

TIME





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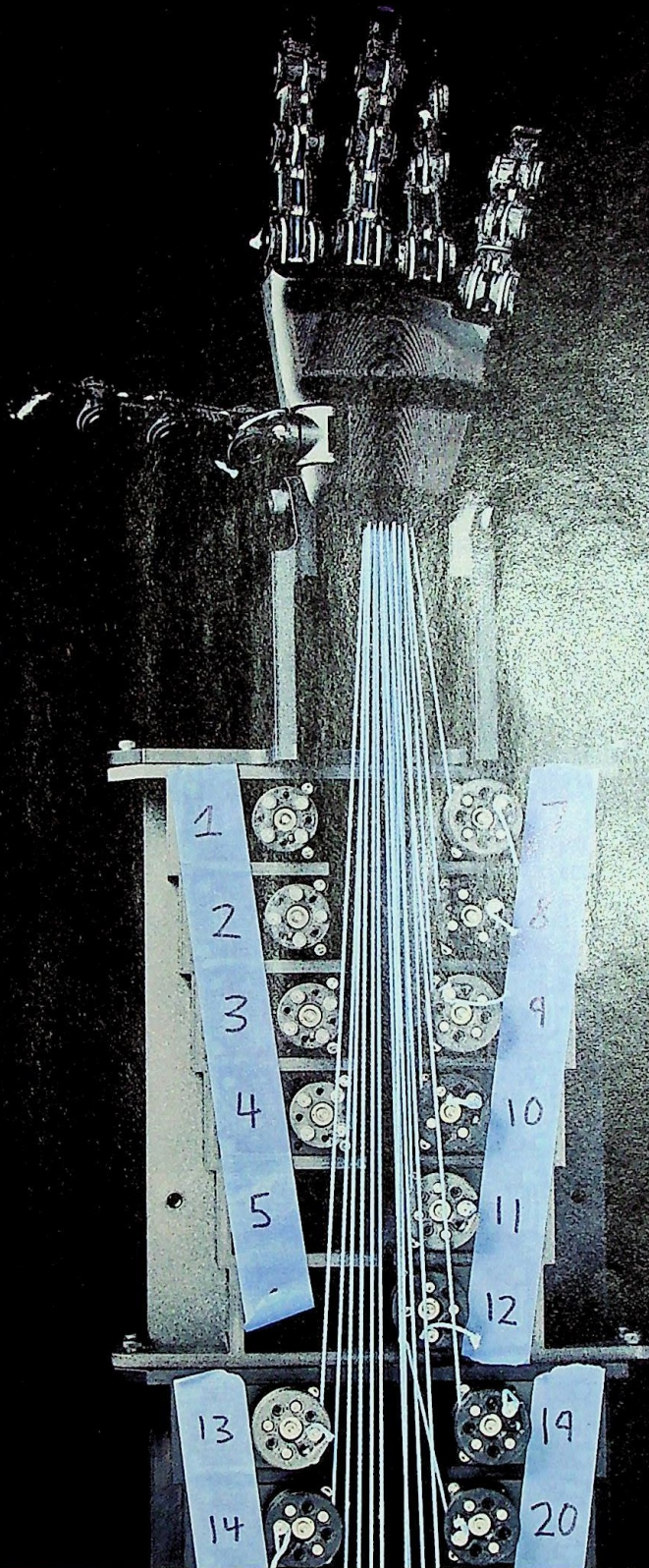
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A sampling from our annual list of where to stay, eat, play, and savor what the world has to offer

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Inside the arm of a Phantom MK-1 humanoid robot in San Francisco on Feb. 25

*Photograph by
Mattia Balsamini for TIME*





Honoring health innovators

At the TIME100 Health dinner on Feb. 19 in New York City, above from left, Arianna Huffington, founder of Thrive Global; Dr. Sadiya Khan of Northwestern University's medical school; and the president of Novartis U.S., Victor Bultó, appeared on a panel moderated by TIME executive editor Nikhil Kumar to discuss heart-disease prevention. Actor Jesse Eisenberg, right, gave a toast on organ donation. The evening, presented by Novartis and Aster DM Healthcare, celebrated the TIME100 Health list, which named scientists, doctors, and others making waves in public health. Find the full list at ti.me/100health



Bidding goodbye to the Games

Find TIME's wrap-up coverage of the 2026 Winter Olympics online at time.com—including the best photos of the Games. The coverage includes standouts like American figure skater Alysa Liu, 20, competing at left in the finals for the women's single free skate on Feb. 19. The charismatic Liu, who left the sport at 16 before returning to competitive skating two years later, won gold.

On the covers



Photograph by Matt Dutille



TIME photo-illustration

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

In Women of the Year (March 9) we misstated the number of feature films Chloé Zhao has directed; it is five. We also mischaracterized Educate Girls' receipt of the Ramon Magsaysay Award; it was the first Indian nonprofit to receive the award.

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Big in Japan

It's no surprise that Japanese companies make great products. Here, we share thoughts and philosophies from several leaders behind Japan's foremost brands.

1. Dashi packet from Nishihara Shokai

President Kazuyuki Nishihara says: "In Japan, we have many different ways to prepare dishes depending on both the location and the season. Even within hotpot there are many varieties, depending on the type of seasoning used and whether it is soup-based or not."

2. Rilakkuma plush toy from San-X

President Hiroshi Chida says: "In modern times, I believe that the word 'cute' means to find something that can be relied upon for the heart, to gain a sense of security and to express one's own existence."

3. Monchichi classic boy plush toy from Sekiguchi

President Toshitaka Yoshino says: "In many ways, society is only now catching up to what we have been doing in the Japanese market, where people have long recognized that our products are designed for adults."

4. Canned coffee with milk from UCC Ueshima Coffee

President Hiroshi Shibatani says: "UCC introduced the first canned coffee, which was invented by our founder in 1969. We later developed vending machines to sell our canned coffee, and the ready-to-drink market has continued to grow since then."

1.



2.



3.



4.



5.



6.



5. Organic "nigori" apple cider vinegar from Tamanoi Vinegar

President Harino Takaya says: "Vinegar has many health benefits, but it can be difficult to drink every day, and some people are not accustomed to the distinct sour taste. We are creating vinegar products that are easier to incorporate into daily life."

6. Karuekure dish from Nitori

President and COO Toshiyuki Shirai says: "We want to provide the best products at the best prices, and we are always looking to create products most suitable for local lifestyles. Because we do our own manufacturing ourselves, we can create products with high efficiency and low costs."

7.



8.



7. Sylvanian Families chocolate rabbit girl from EPOCH

President and CEO Kazuhiro Onoda says: "Japanese manga and characters are built on long-lasting stories, which would likely endure even without toys. Many of our toys have carried the same storylines for 40 years, allowing them to resonate across generations."

8. Bigansui skin lotion from Momotani Juntenkan

President Seiichiro Momotani says: "Japan has a unique beauty culture, because we are an island nation that was separated from the rest of the world for a long time. Our Bigansui is based on a 140-year-old formula that remains relevant in Japan and overseas today."

Momotani Juntenkan

CUSTOMER-FIRST COSMETICS

Cosmetics in Japan are big business. Grounded in a nationwide commitment to technological innovation and quality, “J-beauty” has long enjoyed a devoted following across Asia among fans of a less-is-more approach. In recent years, Japanese skincare and cosmetics have gained global appeal, driven by pop culture exposure and research-backed quality, with monthly exports now exceeding \$260 million (40 billion yen).

Within this vibrant market, Osaka’s Momotani Juntenkan Ltd. has been operating as a family business for over 140 years, and remains one of the largest players in cosmetics R&D and production. The company’s first product was “Bigansui Acne Lotion,” an acne treatment introduced in 1885. As Japan’s first Western-style skin lotion, it was developed by pharmacist Masajiro Momotani as a remedy for his wife, using salicylic acid—then little known in Japan. More than a century later, it continues to enjoy a strong reputation and market presence. While Bigansui marked an early breakthrough in antimicrobial acne care, the company has continued to evolve alongside advances in cosmetics technology.

“I believe the industry is now shifting—not only toward producing and selling products, but toward deeper collaboration with stakeholders such as universities, start-ups and local communities,” company President Seiichiro Momotani explains. In line with this vision, Momotani Juntenkan has been researching skin flora in partnership with academic institutions. With more than 200 types of bacteria living on the skin, the company’s latest innovation, “Floracontroller FC161,” unveiled at the Osaka Expo, aims to restore balance by introducing beneficial bacteria, similar to probiotics for the body. “We’ve learned that facial skin bacteria differ in both type and quantity



Seiichiro Momotani
President

from person to person,” Momotani says. “Those with a higher proportion of favorable bacteria have a skincare advantage. Researchers are now working to identify and apply these bacteria, and we hope this will lead to formulas that better support individual skin needs.”

While international tastes can change as rapidly as fashion trends, Momotani believes evidence-based formulas will have lasting impact. Backed by the reputation of Made in Japan products, popular lines include the White Moisture Series, derived from compounds found in Japanese rice, which accounts for 10% of overseas sales. Looking ahead, local partnerships will remain vital for both in-house products and OEM operations. “Each region has its own lifestyle and skin conditions,” Momotani notes. “Our international division has built expertise in local preferences and regulations over time, giving us a strong advantage globally.”



White Moisture



MOMOTANI™
JAPAN

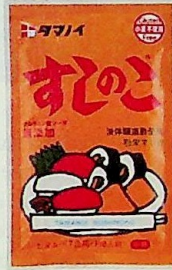
Tamanoi Vinegar Corporation

MEIYO KINPAI TO THE WORLD

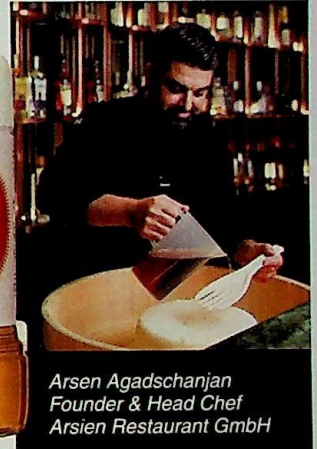
Since the late 16th century when the “Tamanoi” trademark first came into use, Osaka’s Tamanoi Vinegar has upheld the tradition of Japanese artisanal vinegar making. With a rich heritage spanning centuries, the company places strong emphasis on the use of 100% domestically grown Japanese rice, gluten-free production and compliance with strict food safety standards.

The recent Osaka Expo allowed Tamanoi to highlight Japan’s culinary prowess, with hands-on sushi-making experiences using the company’s powdered vinegar, “Sushinoko,” now available in 50 countries worldwide. Other products include their popular Honey Brown Rice Vinegar drink, Japan’s top seller for 18 consecutive years, further reflecting the long-standing trust that Tamanoi has earned. At the top of the spectrum, Tamanoi’s Meiyō Kinpai, their most premium rice vinegar, is a modern revival of their award-winning formula introduced

at the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair. Crafted with a proprietary yeast and traditional fermentation techniques, Meiyō Kinpai is renowned for its mellow acidity and rich *umami* depth, leading to its adoption by discerning restaurants around the world. Moreover, Meiyō Kinpai is now the gold standard for competitive chefs in the annual SushiWorld Cup. As a vital ingredient for creating sushi rice, Tamanoi’s time-tested vinegars conveys the true value of Japanese food culture.



Harino Takaya
President



Arsen Agadschanjan
Founder & Head Chef
Arsen Restaurant GmbH

EPOCH

CRAFTING TIMELESS HAPPINESS

The beloved series of charming animal figures, Sylvanian Families, has been bringing joy to families around the world since its launch in 1985. Produced by Japanese toymaker Epoch, the company’s hands-on approach has been key to the brand’s success, as the “family” continues to grow over the years. “We plan and design all of our toys ourselves, manufacture them at our own factories and sell everything through our own global network,” President Kazuhiro Onoda

explains. “This gives us transparency at every step of the process.” With interest in Japanese kitsch and *kawaii* continuing to rise, Sylvanian Families exclusive stores have become a popular stop for tourists, with up to 50% of sales at select locations coming from overseas shoppers of all ages. “Our dream is to inspire children and bring playfulness to adults,” says Onoda. “Toys cross borders and create enthusiasm around the globe.”



Kazuhiro Onoda
President & CEO

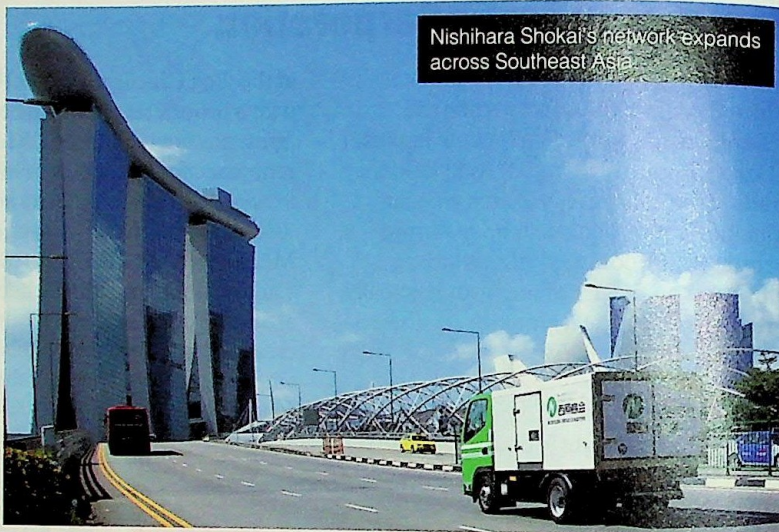


Nishihara Shokai

PRESERVING LEGACIES, MAKING NEW ONES

Japanese cuisine is a global phenomenon, formed over centuries from a mix of indigenous nature, outside influences and changing social context. With its vast assortment of culinary offerings, there is truly something for everyone. The traditional core of Japanese food, *washoku*, was registered in 2013 as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage, recognized for the unique social customs surrounding its production, preparation and consumption. Closely tied to local traditions and regional produce, *washoku* varies widely with the seasons—extending even to tableware, with thick earthenware pots used in winter, and glass or porcelain favored in summer to evoke a sense of “coolness.”

