on AI, Quartz reported.

EX-GOOGLE CEO SAYS WEST MUST FOCUS ON OPEN-SOURCE AI

The West must focus on building open-source AI systems or it will lose the technology race to China, Eric Schmidt, Google’s former CEO, warned in a *Financial Times* interview.

He made the warning after Chinese start-up DeepSeek created an open-source AI for \$6 million, it claimed. In several tests, the model performed on a par with OpenAI’s ChatGPT and Anthropic’s Claude.

If Western models remained closed-system, “China will ultimately become the open-source leader and the rest of the world will become closed,” Schmidt said.

Open-source will spur research and development among universities, which can’t afford to build closed systems, he added.

Sam Altman, OpenAI’s CEO, has agreed, worrying aloud recently that he has been on the “wrong side of history” and that the company needed to move away from closed-source systems.

Closed systems don’t let second-party developers “lift the hood” and understand the workings, which would let them customize the technology or apps to suit their own use. In contrast, anyone is free to adopt and adapt open-source models.

Companies have taken the closed-source path to guarantee a return on the sizable investment needed to create large language AI models.

SCHMIDT COMMITS \$10 MILLION TO AI SAFETY RESEARCH

At this month’s AI Action Summit in Paris, former Apple CEO Eric Schmidt announced his Schmidt Sciences philanthropy is investing \$10 million to fund research in AI safety.

The new AI Safety Science program will support 27 projects identifying and finding ways to mitigate the technology’s risks.

Initial grant recipients include Yoshua Bengio, a pioneer in neural networks, who is creating a technology to mitigate AI risks and Zico Kolter, a Carnegie Mellon University scientist who will examine the nature of AI attacks.

Schmidt has urged China and the West to collaborate to tackle AI’s safety challenges because both face the same risks.

“How could it possibly be bad for us to give them information that they could use to make their models more safe?” he asked.