While the historical importance of *washoku* cannot be understated, Japanese cuisine has also evolved through the adaptation of outside influences. Noodles and pickling methods from neighboring countries gave rise to distinctly Japanese interpretations, while more recent influences from European cuisines, particularly French and Italian, have helped elevate Japan’s culinary reputation on the world stage. Japanese pâtissiers have won the prestigious Coupe du Monde four times, and Tokyo now boasts the



Nishihara Shokai's network expands across Southeast Asia

highest number of Michelin-starred restaurants of any city in the world, with more than 150.

Still, despite this global acclaim, Japan’s culinary world faces persistent challenges, one of the most pressing being a lack of succession in many traditional sectors. As promising young people move to major metropolitan areas in search of stable livelihoods, traditional artisans—from sake brewers to tofu makers—are struggling to sustain their craft in an increasingly modernized society.

Inspired by this challenge, Kazuyuki Nishihara, president of his namesake firm Nishihara Shokai, is on a mission to bring positive change to Japan’s food industry. Founded in Japan’s southern prefecture of Kagoshima, famed for its *kurobuta* pork and *shirokuma* shaved ice, Nishihara Shokai has built a lasting legacy as a comprehensive food wholesaler, acting as a one-stop shop for a wide range of *izakaya*, hotels and traditional restaurants (*ryotei*) across the country. Today, Nishihara Shokai handles more than 100,000 unique products, a significant portion of which are original goods developed in collaboration with partner companies and group manufacturers. Nishihara views the strengthening of this sector as essential not only for passing culinary traditions on to future generations, but also for ensuring that authentic Japanese ingredients can be supplied to the growing overseas Japanese restaurant market.

By leveraging the company’s nationwide sales and logistics network, Nishihara sees a path toward preserving small-scale producers throughout Japan. Operational efficiency is crucial, as many artisanal production methods keep costs high, while Japanese consumers remain relatively sensitive to price increases. “Large companies have the technological capabilities to improve efficiency and increase produc-

Traditional *champon* noodles from Nishihara Shokai.



tion volume. However, many small regional businesses are struggling,” he explained. “They’ve been raised on traditional ways of operating, and because of their size, it’s difficult for them to expand their product lines for either retail or industrial use. Farmers and producers have maintained the same methods for a long time, so improving efficiency is not easy, and it’s hard for them to pass rising costs on to the market.”

Nishihara Shokai addresses this challenge by working at the local level, recognizing Japan’s deep regional diversity, even in dishes that may appear similar at first glance. “Take ramen, for example,” said Nishihara. “Ramen in Hakata and in Tōhoku may look alike, but they are completely different in terms of broth, color and noodle type. Japanese culinary culture is shaped by the diversity of the country itself.” He added that this philosophy underpins the company’s M&A strategy. “We recently acquired a company that produces Nagasaki *champon* noodles using the original recipe and a special type of lye. Only a few companies in Japan still do this, making it a powerful example of how we can preserve both great food and cultural heritage,” he said.

For Nishihara, commercial success and personal passion are inseparable. His business, he says, is a true passion project, and the approach appears to be paying off. With multiple M&A deals planned over the coming year, and growing demand from overseas clients seeking to satisfy authentic dining experiences, the company’s



Kazuyuki Nishihara
President

© Akira Maeda (MAETICO)

momentum continues to build. “One of the reasons behind our globalization is to ensure that high-quality Japanese cuisine is available overseas,” Nishihara said with characteristic candor. “That’s why we began supplying other trading companies across Asia. Our office in the UK is a little different though. We opened that simply because it was a cool idea.”



Scan to learn more



NISHIHARA SHOKAI



Nishihara Shokai has a lineup of over 100,000 products, serving restaurants and hotels from Hokkaido down to Okinawa.

San-X

MAPPING A WORLD OF FEELINGS

When *kawaii* character company San-X introduced “Rilakkuma” in 2003—a brown bear in costume with a fondness for pancakes and sweet dumplings—its popularity was down to more than just aesthetics. The calming presence of a schedule-free bear, whose main activities extend little further than mealtimes and lounging, stood in contrast to the realities of rush-hour Tokyo and work deadlines. Through branded goods such as stationery, soft toys and an upcoming animated TV series, Rilakkuma made comfort accessible amid the stresses of everyday life. San-X characters have now expanded to become more diverse, encompassing over 1,000 characters.

This wide range, from the lethargic “Tarepanda” to the anxious “Buru Buru Dog,” as well as “Sumikkogurashi”—the hugely successful ode to awkwardness—addresses moods both good and bad. “We turn emotions into a positive form and express the feeling of ‘it’s okay to be the way you are’ through our characters,” San-X President Hiroshi Chida explained. For a nation known for *kawaii* culture, Chida believes the concept carries a deeper meaning when applied to character creation. “*Kawaii* is a very familiar expression, meaning that something is cute. I think it’s not just about appearance—it’s about the entire atmosphere that can be felt from a character’s presence,” he said. “In Japan, things that don’t necessarily look conventionally attractive are sometimes described as *kawaii*, and I feel that is unique. Overseas, cuteness can sometimes carry a slightly different image.”


In 2026, the company took a major step in the physical expansion of the San-X Universe, working

 **Coming in 2026**




with Yamanashi’s Fuji-Q Highland amusement park to create a new dedicated area set in the foothills of Mount Fuji. With the goal of delivering a space filled with “healing and cuteness,” Chida is optimistic about the venture. “Over the years, we’ve focused on increasing our contact points with fans. I feel that by meeting our characters in person, their charm can reach the heart more deeply. These kinds of experiences are one area we wish to expand further in the future,” he said. As Japanese pop culture is high in demand, San-X plans to provide comfort to more fans around the world through pop-up and flagship stores. “Rather than overly localizing, we will focus on carefully delivering the charm of our characters developed here in Japan,” Chida said.

San-X has grown since the debut of its first original character in 1979.

 san-X Universe



Scan to learn more

San-X 

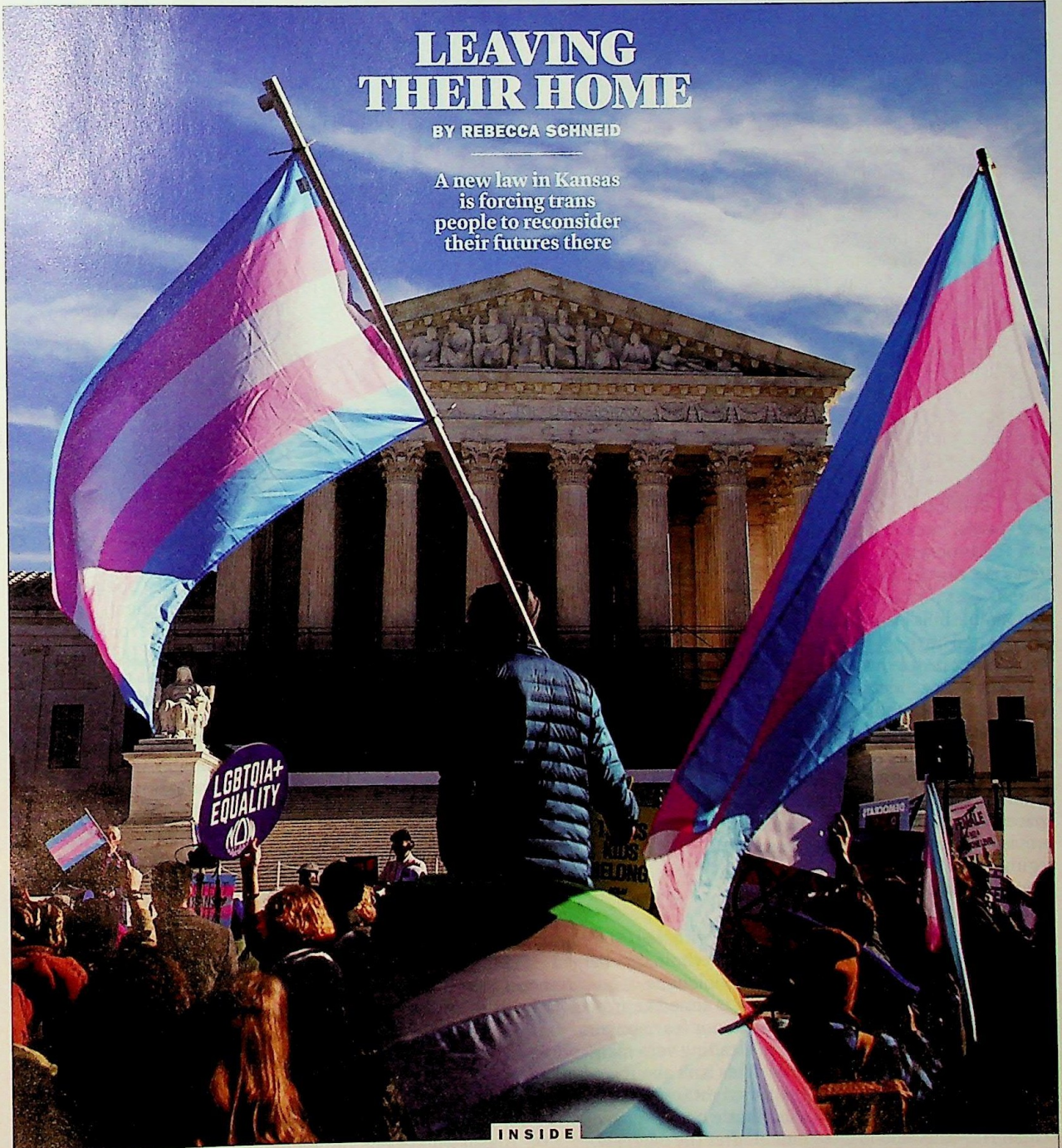
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The Brief

LEAVING THEIR HOME

BY REBECCA SCHNEID

A new law in Kansas
is forcing trans
people to reconsider
their futures there



INSIDE

THE CONFLICT BETWEEN
PAKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN

HOW THE TARIFF RULING
AFFECTS AMERICANS

WHAT TO SAY AT
THE DOCTOR'S OFFICE

ANTHONY ALVAREZ LOVES KANSAS. HE MOVED there when he was 11, and now “every single person he cares about” and loves is in the Sunflower State, he tells TIME. But lately, Alvarez says, he and his friends are thinking of leaving. Alvarez, a 22-year-old who will graduate from the University of Kansas this spring, came out as trans six years ago, and says the average Kansan has never bothered him about his gender. On campus, he walks into the men’s restroom without hesitation—just another student moving through his day. That calculus is changing, he says. Kansas Republicans in late February overrode the veto of Democratic Governor Laura Kelly to pass one of the most restrictive laws in the country for transgender residents, imposing new limits on bathroom access and identification. “I want to give my skills to Kansas. I want to live in the place I’ve called home for so long, but I can’t stay in a place that is going to be outwardly hostile to me,” Alvarez says.

Kansas had last year already joined a wave of states legislating against gender-affirming care for minors, prohibitions supported by President Donald Trump. The new law, Senate Bill 244, focuses on restricting identification and the use of “multiple-occupancy private spaces,” reviving the debate over “bathroom bills” that roiled states like North Carolina in 2016. The law goes further than many comparable bills by invalidating licenses and birth certificates that transgender people have updated to reflect their gender identities and names, and by allowing private citizens to file a civil action of up to \$1,000 against a person of a different sex if they are “aggrieved by an invasion of privacy” in some spaces. The new law’s bathroom provisions create a “bounty-hunter regime,” says LGBTQ+ rights group Lambda Legal, by effectively allowing people to sue transgender people who use the restroom not aligned with their “biological sex.” The bill also allows people to be criminally charged with a Class B misdemeanor for repeat violations.

Republican lawmakers say the law is aimed at protecting women and girls. “While the governor fearmongers and muddies the water with her misleading veto message, our position remains steady: This isn’t about scoring political points, but doing what’s right for women and girls across our communities,” state house speaker Daniel Hawkins said in a statement after the override. The law took effect Feb. 26. Kelly called the legislation “poorly drafted,” and experts worry that the measure’s broad language and sweeping changes will have unwanted consequences for anyone who uses public restrooms.

The Brief includes reporting by Chantelle Lee

Opponents of the bill say it was pushed through with little public input after its “bathroom bill” provisions were added in late January. “The goal is to single out and exclude, if not give a total license to discriminate against, transgender people in the state,” says Logan Casey, director of policy research at the Movement Advancement Project, a think tank. He says the law’s restroom provision is not just “invasive and dangerous,” but “one of the widest-sweeping currently in the nation.”

WHILE LAWS IN FLORIDA, Tennessee, and Texas also bar changes to gender markers for new driver’s licenses, Kansas’ reversal of existing documents is unusual. Kansas officials expect to cancel about 1,700 driver’s licenses and issue new birth certificates for up to 1,800 people, according to the Kansas department of revenue. Alvarez said he has gone

through four IDs since 2023 as he navigated different restrictions to get a new gender marker, change his name, and renew his ID after turning 21. Now, he expects to be notified by mail that his ID is invalid—meaning a fifth round of paperwork: “It’s basically outing yourself to like every single person around you.”

Representative data about trans Americans is historically sparse. But a 2024 survey of 192 respondents in Kansas, run by the Trevor Project, found that 47% of LGBTQ+ 13-to-24-year-olds reported they or their family had considered leaving because of the state’s policies. That figure rose to 56% for trans and nonbinary youth.

And Tara McKay, director of the LGBTQ+ Policy Lab at Vanderbilt University, points to the U.S. Transgender Survey—billed as the largest survey of transgender people in the country—which in 2022 showed

that nearly a quarter of respondents reported being verbally harassed, denied benefits and services, or asked to leave establishments when they provided an ID that didn’t match their presentation. Revoking IDs already issued to “folks who’ve socially transitioned, legally transitioned, possibly medically transitioned, creates a whole new set of problems,” McKay says. “This is a policy choice that predictably increases harm.”

Isaac Johnson, a trans man who worked for years as a social worker in Kansas, credits the escalating attacks on transgender people there as his reason for moving two months ago to New York. “I feel guilty, on one hand, for leaving Kansas and leaving all my friends behind,” he says. “But also, everyone is fleeing right now.” □

‘I want to give my skills to Kansas... but I can’t stay in a place that is going to be outwardly hostile to me.’

—ANTHONY ALVAREZ,
A TRANS STUDENT IN KANSAS



Punch-drunk love

Punch, a 7-month-old Japanese macaque, reaches out to his stuffed orangutan at Ichikawa City Zoo in Japan on Feb. 19. Punch won hearts around the world with his love for the toy, a gift from zookeepers that he seemed to find comfort in after being rejected by his mother and his peers—and since going viral, he's even been seen playing with the other monkeys.

THE BULLETIN

Pakistan and Afghanistan fight over insurgency

PAKISTAN DECLARED “OPEN WAR” with Taliban-led Afghanistan after the two governments escalated attacks on each other in late February.

“Our cup of patience has overflowed. Now it is open war between us and you,” Pakistan’s Defense Minister Khawaja Asif wrote in a social media post on Feb. 27.

SHATTERED TRUCE The declaration followed attacks between the countries that shattered a fragile ceasefire in place since October, when the two neighbors, which share a 1,600-mile mountainous border, traded airstrikes and were locked into intense border clashes and deadly ground fighting. Taliban forces are equipped with arms left behind by the U.S. when it withdrew in 2021.

STRAINED RELATIONS The two South Asian nations have a complex history. During the 20 years the U.S. was fighting the Taliban, Pakistan was obliged to become a base against an Islamist movement it had helped foster—and was frequently accused of allowing Taliban fighters to shelter just inside its border.

After the Taliban returned to power as the U.S. withdrew, Pakistan made the same complaint: that the new government was hosting militants, dubbed the Pakistan Taliban, blamed for a spate of recent suicide bombings.

Between militant attacks and combat-related deaths, including several days of battles with India, Pakistan’s neighbor on the other side, 2025 was Pakistan’s deadliest year in more than a decade.

TRADING FIRE Pakistan bombed Afghanistan’s two biggest cities, Kabul and Kandahar, as well as the border province of Paktia, after days of clashes. Islamabad says it targeted camps allegedly belonging to the militant groups accused of carrying out terrorist attacks in Pakistan. Afghanistan responded with attacks on Pakistani border troops.

Casualty claims have greatly varied: Pakistan claimed more than 130 Taliban were killed and 200 wounded; Afghanistan reported no casualties at all. Kabul said earlier Pakistani attacks hit civilian homes and a religious school and killed at least 18 people. Afghanistan’s former President Hamid Karzai said that the country would “respond to aggression with courage.”

—MIRANDA JEYARETNAM

GOOD QUESTION

What does the Supreme Court ruling on tariffs mean for me?

BY MIRANDA JEYARETNAM

SINCE THE SUPREME COURT STRUCK DOWN DONALD Trump's emergency tariffs, questions have mounted around what the ruling means for consumers and businesses that already paid the price of the trade policy.

On Feb. 20, the court ruled 6-3 that Trump could not use the 1977 International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) to impose import duties by declaring a national emergency. That effectively rolled back the sweeping "Liberation Day" tariffs that Trump imposed last April, as well as levies on China, Mexico, and Canada that he tied to the flow of fentanyl into the U.S.

The ruling does not reverse all tariffs. Any tariffs imposed under Section 232 of the 1962 Trade Expansion Act, including on steel and aluminum, remain in place. Those are based on Commerce Department investigations into whether certain imports threaten U.S. national security.

Meanwhile, Trump, whose Administration has argued that tariffs have generated important revenue for the U.S. government and given it leverage to secure more favorable trade terms and investment pledges from other countries, invoked Section 122 of the 1974 Trade Act to impose a 10% tariff on all countries "over and above our normal tariffs already being charged," which he later raised to the maximum 15%, valid only up to 150 days. These tariffs could still face legal challenges.

The Administration is also planning to launch "accelerated" investigations under Section 232 and Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer said.

The ruling has also threatened to upend trade agreements that the U.S. struck with countries seeking to lower Trump's emergency tariff rates, resulting in potentially more price fluctuations for American consumers. The E.U. paused ratifying its trade deal with the U.S. as the European Commission seeks clarification about whether the bilateral agreement will be honored.

A slew of countries that were either subject to a baseline 10% tariff or who had negotiated their tariff rates down could end up with higher tariffs. Some countries, like Japan and South Korea, also pledged massive investments to the U.S. in order to secure trade deals, which now appear less favorable. Global Trade Alert suggests that the U.K., Japan, South Korea, and some E.U. countries that struck deals with the U.S. will now pay more than they did before the

ruling and new tariffs. Countries like Singapore and Australia that were paying the 10% baseline tariff before will also be subject to higher 15% tariffs. By contrast, China, Brazil, and India benefit most as the 15% tariff replaces much higher IEEPA tariffs.

DEMOCRATS BEGAN CALLING for the federal government to issue refunds for the roughly \$130 billion in import duties that the Trump Administration collected. Senate Democrats announced legislation that would require full refunds with interest of the money collected from the emergency tariffs, amounting to around \$175 billion. If enacted into law, those refunds would be issued to businesses that paid import duties, though some

companies passed on all or part of the cost to consumers by hiking prices.

Some Democrats have called for direct refunds to consumers. Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker, a potential Democratic presidential primary candidate in 2028, shared on social media a letter he sent Trump invoicing him for \$8.7 billion, or \$1,700 for every family in Illinois. California Governor Gavin Newsom, who has also teed up a potential presidential run in 2028, said, "Donald Trump has been illegally taxing your groceries, furniture, and cars for over a year. Time for a refund."

But the president signaled that his Administration has no intention of issuing refunds anytime soon, telling reporters that the issue "could be in court for up to five years" when he was asked about refunds.

Justice Brett Kavanaugh, one of three Supreme Court Justices to side with Trump, who nominated him to the court in 2018, noted in his dissent that refunding tariffs would create a "mess."

The President has not given up on his signature policy—with the impact on consumers remaining to be seen. □

Preparing to unload vehicles at a Chinese port in February



'Trump has been illegally taxing your groceries ... Time for a refund.'

—GAVIN NEWSOM,
CALIFORNIA
GOVERNOR

RESIGNED

Laurence des Cars, as the president of the Louvre Museum in Paris, on Feb. 24. In October, a theft at the museum sparked concerns about its security measures.

CONVICTED

Colin Gray, the father of the teenage suspect in a 2024 shooting at Georgia's Apalachee High School, of second-degree murder in connection with the shooting, on March 3.

FIRED

Kristi Noem, as Homeland Security Secretary, President Donald Trump announced March 5, saying she would be made a "Special Envoy for the Shield of the Americas." Noem has faced criticism for her oversight of Trump's immigration crackdown.

TESTIFIED

Hillary and Bill Clinton, in the House Oversight Committee's investigation into the late convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, on Feb. 26 and 27. The couple said they had no knowledge of Epstein's crimes.

DIED

Neil Sedaka—who co-wrote and sang pop hits of the '50s and '60s, including "Breaking Up Is Hard to Do"—on Feb. 27. He was 86.

**DIED****Eric Dane****Actor and ALS advocate**

ACTOR ERIC DANE, KNOWN FOR HIS MANY ROLES INCLUDING ON TV shows *Grey's Anatomy* and *Euphoria*, died Feb. 19 at age 53 following "a courageous battle with ALS," a statement from his representatives said. "He spent his final days surrounded by dear friends, his devoted wife, and his two beautiful daughters, Billie and Georgia, who were the center of his world," it added.

Dane announced last year that he had been diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS, a rare and swiftly progressing neurodegenerative disease that erodes a person's motor neurons until they eventually lose control of their muscles, ending their ability to walk, talk, eat, and eventually breathe, according to the ALS Association. There is no cure, and people on average live only two to five years after diagnosis. It affects about 350,000 people globally.

After being diagnosed, the actor threw himself into ALS advocacy, partnering with organizations to secure funding for research into a cure for the disease. Dane was included in the 2026 TIME100 Health list, in recognition of his work.

Dane started his career with guest roles on TV shows including *The Wonder Years*, *Roseanne*, and *Married... With Children*. But it was Shonda Rhimes' long-running medical drama *Grey's Anatomy* that made him a star. He portrayed the dashing plastic surgeon Dr. Mark Sloan, popularly nicknamed McSteamy. He entered the show's second season in 2006 as a guest star, but became a series regular for six seasons.

Dane said he felt "fortunate" to continue working after his diagnosis, including reprising his role in HBO's *Euphoria*, the third and likely last season of which is scheduled to premiere in April.

Speaking to TIME earlier this year about his advocacy and acting, Dane said, "If my actions can move the needle forward for myself and countless others, I'm satisfied." —CHAD DE GUZMAN

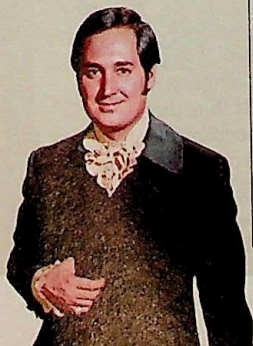
SWITCHED**B.C., to DST**
A constant clock

Things will be sunnier in British Columbia going forward. That's because the Canadian province decided that after it sets its clocks ahead for daylight saving time (DST) on March 8, it's not going back to standard time in the fall.

Polling shows the move is popular, but it comes with risks. On daylight time, clock time is less aligned with the sun than it is on standard time—and that can mess with our bodies' circadian rhythms, which in turn can lead to all manner of health woes.

One 2025 paper estimated that eliminating DST would lower the U.S. prevalence of stroke by 300,000 cases. A Spanish study found a 30% increase in fatal car accidents from 1990 to 2014 on the day the clocks spring forward. A 2020 study found medical errors like giving the wrong medicine to a patient rise by as much as 8.8% in the week following the switch.

But even as the perils of DST become more evident, the U.S. is, if anything, moving in the wrong direction, with Congress annually considering a so-called Sunshine Protection Act that would follow B.C. in making DST permanent. But at least North America remains an outlier: only about a third of countries around the world observe DST at all. —Jeffrey Kluger



5 phrases that will instantly get your doctor's attention

BY ANGELA HAUPT

DOCTORS DON'T JUST EXAMINE bodies—they also decode language. And some words and phrases make them lean in, ask more questions, and rethink what might be going on.

A clear, detailed conversation with a patient “gets you 80% there on a diagnosis,” says Dr. Robert Biernbaum, chief medical officer at WellNow Urgent Care, which has locations in five states. “That’s how important words are. They’re the most important thing we do in adult medicine.”

There’s no need to use medical jargon you picked up while googling your symptoms, he adds. If a patient informs him they think they have pneumococcal pneumonia, for example, that could set the diagnostic process back: he has to start over and ask them why they think that. The most helpful language is honest and specific, and focuses on changes over time and day-to-day impact, Biernbaum adds.

It’s most important to opt for words that signal heightened risk, capture trajectory, or shine light on functional impact rather than just discomfort. “The goal isn’t to ‘say the right word,’” he says. “It’s to clearly communicate what’s different, how long it’s been happening, and why it concerns you. That’s what helps clinicians take the right next step.”

The importance of language speaks to why everyone should have a primary-care doctor, says Dr. Adam Stracher, chief medical officer and director of primary care at Weill Cornell Medicine. “When you know a patient and their personality, their fears, and their anxieties, it’s easier to know when something is really wrong,” he says. “There are some patients who are a little more anxious and others who are more stoic, and that helps you parse how seriously to take something.”

We asked doctors which phrases always catch their attention—and why.



“This has been going on for months”

When you’re describing symptoms to your doctor, it’s key to include how long you’ve had them. You might use a word like *persistent*, says Dr. James Tacci, president-elect of the American College of Preventive Medicine. “The fact that any abnormality is persistent makes it more than trivial,” he says. “It doesn’t necessarily mean that it’s bad, but it means it’s something that needs to be addressed.”

“I had to stop going to the gym”

One of the most important things doctors want to know is how much symptoms are changing your daily life. Biernbaum is especially alert to phrases like *interfering with sleep*, *can’t work*, *can’t eat*, *can’t walk*, and *I had to stop doing X*. “When people start saying things like ‘I haven’t missed a day of work in five years, and I had to call in because I can’t work because the pain is too bad,’ you listen,” he says.

“I had a sudden change in strength”

The word *sudden* signals that the timeline has shifted in an important way. Stracher pays particular attention to phrases like these: *sudden loss of vision*, *sudden shortness of breath*, and *sudden change in strength*. “The sudden, acute onset of anything gives us a higher level of suspicion” that something urgent is wrong, he says.

“I have a family history of skin cancer”

Your family medical history might be recorded in your patient portal. But that doesn’t necessarily mean your doctor remembers your dad had a heart attack at 52. “It makes so much difference if you have a family history of whatever it is that you’re being tested for, because it puts you in a whole new category,” Tacci says. “That makes every physician appropriately stop, take pause, and say, ‘OK, let’s make sure we’re on the right page for you based on your genetics.’”

“I have sharp chest pain that worsens with exertion and improves with rest”

A helpful rule of thumb: Precision beats vagueness. Providers respond most strongly to clear, concrete descriptions, Biernbaum says, rather than broad statements like “I’ve never felt worse in my life.” They need specifics about timing, triggers, and symptoms to make the best decisions. “Very precise descriptions are so important for us to get to the bottom of something.”

TIME

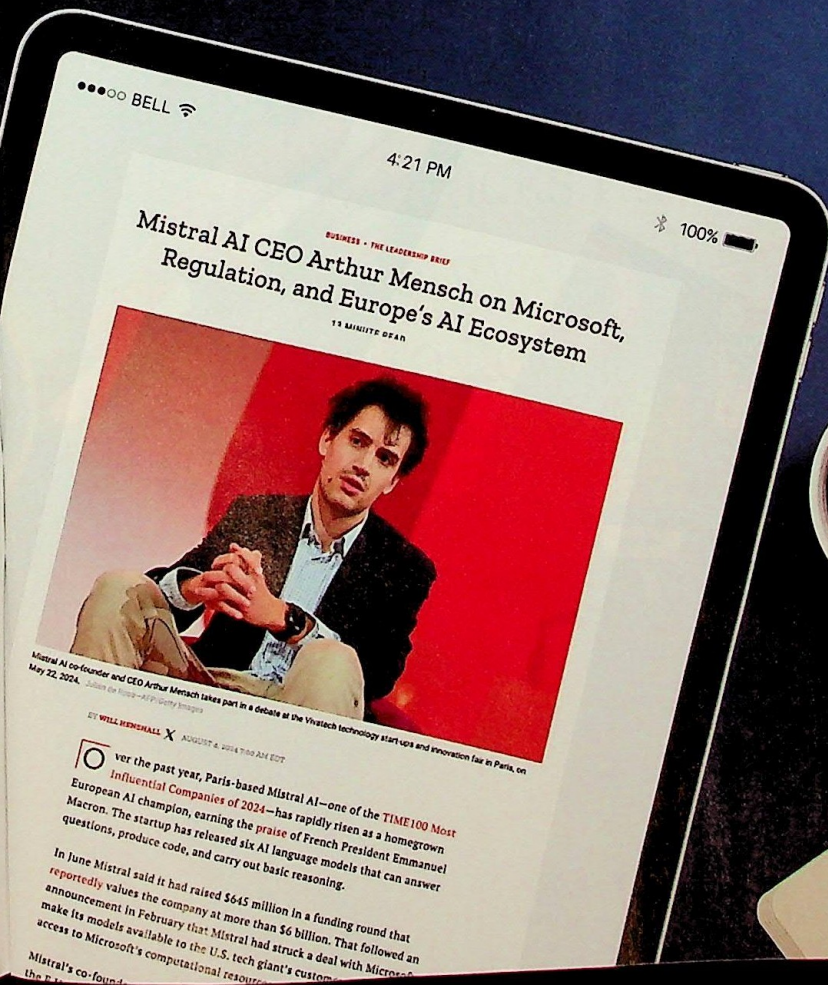
THE LEADERSHIP BRIEF

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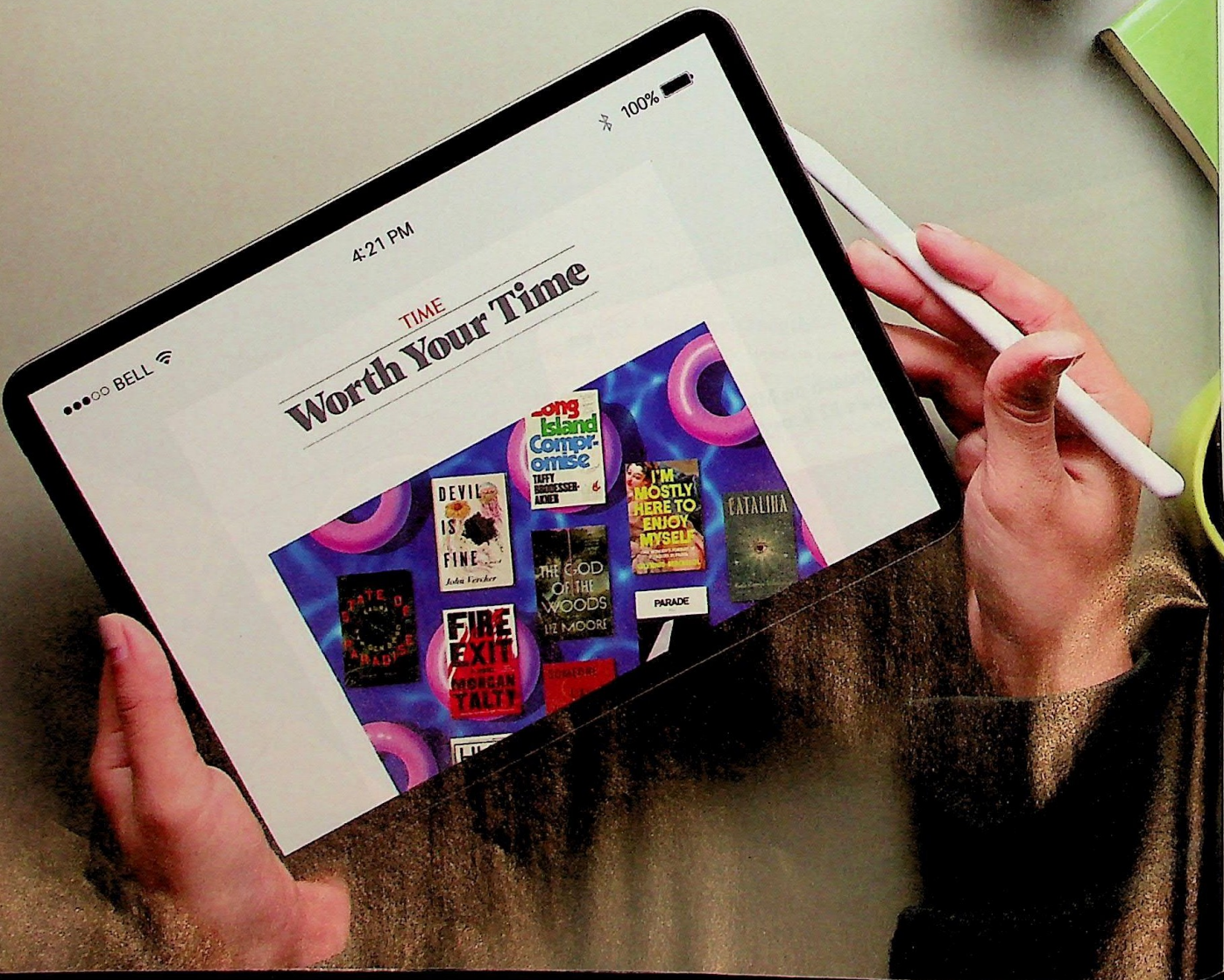
WORTH YOUR TIME

Looking for a new show to watch or book to read this weekend? We have plenty of recommendations. Get them in your inbox every Friday.



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The View

WORLD

FREEZING BUT FREE

BY DARIA KOLOMIEC

I am writing from Kyiv, where the temperature in my apartment barely reaches 40°F. I sleep in thermal underwear, an insulated tracksuit, and a winter hat. Recently, I added gloves. Russian attacks have destroyed 80% of our energy and heat infrastructure, working to keep Ukraine cold in what is apparently an attempt to turn us against one another. Instead, neighbors cook borscht for the entire building. ▶

INSIDE

WHY MEXICO IS CONFRONTING
THE CARTELS

THE PUSH FOR MORE
EPSTEIN FILES

DROUGHT COMES FOR THE
COLORADO RIVER

Electricity can disappear for three days or more. Heat and water too. Compared with many, I am lucky. I have a gas stove. I am also 37 years old and have all my limbs. I can walk up the stairs to my home without an elevator and carry heavy bottles of water. I can even find a yoga studio where I shower and wash my hair. Unfortunately, I can't say the same for the elderly, for people with disabilities, for veterans without limbs (who need electricity to charge their prosthetics), or for those who have lost their homes and simply have nowhere to go.

Freezing, but free. That's how I would describe the mood in Kyiv. We are tired, but we are not broken. And our perseverance can be measured in days. It has been almost 1,500 of them (four years, and counting) since Russia invaded. I marked one, Jan. 13, 2026, on my calendar—the day Ukraine had officially been resisting longer than the Soviet Union fought Nazi Germany during World War II, the largest and bloodiest conflict of the 20th century. A common meme shared among soldiers: I've been fighting longer than my grandfather did.

My foreign friends often tell me Ukrainians have a particular sense of humor. In Kyiv, the new joke goes: "If the Russian missiles and drones didn't kill you today, watch out for the dangling icicles."

When the war had gone on for two years, I wrote an essay marking the anniversary. A lot has changed in the two years since. Iryna Tsybukh, a public activist, a combat medic, and my friend, was killed on May 29, 2024, on the front line near Kharkiv, just days before her 26th birthday.

Around then, I was in New York, preparing a benefit reading of the documentary theater piece I created, *Diary of War*, which Iryna contributed to. American veterans were performing *Diary of War* to raise funds for Iryna's medical battalion, Hospitalers. It was unbearable—organizing an event in honor of my friend in New York while our friends were burying her in Kyiv.

Iryna changed how we say goodbye to those killed in action. In her will, she asked that mourners at her



A memorial for fallen soldiers in Kyiv's Independence Square on Feb. 24

funeral sing Ukrainian songs; that we not bring flowers, but donate to Hospitalers. Instead of Soviet-style monuments, Iryna asked for living remembrance.

Every day at 9 a.m., people in Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities stop to honor those killed by Russia. Yurii Tsybukh, Iryna's younger brother, recently raised and donated more than \$3,000 to continue a university scholarship in her name. And I created the playlist for Iryna's funeral, a collection of Ukrainian songs that were a soundtrack to her young life: a funeral playlist for my friend.

EVERY PERSON IN UKRAINE has their own diary of war, and every object does too—from my playlist to the box of Roshen chocolates I bought for a friend. After I purchased them from a store in Kyiv, the chocolates gained a new meaning and value when Russia destroyed the factory.

It can feel impossible to feel—to measure—it all. Remembrance. Grief. Survival. The fight for identity. Burying friends. Searching for love. Living in complete uncertainty, with a very short planning horizon.

Over the past four years, Ukrainians have learned not just to endure

shocks, but to grow from them. We have all had to become masters of *kintsugi*, the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery, in our own lives. We have learned how to glue everything back together by morning, to replace windows blown out by drones, to find alternative ways to heat our homes, to invent new ways to keep fighting.

War is a total loss of control over your own life. So I hold on to what I can still influence: telling the truth. Faced with propaganda and indifference, I try to share with the world what cannot be understood without living through it. I hope that someone is listening.

The full-scale war has required all Ukrainians to make sacrifices that we had not imagined. But the Russians were wrong, the cold cannot break us. We turn to each other for warmth. We look to each other for light in the dark.

We are still here. Even if you no longer see us on the front pages of newspapers.

But what we cannot endure is isolation. When the world forgets us, we feel profoundly alone, in the vastness of primal cold and endless darkness. No winter can compare to that.

Kolomeic is a Ukrainian activist and DJ



The Risk Report

By Ian Bremmer

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

PRESIDENT CLAUDIA SHEINBAUM scored a major win last month when Mexican special forces killed Rubén Nemesio “El Mencho” Oseguera, leader of the country’s most powerful criminal organization. This is no ordinary drug gang. Its network involves not just fentanyl trafficking to the U.S. but also illegal mining, extortion, and human trafficking. And unlike most cartels, which have a hierarchical command structure, this organization operated through alliances with local gangs and smaller criminal groups, allowing it to expand operations across much of Mexico.

But Oseguera’s death has also raised the stakes in Sheinbaum’s battle to both contain her country’s drug violence and ease pressure for action against the cartels from the Trump Administration.

The capture or killing of cartel leaders often triggers a surge in deadly violence, as factions struggle over control of the organizations and retaliate against authorities. The 2024 capture of Ismael “El Mayo” Zambada provoked a major and sustained escalation of violence several weeks after the arrest.

Since Oseguera’s killing, deadly attacks have spread across cartel strongholds in a half-dozen states. Sheinbaum’s first priority is to prevent localized violence from spreading to places like Guadalajara, an industrial and investment hub that will host World Cup matches later this year, and to protect businesses, highways, and other key infrastructure.

It’s worth noting that Sheinbaum has adopted a much more systematic

security strategy than that of her predecessor and political ally Andrés Manuel López Obrador—the result of both her security-focused mindset and her recognition that violent crime remains the top concern of voters. But it’s also a product of pressure from Washington for more direct coordination between security forces on both sides of the border, as the U.S. has provided critical intelligence and help containing the flow of guns into Mexico.



A delicate moment for Sheinbaum, seen in Mexico City on Feb. 25

Sheinbaum has worked hard to persuade Trump that she shares his concerns about border security—partly in hopes of avoiding further U.S. action on trade or any risk that U.S. security forces might move against the cartels within Mexico, compromising its sovereignty.

Sheinbaum has sent a number of captured cartel members to the U.S., and Trump has publicly celebrated a major drop in fentanyl seizures since he became President, a success each can credit to tighter cooperation between the two governments.

But the killing of El Mencho confirmed for U.S. officials that the

Mexican government would take direct, forceful action against the cartels, raising expectation in Washington that more strikes might follow.

TRUMP’S AGGRESSIVE and unilateral moves against Venezuela and Cuba have heightened concerns in Mexico City that failing to keep up the intensity of the battle against cartels might persuade Trump to directly target criminal groups with cross-border strikes.

Once again, Sheinbaum hopes to stay one step ahead, by expanding security cooperation with the U.S. that might go beyond intelligence sharing. **Yet there’s still a concern within her administration that**

U.S. pressure for action will expand—perhaps extending beyond the cartels themselves, to political or military figures in Mexico with alleged ties to organized crime. To head that off, Sheinbaum might take action against a few lower-level or former officials, but it’s unlikely she would move against high-ranking figures within her Morena Party or anyone close to López Obrador.

Sheinbaum also has no appetite for an all-out war with the cartels. If there is a bloody escalation,

she might not be able to contain it—and the U.S. might be brought more directly into the fight.

But for the moment, there are no dominant crime lords in Mexico. New ones could emerge in the coming months and years, though over the past 16 years, Mexican and U.S. authorities have proved effective at capturing or killing top cartel leaders. Her administration will focus for now on containing violence as it erupts, with an overarching goal of degrading the strength of the most dangerous and effective cartels. That’s a battle she has a much better chance of winning. □



Democratic state representative James Talarico takes the win in Austin early on March 4



The D.C. Brief By Philip Elliott

SENIOR CORRESPONDENT

JAMES TALARICO, THE SECULARIST seminarian armed with a biblical rejoinder for what he sees as politics' sins, won Texas' hard-fought U.S. Senate Democratic primary on March 3, setting up a November push once seen as a Hail Mary for his party. It was opening night of primary season in the U.S., and with his 6-point win over the combative progressive Representative Jasmine Crockett, it appeared that an argument grounded in electability this fall prevailed, or at least found enough open ears.

"This is a people-powered movement to take on this broken, corrupt political system," Talarico said in his election-night speech. "This is proof that there is something happening in Texas. Tonight, the people of our state gave this country a little bit of a hope. And a little bit of hope is a dangerous thing."

On the Republican side, things were heading toward another two bitter months of a bruising campaign between incumbent Senator John Cornyn and challenger Ken Paxton, the hard-right and scandal-soaked state attorney general. Neither candidate topped 50% because Representative Wesley Hunt made it a three-way contest. The runoff is scheduled for May 26 and gives Democrats a

head start in what is shaping up to be a tough and costly battle that could decide which party runs the Senate for the final two years of President Donald Trump's term.

Electability was the core argument on that side too.

"If he's nominated, there's a high risk that Paxton would lose the Senate seat, taking five congressional seats down with him," Cornyn said on election night. "Just like the primary, we have a plan to win the runoff, and we are in the process of executing it. Judgment day is coming for Ken Paxton."

The 1.5 million-plus votes cast among Democrats was more than double the number seen in 2022. Among Republicans, 1.3 million voted, up about 30% from 2022, according to VoteHub. The results may offer a preview of party posture in other primaries and head-to-head matchups to come. On its own, though, it suggested that Democrats' messy search for their path forward may be a battle at every step—and that Republicans may struggle to figure out how to win definitively without Trump as a vote animator.



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Health Matters By Veronique Greenwood

STAFF WRITER

Think back to the first thing you can remember, and you'll find you were likely already several years old. Between us and our earlier experiences lies a mysterious barrier.

Research suggests that in mice those lost memories still exist. At the lab of Paul Frankland, of the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, researchers tagged brain cells activated as young mice learned to fear a chamber. Later, when the grown mice had forgotten their fear, the researchers reactivated those cells—and the mice remembered. The lab of Tomás Ryan, a neuroscientist at Trinity College Dublin, has revealed that male mice whose mothers' immune systems were activated during pregnancy do not forget early experiences, suggesting the immune system may be involved. What about humans? It's tricky, but Nick Turk-Browne at Yale and his colleagues have managed to scan a growing number of little kids and discovered that those as young as a year old do appear to be forming memories. This suggests humans, too, may be making memories that just can't be reached later.

It's a mystery why our brains forget our early lives. Do our earliest memories pose a threat, somehow, to our survival? Or does the value of those memories lie in something that does not require their conscious retrieval? Perhaps they allow us to build a mental database of the way things work, Turk-Browne speculates. The specifics—the things we hang onto in many of our memories—might not be what's valuable about them, and they might still be with us in ways we don't recognize.



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Q&A

What's next for the Epstein files

BY NIK SPALJ

REPRESENTATIVE RO KHANNA helped force one of the most sweeping disclosures of investigative records in modern American history when Congress passed his bipartisan Epstein Files Transparency Act last year, compelling the Justice Department to release millions of documents tied to the convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

The release has triggered a wave of fallout, with prominent figures across politics, business, and international institutions resigning or facing investigations—developments Khanna describes as the beginning of a long-awaited “moral reckoning” for what he calls an “Epstein class” of powerful people who believed themselves beyond accountability.

Even though more than 3 million pages have been made public, major questions remain. Lawmakers and journalists have identified millions of additional documents still withheld or heavily redacted, including missing FBI interview summaries connected to allegations involving President Donald Trump. (Trump has long said he had no knowledge of Epstein's crimes.) “Why are they hiding these documents?” asks Khanna, a Democrat who represents the Silicon Valley area.

TIME spoke with Khanna (pictured, speaking) about why he believes the most consequential evidence remains hidden and what Congress and the courts could do next to force additional disclosures.

Are you surprised that the files have had an impact across so many countries and industries? I had to ask someone on my team and [GOP Representative Thomas] Massie's team to compile the list of rich and powerful people in the United States

and around the world that are being held accountable. There are dozens. And there are dozens more who need to be held accountable and, in some cases, investigated and prosecuted. I have always said: if these files are released, it will be a moral reckoning for the nation, and half of the worst stuff still hasn't been released. This is the first time in modern American history that the global elite are being held accountable.

Do you expect more people will be implicated? Yes, I believe more people will be implicated in terms of having known about Jeffrey Epstein's pedophilia and turned a blind eye, and still having engaged in business



relationships with him. I believe some others will be exposed as having raped these young girls and trafficked these young girls. The problem is, though, we need the documents that have not been released. The most central right now are the three documents the FBI and DOJ have covered up with [a] woman's allegation against Donald Trump that he sexually assaulted her when she was a minor. I have no idea on the merits, but I do believe that the problem is the cover-up. [On March 5, after Khanna spoke to TIME, the DOJ released the documents, saying their omission had been an accident.]

How much of the documents have we not yet seen? [Deputy Attorney General Todd] Blanche has said that there are about 3 million

or so documents that haven't been released. And of the documents that have been released, there are too many redactions on them, and even the members of Congress are seeing documents that already had [been] blanked out.

What response have you gotten from the DOJ as to why those documents aren't available? They just hide behind privilege, and they claim that they are protecting survivors. But they've protected the predators, and they are not complying with the law.

What else can Congress do to force the DOJ to release the files? We can take action in the Southern District of New York to require the release. Survivors can sue to require the release under the Epstein Transparency Act. When [Democrats] are back in the majority, we can subpoena people at the Justice Department and FBI whistleblowers. And we need to bring in front of our committee those people who are in the files [who] have been emailing about going to the island or the ranch and ask them, under oath, what they knew.

Does Congress need a second phase of legislation? Would you change anything in the bill? We could pass a second law to be even more explicit, but they may just violate that second law. Maybe there's additional punitive teeth we can put on it. Really we need the judicial system to enforce it.

What has been revealed in the files about Epstein's relationship with President Trump? That they had an extensive friendship. And they spent a fair amount of time together. And that there are also, of course, allegations against President Trump by at least one woman. What we need is transparency. I don't judge the merits of any of this. But what we need is President Trump to come before Congress and testify under oath like President Clinton.

ENVIRONMENT

A river ran through it: America's thirsty West

BY PETE MCBRIDE

I'VE SPENT MOST OF MY LIFE CHASING SNOW AND WATER around the West. I grew up on a cattle ranch in central Colorado, so I learned early on that food does not come from the supermarket and water does not originate at the tap. Melting snow feeds creeks and tributaries that eventually connect with the Colorado River, often described as the most loved and litigated body of water in the West. The icy, crystal-clear snowmelt flows 1,450 miles through seven states and 11 national parks, supporting on the way some 40 million Americans and 4 million acres of farmland. The delta where it ends in Baja and Sonora Mexico was once the largest desert estuary in North America, boasting so many migratory birds that the sky was often blocked by blankets of wings. Today it's a cracked-earth wasteland, more a river cemetery than an oasis.

I've been documenting this slow-motion crash. Fifteen years ago, I made a source-to-sea journey down the Colorado River for *National Geographic*. The point was to photograph the river's natural beauty, but also the many uses diminishing its flow. The river's plumbing network fills sprinklers and faucets from Denver to Las Vegas to San Diego and every other major Southwest city, town, farm field, and feedlot in between.

Along the way, I learned for the first time that thanks to an outdated Colorado Compact—a century-old management agreement that expires this year—we allocate more water than the river actually supplies. The Colorado does not reach the sea anymore. It did for 6 million years, but ran dry sometime in the late 1990s.

Why? Simply put, there are too many straws in the drink. On top of that, in the past 2½ decades, drought and a changing climate have cut about 20% of that flow. Tree-ring science that confirms the river's lower average annual flows also shows the American Southwest is facing its driest period in 1,200 years.

So the system is veering toward catastrophe. America's two largest reservoirs, Lake Powell and Lake Mead, book-end the Grand Canyon. Depleted by nearly 80%, they are approaching dead pool, when water levels drop below the level of the outlets in the dams. For years, the phrase was used for futuristic, alarmist forecasts. Now the Bureau of Reclamation says that under worst-case hydrologic models, Lake Powell could see it next year.

The compact among the parties that share the waters of the Colorado expires at the end of this year. Everyone agrees that changes need to be made, but disputes over where and how have created gridlock between the upper-basin mountain states (Colorado, Utah, Wyoming, and New Mexico) and the lower basin (Nevada, Arizona, and California). The tension is so visceral that the state water leaders

➤
Rock formations
emerge as Lake
Powell recedes



have refused to all sit at one table.

Band-Aid has been laid on top of Band-Aid; temporary solutions invariably fail. Native communities, which hold paper rights to 25% of the river's water, have remained overlooked and waterless. While habitats dry up, big agriculture, the largest straw in the river, continues to divert millions of acre-feet to grow 10 to 15 cuttings of alfalfa crops a year for export to Saudi Arabia and China.

LAST APRIL, I JOURNEYED downstream to Lake Powell, where water levels, at 28%, were close to record low. I was documenting the newly visible arches, alcoves, and alleyways of Glen Canyon, which for grandeur can rival or surpass parts of the Grand Canyon. Sandstone wonders like the "Cathedral in the Desert" that had been underwater for my entire lifetime were now returning. Stained with sediment bathtub rings from wetter times, they remind us of our hubris.



On the final leg of my source- to-sea journey, my raft ran aground

At the end of my trip, I spoke with a boat attendant at Bullfrog Marina who was bemoaning the challenges facing the recreation industry—less water, lower visitor counts, fewer boat rentals. But as I left, she pointed east and said, hopefully, “We are just waiting for the snowmelt to arrive.”

Last winter’s snowpack started out well below average, then rallied in April, spiking to 97% of average based on 30-year data. But that late-winter arrival didn’t all reach the river. Instead, higher-than-normal spring temperatures created thirsty soil that soaked up nearly half the flow. So that hopeful runoff never came to Lake Powell or beyond to Lake Mead, both of which shrank further.

By May, the runoff was so anemic that the creek my family uses to irrigate a grass hay meadow nearly ran dry. On the cool morning of May 31, typically high-water runoff time, the water commissioner called me to say we had to turn off our ditch. Someone

downstream with older water rights did not have enough water to fill their own. This was a first both for me and for the 88-year-old water commissioner, who had held the job for decades. Neither of us had ever seen the creek run so low, nor heard of a “call” on any historic ditch in our region. When my brother and I shut the headgate, we relocated some brook trout from an eddy in the ditch back to the creek. There wasn’t water for both.

As I approached the final leg of my source-to-sea journey on the Colorado, my raft ran aground. I was just over the border with Mexico. Even as I absorbed the shock that I had to walk the last 90 miles, it did not cross my mind that the shortfall would become evident on our ranch in the Colorado’s headwaters 8,000 feet above sea level.

BUT HERE WE ARE. As I began writing this in mid-January, Colorado snowpack was just over 50% of annual average. As my neighbor, a former Olympic ski racer who knows something about snow, said to me, “We have to accept that winter is just not happening.” Like it or not, she’s right. And as a result, we are bathing in a basin-wide water crisis. The civilization we built around an outdated water-management model is proving that when we ask too much of a limited resource, it disappears.

It is time for those in charge of managing this resource that produces over 12% of U.S. GDP to start thinking bigger, beyond their states and regional water districts. It is time to face their differences, head to the river’s shores, and literally climb into a raft to take a river trip together. The Colorado River managers should get in a boat in the headwaters somewhere, Shoshone Rapid in Colorado or below Flaming Gorge Dam in Utah, and keep floating downstream until they figure something out—not just how to stretch less water, but how to fund infrastructure that sustains it.

If they took the time to listen and look at the actual river and worked together pulling paddles and oars, they might find some answers downstream. I bet they would not only reconnect with the river they manage, but also find more solutions than by avoiding each other in sterile conference rooms.

Five and a half decades ago, two Colorado River nemeses, Floyd Dominy of the Bureau of Reclamation (pro-dam) and David Brower of the Sierra Club (anti-dam) famously did just that. They took a river trip together. And while they did not come out as friends, they did share drinks on the river’s banks at night, crash through rapids together, and return with a respect for each other and a renewed love for the river itself. Who knows if that trip was key to fewer dams on the river today, but those fierce adversaries shared more river time than our leaders do today.

I have witnessed firsthand how different user groups can collaborate to keep this river running and even, briefly, water its parched delta. Rafters, ranchers, anglers, hydrologists, energy wonks, government officials, and others have coordinated to keep water in the river. I still think state water managers can as well.

McBride is a photographer and filmmaker and the author of Witness to Water

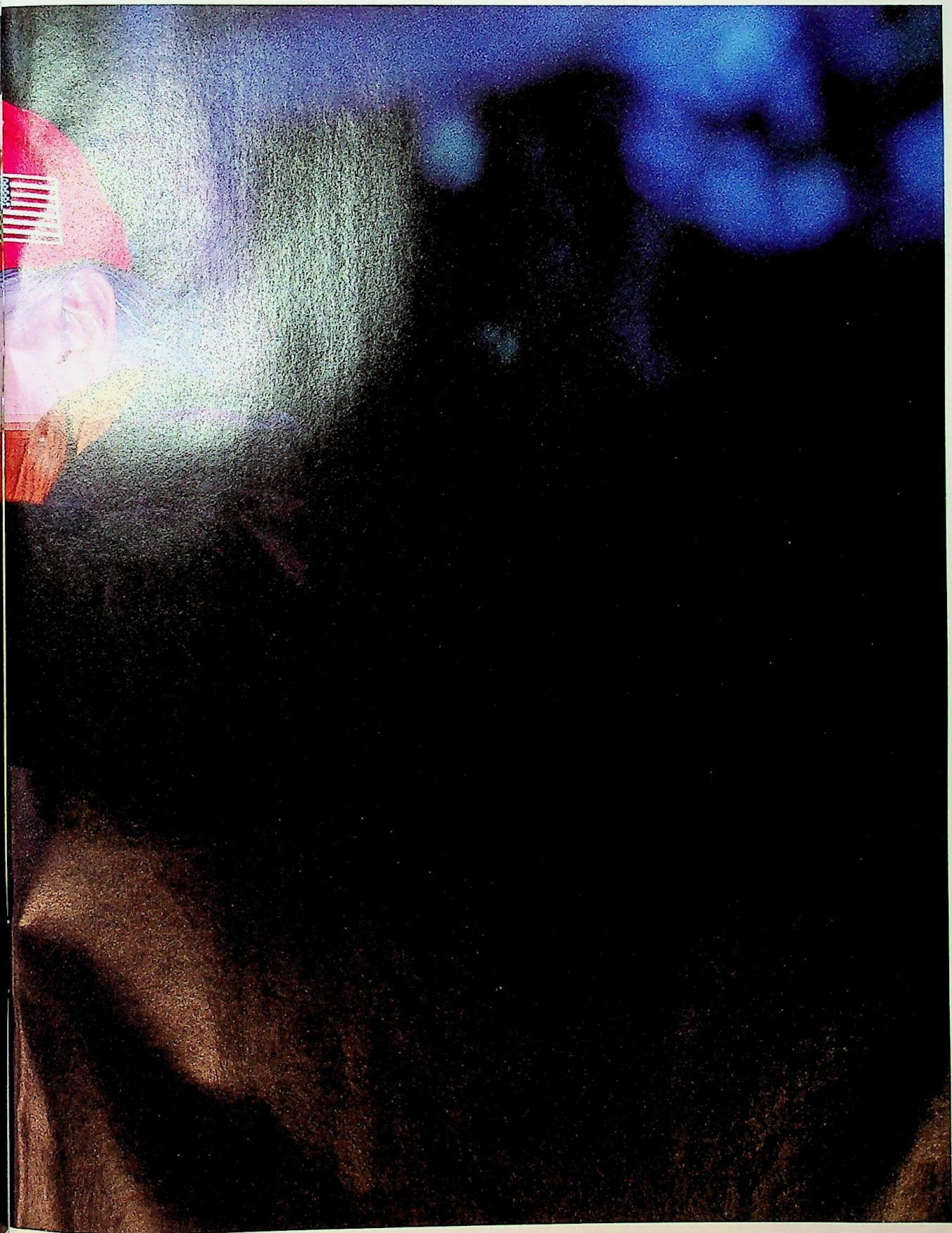
Trump arrives at the White House on March 1, during the conflict's opening weekend



POLITICS

Trump's War

THE PRESIDENT'S MASSIVE
GAMBLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST
BY ERIC CORTELLESA



President Donald Trump had just arrived at Mar-a-Lago on Friday night, Feb. 27, when he got word from U.S. intelligence officials: they believed they had located Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Months had passed since Trump began preparing for the possibility of war with Iran. In recent weeks, he had instructed military officials to draw up operational plans for a joint strike, coordinated closely with Israel. Eight months after bombing three Iranian nuclear sites, he was once again getting edgy about the Islamic Republic's nuclear program. The latest round of negotiations in Geneva had done little to reassure him. Trump was suspicious that Tehran was preparing an attack on American and Israeli targets. Though the U.S. had positioned a carrier strike group in the region, with another on its way, Iranian negotiators showed little urgency to reach a deal, he notes, proposing to meet again in a week with U.S. envoys. "When I heard that," Trump says, "I said, you know, they're going to hit first."

As guests partied on one side of his oceanfront mansion and private club, Trump huddled with top military and intelligence brass on the other, where he made the decision to launch a decapitation strike against the Iranian regime. "We went way early," Trump explains in a March 4 phone call with TIME. "We were going to do it in another week."

In the early hours of Saturday morning, the start of the workweek in Tehran, Operation Epic Fury began. American long-range missiles and drones moved in concert with Israeli jets, striking hundreds of Iranian military installations:

missile batteries, naval vessels, air-defense systems, and command centers. It was one of the region's most expansive air operations in decades. The bombardment killed Khamenei, who presided over a repressive regime for 36 years. Also dead were a cluster of senior Iranian officials envisioned as potential successors. "I've killed all their leaders," Trump says. "That room is gone." The attacks also inflicted significant damage to civilian areas. In the far south of Iran, more than 150 people were killed when a barrage hit a girls' school.

Iran retaliated with missile and drone bombardments against U.S. bases and allied territory, targeting military facilities across the Gulf, including Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar. One Iranian drone killed six American service members at a U.S. command center in Kuwait. Asked whether Americans should be worried about retaliatory attacks at home, Trump acknowledges the possibility. "I guess," he says. "But I think they're worried about that all the time. We think about it all the time. We plan for it. But yeah, you know, we expect some things. Like I said, some people will die. When you go to war, some people will die."

Trump promised to end wars, not start them. Instead, he has deployed military force in increasingly dizzying ways. No other modern American leader has directed assaults in as many

countries in such a short span of time. Since returning to office, Trump has authorized attacks in eight nations, three of which have never before been directly targeted by U.S. forces. In 2025 alone, he approved more individual airstrikes than his predecessor did over four years.

Trump has ordered a major campaign of airstrikes targeting Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen; authorized naval attacks on vessels from Venezuela suspected of drug trafficking; and signed off on the operation that seized that country's authoritarian President, Nicolás Maduro, left more than a hundred dead, and placed the Venezuelan leader on trial in New York. Just days after the onslaught against Tehran, the U.S. took part in joint military operations in Ecuador, targeting "designated terrorist organizations." His Administration has also fixed its sights on Cuba, where President Miguel Díaz-Canel has ramped up military exercises amid reports that Trump has asked advisers to devise plans to end the island's six-decade communist rule.

In short, if Trump campaigned as a President of peace, he has governed as the opposite. Now he has drawn the U.S. into the kind of conflict he long pledged to avoid. Having ousted the tyrannical ruler of Iran's theocracy, he has committed the U.S. anew to regime change in the Middle East, telling TIME he intends to play a role in shaping the next government of a regional powerhouse home to some 90 million people. "One of the things I'm going to be asking for is the ability to work with them on choosing a new leader," he says. "I'm not going through this to end up with another Khamenei. I want to be involved in the selection. They can select, but we have to make sure it's somebody that's reasonable to the United States."

It's impossible to know how all this will unfold. There was little sympathy internationally for the Ayatollah, who



Trump confers with senior Administration officials at Mar-a-Lago during Operation Epic Fury

reigned over a brutal Islamist regime; throughout Tehran and across the Iranian diaspora, crowds have rejoiced in the streets upon hearing the news of his demise. To some, Trump's attacks are historic in the best sense, eliminating an avowed adversary who sought to destroy the U.S. and whom Washington has long viewed as the head of the world's foremost state sponsor of terrorism.

But the gambit carries extraordinary risks—for Trump's presidency, for Iran's fragile political future, for regional stability, and for the safety of Americans at home and abroad. The gravest decision a President can make is whether to send American troops into harm's way. Trump, who once defined himself in opposition to foreign entanglements, has pivoted with astonishing alacrity toward open-ended confrontation across multiple theaters.

In his interview with *TIME*, Trump says his goals are to eliminate Iran's nuclear threat once and for all, to dismantle its ballistic-missile program, and to

install a Western-friendly government. "We have to be able to deal with sane and rational people," he says. Yet Trump launched a war before making a case to the country or to Congress, and his Administration has offered unclear—and at times contradictory—explanations of the mission's objectives. The most unnerving possibility is that Operation Epic Fury is not the culmination of his shift toward a war presidency, but rather the beginning of a new chapter.

THE PATH TO WAR with Iran was paved by a pair of meetings, one year apart, with Benjamin Netanyahu.

On Feb. 4, 2025, the Israeli Prime Minister visited the White House for the first time since Trump's return to power. Seated at a long table in the Cabinet Room, Netanyahu began with a bracing reminder, according to

U.S. and Israeli officials present at the meeting: Iran, he noted, had plotted to assassinate Trump during the 2024 campaign. Law-enforcement officials disclosed that they had disrupted what they described as two Iranian plots to kill Trump. (Tehran denied the allegations.) Trump has long fused geopolitics with grievance, and Iran's clerical leadership occupied a singular place on his list of adversaries. When *TIME* asked him in a November 2024 interview about the prospect of war with Iran, Trump did not dismiss it. "Anything can happen," he said.

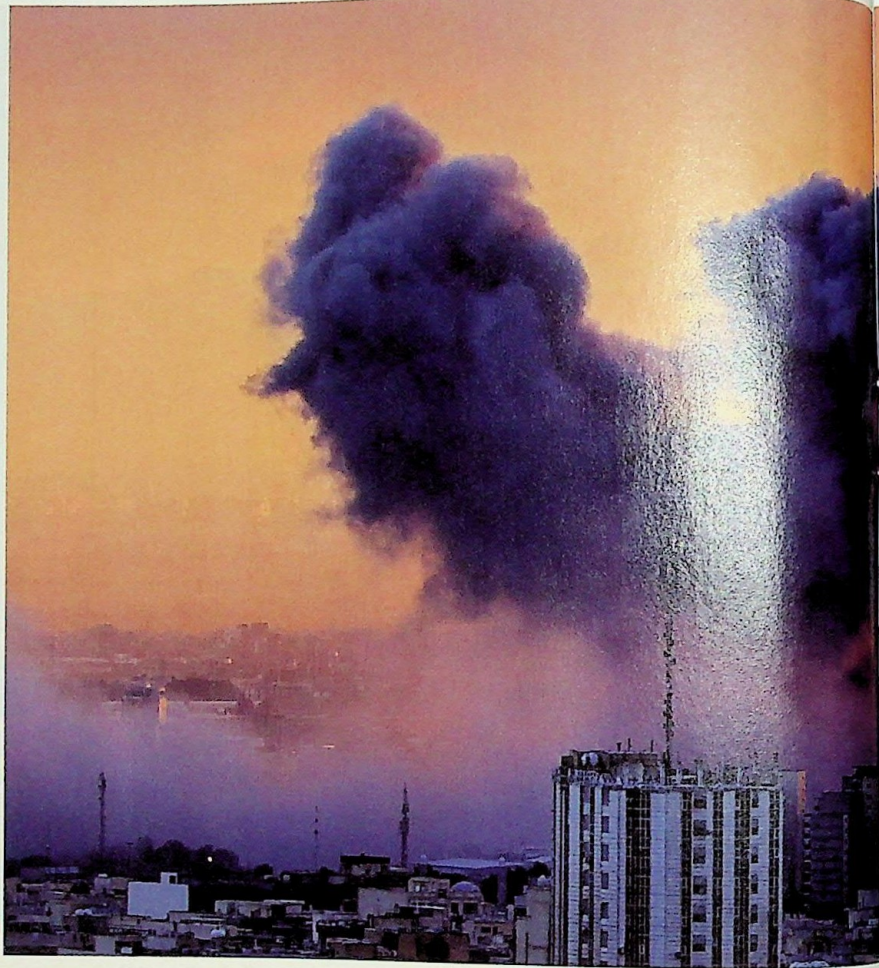
Sensing an opening, Netanyahu walked through a slide deck. It showed stockpiles of highly enriched uranium climbing, centrifuges spinning faster, inspectors reporting gaps. Ever since Trump withdrew from President Barack Obama's nuclear accord in 2018, Tehran had incrementally expanded its enrichment program, moving closer to break-out capacity. By the time Trump was inaugurated a second time, international inspectors assessed that Iran possessed

enough weapons-grade uranium to place it mere weeks from assembling a bomb. “Look, Donald,” Netanyahu said, leaning in, “this has to be tackled, because they’re racing forward.” He paused, locking eyes with the President. “You can’t have a nuclear Iran on your watch.”

But Trump was not ready to greenlight an Israeli strike. He wanted a diplomatic attempt first, and tasked his longtime friend, real estate developer Steve Witkoff, with exploring a solution. U.S. and Israeli officials settled on a 60-day framework to test whether an agreement was viable. The Israeli officials say the deadline was strategic. When Iran exceeded it without concessions, they argue, Trump’s skepticism hardened. “It proved to Trump that we have nobody to talk to,” one Israeli official says. “It was a ruse.”

After the International Atomic Energy Agency reported that Iran had concealed aspects of its nuclear development in violation of prior commitments, Israeli intelligence was shared with the White House, purporting to show Tehran was slow-walking negotiations while covertly assembling components necessary for a weapon. On June 13, 2025, Jerusalem launched a wave of strikes that broke through Iranian air defenses and disrupted supply lines. Trump was impressed—and, as one of his advisers put it, eager not to be a spectator to history.

On June 22, Trump authorized Operation Midnight Hammer, a tightly coordinated onslaught on three of Iran’s most critical nuclear sites: Fordo, Natanz, and Isfahan. Fourteen GBU-57 Massive Ordnance Penetrator bombs were delivered by B-2 Stealth bombers in what officials described as the largest such mission in American history. The objective was explicit: penetrate hardened facilities and degrade Iran’s capacity to cross the nuclear threshold. Assessments of the damage varied. Though analysts urged caution, Trump declared the facilities “effectively destroyed.” When Iran’s retaliatory missile strikes on U.S. bases appeared largely symbolic—intercepted or limited in scope—he proclaimed the “12-day war” over. Tehran would have a choice, he said: negotiate a



▲ A plume of smoke rises after a March 3 strike on Tehran

permanent end to its nuclear ambitions or face further consequences.

Over time, Trump saw the strike as a success on multiple levels. After his Administration helped broker a Gaza cease-fire that secured the return of Israeli hostages held by Hamas, he framed Operation Midnight Hammer, along with his first-term assassination of the Iranian general Qasem Soleimani, as leverage—proof that credible force could reset diplomatic equations. “It would have been impossible to make a deal like this before,” Trump told TIME last fall. “No President was willing to do it, and I was willing to do it. And by doing it, we had a different Middle East.”

To some, Midnight Hammer validated a doctrine of decisive action—limited in duration but maximal in force. To others, it normalized Trump’s

ordering preventive strikes against sovereign nations with uncertain long-term consequences. Either way, the operation fed Trump’s own sense of momentum. It also created the foundations of a new template: apply overwhelming force, declare victory, then offer negotiation from a position of dominance. By year’s end, Trump was no longer speaking of war as something to avoid at all costs, but as an instrument to achieve his ends.

Smaller operations soon flickered across the map: Military strikes against suspected narcotics vessels in the Caribbean. Joint raids with regional partners targeting cartel infrastructure along Venezuela’s coast. Covert actions against criminal networks in Ecuador. The crescendo came in January, when American special-operations forces launched a predawn assault in Caracas that ended with the capture of Maduro, and his transfer to the U.S. to face narcotics terrorism charges.

The focus of diplomacy then shifted



back to Iran's nuclear program. Trump tapped two trusted envoys to pursue a deal: Witkoff and son-in-law Jared Kushner, who had negotiated the Gaza deal and were leading the Administration's efforts to broker peace between Russia and Ukraine. Their mandate was straightforward, if ironic: to secure an agreement not unlike the Iranian nuclear accord forged by Obama, the very deal Trump had excoriated and withdrawn from during his first term.

Meanwhile, the Islamic Republic was violently suppressing anti-government protests across the country. Trump saw an opening. He told the demonstrators that "help is on the way" and warned Tehran a military response was on the table—though took no action as Iranian authorities shut down the internet and slaughtered as many as 30,000 people. According to senior Administration officials, Trump thought pressure from the streets, combined with American threats, could force Iran to the negotiating table.

But Witkoff and Kushner's attempts to forge a deal in Geneva went nowhere. When the envoys returned empty-handed, Trump concluded the Iranians were playing for time, using what one senior U.S. official described as "games, tricks, and stall tactics." Iran refused to entertain negotiations over two issues that Western officials considered central: its ballistic-missile program and its support for regional proxy forces, including Hezbollah and Hamas.

Then two developments accelerated the shift toward confrontation, according to two Trump officials familiar with the deliberations. The first was an intelligence assessment indicating that Iran was preparing ballistic-missile strikes that could be used "potentially pre-emptively" against American forces in the region. "The President decided he was not going to sit back and allow American forces in the Middle East to absorb attacks from conventional missiles," one official told report-

ers. The second was Netanyahu's parallel march toward war. "We knew that there was going to be an Israeli action," Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on March 2. "We knew that that would precipitate an attack against American forces, and we knew that if we didn't pre-emptively go after them before they launched those attacks, we would suffer higher casualties."

On Feb. 11, Netanyahu returned to Washington for a meeting with Trump that participants describe as unusually grave. There were none of Trump's customary wisecracks, no theatrical asides. For three hours the two men sat together at the White House, working through operational plans and the parameters of a coordinated campaign. Trump has previously told TIME he does not trust the Israeli Premier—"I don't trust anybody"—but now they were working in lockstep on an operation that would alter the balance of power in the region. By the time Netanyahu left Washington,

the outlines of the attack were set. In a little more than two weeks, the first bombs would fall on Tehran.

EVEN THOSE WITH only a passing familiarity with Middle Eastern history can imagine the grim scenarios that could unfold from here. When George W. Bush ordered the invasion of Iraq in 2003, members of his Administration predicted that American troops would be greeted as liberators after the fall of Saddam Hussein. For a fleeting moment, that seemed plausible. Then the war curdled into a quagmire that destabilized the region, drained American lives and treasure, boosted Iran, and helped fuel a wave of radicaliza-

tion whose repercussions still ripple through global politics. It was amid the fatigue and disillusionment from those wars—in Iraq and Afghanistan—that Trump forged his "America First" identity.

He has now launched a war that could carry

many of the same risks. "Even in scenarios where we had, like in Iraq or Afghanistan, some degree of planning for the day after, it ended in grief," says Ali Vaez, an expert on Iran with the International Crisis Group in Geneva. "This time around, it is really based on wishful thinking."

Trump made only a cursory effort to notify Congress before launching the attack, briefing a small circle of congressional leaders shortly before the operation was under way and leaving most lawmakers to learn of it after the fact. There had been little public debate beforehand about the possibility of war, including at his State of the Union address just days earlier. In the aftermath, some officials framed the strike as a necessary act of pre-emption against an imminent threat; others described it as a long-planned effort to cripple Iran's military leadership and force a broader political reckoning in Tehran. Rubio's statement—that Israel was preparing an attack of its own and that

'I'm not going through this to end up with another Khamenei.'

—PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP,
ON IRAN'S NEXT LEADER

A widening war

A CONFLICT FELT ACROSS THE MIDDLE EAST AND BEYOND



Members of the Iranian diaspora celebrate the death of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei outside Iran's embassy in Madrid on March 1

Air-raid sirens sound in Bet Shemesh, Israel, on March 2 during the funeral of two people killed the day before by an Iranian missile

An unexploded missile intercepted by NATO forces over northeastern Syria on March 4. Although its origin is unknown, reports suggest it was likely launched by Iran

Protesters outside the Israeli embassy in Istanbul on March 1, after Supreme Leader Khamenei was killed



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Iranians arrive in Turkey through the border at Kapikoy on March 3; several hundred crossed despite restrictions imposed when the bombing began

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An Israeli airstrike near Beirut on March 3, the same day it invaded southern Lebanon, a stronghold of Iran-backed Hezbollah



Secretary of State Rubio arrives at the U.S. Capitol on March 2 to brief members of Congress

Washington moved first to weaken Iran before it could retaliate against American targets—was yet another rationale.

In his phone call with TIME, Trump described the mission as preventive. “America First is really about keeping America healthy and well, and not having other countries, you know, hit us,” he says. “There are occasions when you have no choice. This was an occasion.” The aim, he says, is to prevent Iran from having the capacity to endanger the U.S. “They can’t have a nuclear weapon. That’s number one, two, and three. Number four, no ballistic missiles,” he says. Another objective, Trump tells TIME, is installing “somebody that is rational and sane” to lead Iran.

Some experts say the U.S. may not be able to engineer a successor government more stable than the one it seeks to replace. “This is not a regime of individual leaders. It’s a regime of well-entrenched

institutions that have a monopoly on coercion,” says Suzanne Maloney, an Iran expert at the Brookings Institution. “Other than just a continuous process of assassination, I’m not entirely clear on how the President anticipates he’s going to be able to determine the next leader of Iran.”

Others argue that the danger may run deeper still: that the fall of the Islamic Republic could fracture Iran rather than reform it, unleashing internal power struggles, proxy conflicts, or even a civil war. The Trump Administration is betting on the possibility that Iran’s population might welcome outside pressure against the clerical regime. Iran is a young country—more than 40% of

its population is under 30—and many of those citizens have lived their entire lives under sanctions, repression, and economic stagnation. Trump’s advisers believe that resentment toward the ruling establishment could produce change, particularly if a new government could quickly align with regional powers such as Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states that have grown closer to the U.S. and Israel in recent years.

But that hope collides with a harsher reality. Popular dissatisfaction does not automatically translate into revolution. Protesters lack weapons and organization; the Iranian security apparatus does not. If the regime endures, or violently suppresses unrest again, the U.S. could face a decision it has tried to avoid: whether to send in ground forces to finish the job.

Trump has not ruled out that possibility. He has said he believes the

objectives of the campaign could be achieved within four or five weeks, though he concedes the timeline could stretch longer. The war will continue, he suggests, until those objectives are accomplished. "I have no time limits on anything," he says. "I want to get it done."

Trump's abrupt reversal on foreign intervention is testing the coalition that carried him back to power. Pressures have emerged on the right, with longtime allies questioning the scope and purpose of the campaign, reviving the anti-interventionist strain that once defined the MAGA movement. Tucker Carlson and Megyn Kelly have each accused Israel of dragging the U.S. into a misadventure overseas. Marjorie Taylor Greene, once among Trump's most steadfast allies but now an increasingly vocal critic, accused him of betraying the movement. "This is not what we thought MAGA was supposed to be," she wrote on X. "Shame!" Other detractors have argued that the war may come to resemble a "wag the dog" moment for a President facing soft approval numbers, the Epstein scandal, and economic unease ahead of the midterms.

How Trump responds to those pressures may determine how long the war continues, especially if it grows unpopular. The dynamic is one that haunted Bush, whose war in Iraq became so politically toxic that members of his own party abandoned him. The irony would be profound: Trump, who electrified Republican politics in part by repudiating the foreign policy legacy of the Bush family, could find himself ensnared by the very forces that helped undo that dynasty.

Trump believes the outcome will be different this time. In the past, such as in Venezuela, he has launched dramatic military actions and disengaged before they hardened into protracted wars. But this is a far bigger and riskier gamble, as he readily acknowledges, and the consequences are less predictable. As the conflict unfolds, the question that hangs over Washington is the same one that has haunted Commanders in Chief for generations. Presidents may choose how war begins. But they don't get to decide how it ends. —*With reporting by BRIAN BENNETT, LESLIE DICKSTEIN, and SIMMONE SHAH* □

REACTION

Inside Iran, jubilation quickly followed by apprehension

BY KAY ARMIN SERJOIE

In Tehran, the war found a contractor named Salman as he was toweling off. "I had just stepped out of the shower," he said, "getting prepared to go out, when the sound of low-flying aircraft startled me." Out his window, he saw two columns of black smoke above the compound of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. It had been hit in the first wave of U.S.-Israeli airstrikes.

When his death was confirmed, celebrations broke out across the country. "I feel a trembling inside me—a feeling I've never experienced in my life," said Mehdi, an engineer in the eastern city of Mashhad. "I think this may be the most important moment of my life. Someone has died who killed all my dreams."

"It's as if I'm dreaming," said Hassan, 41, a Tehran lawyer. "The worry that the regime might not fall even after his death keeps me from being fully happy. But I keep reminding myself that nothing was more terrifying than him being alive."

In a video message, President Donald Trump urged Iranians to stay inside while U.S. and Israeli forces carried out their assault. "When we are finished, take over your government," he said. "It will be yours to take." Hearing that, a 47-year-old Tehran businessman named Mohsen unpacked the car he was about to take his family away in. "When I heard Trump say stay in your homes, and take over the country when he's finished, I changed my mind. How can I go onto the streets if I'm not in Tehran?"

Before the week was out, however, events had tempered the initial enthusiasm of some. After the massacre of thousands of protesters in January, Sorour, who works as a clerk in Tehran, welcomed the assault as "the only way we can get rid of this regime." Then she found herself parked at a gas station

when an airstrike destroyed the building beside it. "As soon as I got out, I slipped. I looked down and saw I was standing in the spilled-out guts of a motorcyclist who had been filling up." She found bits of flesh and brain in her hair, and now showers compulsively. "The number one thing we need to do now," she says, "is fight the Americans and Israelis."

Others reached by TIME were alarmed by news reports that the CIA is arming militias in Iran's Kurdish minority, some of which harbor separatist aspirations. "For years the regime used this as a pretext to frighten people and to prevent them from rising up," notes Behrooz, an engineer in Tehran. Only during the nationwide solidarity of the 2022 protests over the death of Mahsa Amini did

people realize "that this is just regime propaganda," he says. "I can't imagine how dumb Trump and Netanyahu have to be to prove the Islamic Republic right."

For Heshmat, 42, a Tehran businessman, the threat was visceral. "The first thing these Kurdish militia would do is to start massacring



Ruins of police HQ in Tehran, March 2

Iran's Turks in Azerbaijan [province]," he said. "I'm originally from Tabriz; my family is still mostly there. We have to defend our family, and honestly I don't think it would be possible without getting hold of arms." Iran's borders include a host of other ethnic minorities as well. "If the Kurdish militia attack, it's not going to stop in the Kurdish regions," said Behrooz. "Soon the Turks will also rise up, then the Baloch, then the Arabs. Iran will disintegrate. I've been fighting the Islamic Republic for many years. I've been doing all I can to get rid of them, because that's the only way we can have a free Iran, a democratic Iran. But the prerequisite to all these things is that there is an Iran, that it exists." —*With reporting by Roxana Saberi and Fatemeh Jamalpour*

OBITUARY

A life of sanctimony and violence

BY KARL VICK

THE YEARS DID NOT MELLOW ALI Khamenei. Appointed Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran at age 50, he was the longest-serving ruler in the Middle East at the time of his death at 86 on Feb. 28, 2026. The Islamic Republic had been founded by his mentor, Ruhollah Khomeini, the Grand Ayatollah who, after the 1979 revolution, replaced a monarchy with a theocracy. But it was Khamenei who ruled for three-quarters of the republic's existence, transforming it into a de facto military dictatorship.

Sometimes clothes do make the man. Khamenei wore the turban of a senior Shi'ite cleric. But the pale plaid kerchief often looped around his neck was favored by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the praetorian force he elevated to near co-ruler status. By the early 2000s, the Guards had consolidated military, political, and economic power so extensively that a prominent Iranian economist remarked, with raised eyebrows, that the only comparison was to National Socialism in 1930s Germany.

If that arrangement solidified Khamenei's rule, it left little for Iran's 93 million people—and even less after the regime's pursuit of a nuclear weapon triggered intensifying international sanctions that sent the economy into free fall at the end of 2025. With hard-currency reserves depleted and inflation soaring, Iranians took to the streets en masse, chanting for the regime's downfall. On Khamenei's orders, security forces killed an estimated 30,000 people, according to senior health officials.

Over the following two months, President Trump opened negotiations over Iran's nuclear program while deploying two aircraft-carrier

groups and additional warplanes to the region, the largest U.S. military buildup there since the 2003 invasion of Iraq—an armada that was finally unleashed on Iran in the early hours of Feb. 28.

Iran's Supreme Leader was killed that morning in the opening barrage, as a joint U.S. and Israeli aerial assault targeted military and government sites across the country. Trump confirmed the death in a post on Truth Social, writing: "Khamenei, one of the most evil people in History, is dead."

For decades, Khamenei had sought to defy both the U.S.—"the Great Satan" leading a godless West—and Israel, while adhering to an overriding imperative: preserve the regime at all costs.

That imperative may explain why, in his later years, he spent extended periods underground. The bunker beneath his compound in central Tehran lies so deep that one visitor timed the elevator descent at more than five minutes. After June 2025, when Israel (for 12 days) and the U.S. (for one) launched strikes aimed at crippling Iran's nuclear program and decapitating the IRGC leadership, Khamenei curtailed public appearances. He stopped holding regular meetings with Iran's elected President and emerged only for defiant speeches in controlled environments.

"An aircraft carrier is a dangerous machine," he acknowledged in a Feb. 17 speech. "But even more dangerous than that is the weapon capable of sending it to the bottom of the sea."

THE SON OF A CLERIC, Khamenei grew up in modest circumstances in the eastern city of Mashhad. As a religious student, he gravitated toward Shi'ite thinkers who fused



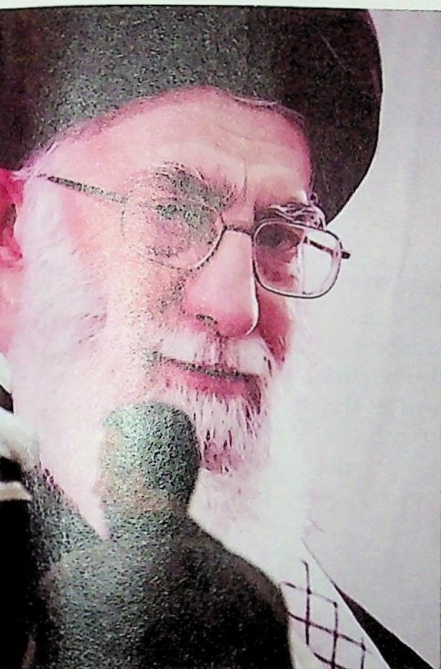
Iranians pass a poster of Khamenei after an event at Tehran's largest cemetery on Feb. 1

political absolutism with theology.

He became that unlikely figure: a militant cleric. During the 1960s and 1970s, he endured torture and solitary confinement in the prisons of the U.S.-backed Shah, whose overthrow became the central project of his youth.

After the Islamic revolution, as a key aide to Khomeini, he rose quickly. In 1981, as he was about to address a news conference, a bomb planted by a rival faction exploded beside him, leaving his dominant right hand effectively useless and him in chronic pain. Months later, when Iran's President Mohammad Ali Rajai and 99 others were killed in another bombing, Khamenei was chosen as his successor. In his inaugural address, he denounced "deviation, liberalism, and American-influenced leftists," previewing a tenure defined by ideological rigidity.

When Khomeini died in 1989,



shortly after accepting a cease-fire in the eight-year war with Iraq (to preserve the regime, he said) there was no clear successor. Khamenei, recently returned from a trip to North Korea and China, was only a junior cleric in a Shi'ite tradition noted for its adherence to hierarchy. But a battlefield promotion to Ayatollah was arranged, blending faith with politics in an exercise that critics said sullied both—even before Khamenei reinforced his position by earthly means, elevating the IRGC.

On state television, Khamenei projected an avuncular demeanor, his spectacles framing a sharp gaze. Visiting journalists were informed that his favorite novel was *Les Misérables* and that, in a sclerotic theocracy, his wristwatch signaled modern tastes. But when delivering Friday sermons, he rested his good hand on the barrel of a rifle.

In the 1990s, Iranian voters expressed their appetite for relief from the strictures of fundamentalist rule by voting overwhelmingly to elect reformist figures to the presidency and parliament, the parts of government that operate below the upper

tiers controlled by unelected clerics. Khamenei moved to contain it. Over time, newspapers were closed, dissidents jailed, and candidates kept off the ballot. At one point, Khamenei ordered the beating of his own brother, a cleric aligned with reform.

After the disputed 2009 presidential election, in which an apparent reformist victory was thwarted, the streets became the only outlet for dissent.

BY ALL ACCOUNTS, Khamenei lived modestly. Yet a 2013 Reuters investigation estimated that he controlled assets worth \$95 billion through a network of foundations and holdings. In a country where a government ministry reported in 2023 that more than half the population was malnourished, such figures fueled resentment. Bloomberg reported in January that his 56-year-old son Mojtaba, long viewed as a potential successor, owned more than \$100 million in luxury properties abroad.

The IRGC controls roughly 30% of Iran's economy, according to one of its founders, Mohsen Sazegara, now an exiled dissident. When a new airport opened outside Tehran in 2004, the Guards asserted control by rolling tanks onto its runways. Its members dominate major sectors of industry and oversee Iran's vast smuggling networks.

Over time, power in the Islamic Republic operated like that of a royal court. Khamenei married before the revolution, to a woman whose photograph and even first name were not made public until her own death, on March 2, which an official news

agency attributed to injuries sustained in the airstrike that also killed her husband. The marriages of their children and siblings were widely known, however, doubling as alliances into political factions, the clerical hierarchy, and the unelected institutions that ultimately answered to the Supreme Leader.

Karim Sadjadpour of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, who has written extensively on Khamenei, said he governed Iran “as a cause, not a country.” Historically known as Persia, the country has endured for more than 2,500 years. The cause, however, has been hurting.

Despite years of reports about his declining health, Khamenei did not publicly designate a successor. He was said to have regarded Qasem Soleimani, the charismatic IRGC general, as a son, however. Until President Trump ordered his killing in a 2020 drone strike, Soleimani was in charge of Iran's sprawling network of proxy forces, extending from Iraq to Syria, Yemen, Gaza, and Lebanon, where Hezbollah long held Israel in a stalemate.

But every node of what Khamenei called the “axis of resistance” was severely weakened after the Oct. 7, 2023, attack on Israel. The attack, which killed some 1,200 people, was carried out by Hamas, a Tehran client that expected help from others. That help came only fitfully, however, while Israel mounted a series of campaigns that—after decimating Hezbollah and the missile arsenal it threatened to unleash over the border if Israel dared to attack Tehran—left Iran exposed.

Also gone, by the time of Khamenei's death: enforcement of the Islamic Republic's strict dress code for women, regarded as a pillar of the regime; its last remaining alliance, with Venezuela; physical access to oil markets, cut off by a U.S. naval blockade; and, perhaps most consequentially, the country's air defenses, destroyed in the 12-day war.

The question now is whether the regime survives the death of its master. □

‘The problem we have with the United States is that they want to devour Iran.’

—ALI KHAMENEI,
IN HIS FINAL SPEECH

A New Side of Japan

- 1 **Hokkaido**
Park Hyatt Niseko Hanazono
Niseko
- 2 **Tochigi**
Nikko Kanaya Hotel
Nikko

For the intrepid traveler, Japan offers all the sights, experiences and flavors one could ask for. The country has seen several major tourism waves over the years, not least the nearly 32 million visitors who arrived in 2019 during the Rugby World Cup. Today, post-pandemic demand, favorable exchange rates and the global spread of pop culture via social media have combined to make Japan the “it” destination.

Around the world, group chats and tour itineraries are buzzing with plans for the Japan trip of a lifetime. Yet it’s easy to be drawn into the familiar circuit: the well-worn Tokyo–Kyoto–Osaka route, with stops for bowing deer and picture-perfect convenience stores. Step beyond these highlights, however, and a far richer Japan begins to

reveal itself. Mountainside hot springs await weary hikers after long days on the trail, while the country’s southern islands offer distinct cultures, customs and cuisines. Even in a metropolis like Tokyo, theme-park thrills, intimate concerto performances and dive-bar charm unfold every night of the week. There truly is something for everyone. So when planning your next journey, set aside the stereotypes and dig deeper.

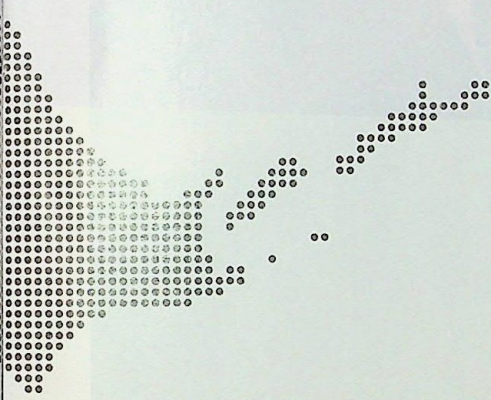
Explore the recommendations on this list and discover a new side of Japan.



Scan to find out more online



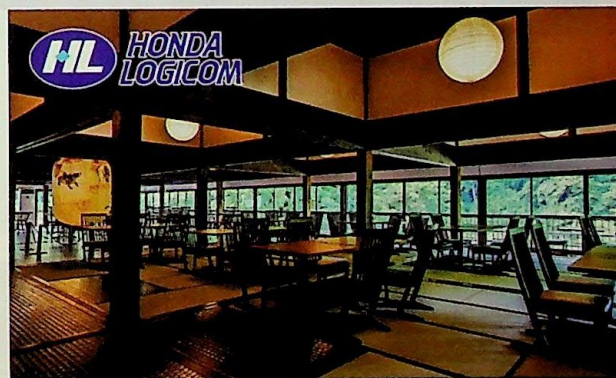
- ③ **Nara**
NEOLD
Yoshino
- ④ **Kanagawa**
SCAPES THE SUITE
Miura
- ⑤ **Hiroshima**
Hotel Granvia Hiroshima South Gate
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Fujikawaguchiko
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Osaka City
- ⑮ **Kumamoto**
Kurokawa Onsen
Minamioguni
- ⑯ **Okinawa**
Junglia
Kunigami



Honda Logicom

BRINGING TOGETHER THE BEST OF AICHI
Just a one-hour drive from Nagoya lies Korankei, a secluded mountain gorge famed for its autumn foliage. Believed to have been founded in 1634, when a local temple's head priest began planting maple trees along the Tomoe River, Korankei now welcomes hundreds of thousands of visitors each year drawn by its rich natural beauty. Set in a relaxed corner of the gorge, lodging and dining venue Ichinotani works to preserve and elevate local traditions. As a long-established *ryotei* restaurant, guests can enjoy their meals surrounded by traditional Japanese art, with the venue also hosting musicians for year-round festivals. Thoughtful details include painted *chochin* lanterns and wooden floors carved using the traditional *naguri* technique.

Central to Ichinotani is its locally sourced cuisine, with refined *ryotei* courses and more casual café-style options. Winter features game hot pots with home-made miso, while spring highlights local *ayu* sweetfish. Ichinotani also produces its own honey through its in-house beekeeping program, with flavors that change with the seasons and surrounding flowers, an effort made possible through close cooperation with the local community.



Centurion Hotels

THOUGHTFUL LUXURY

Omotenashi, roughly meaning “hospitality,” is one of the key draws for travelers planning a trip to Japan. Whether visiting a casual restaurant or a five-star resort hotel, the idea of thinking one step ahead of the customer—so they do not even need to ask—permeates the country’s hospitality sector. Hotelier Toshio Yanagawa sees *omotenashi* as a key factor for return visits to Japan, contributing to the current tourism boom of over 40 million visitors in 2025. With much of this concentrated in major cities, he believes regional areas still hold potential. “Until ten years ago, Japan didn’t place much emphasis on attracting tourists. I often wondered why, as the country has so many hidden tourism treasures,” he said. “Countless destinations remain largely untapped.”

That belief has shaped the growth of his brand, Centurion Hotels, now spanning the country from northern Hokkaido to the southern tip of Okinawa. With ambitions to open hotels in all of Japan’s 47 prefectures, Centurion aims to bring emerging tourism demand to lesser-known regions. Its newest property, located near Shimane’s Izumo Taisha, one of Japan’s oldest shrines, features a state-of-the-art sauna alongside culinary ingredients sourced from the local area. Traditional accommodation in Japan



Toshio Yanagawa
President & CEO

often centers on an *onsen*, a large hot spring bath filled with mineral-rich water. In recent years, however, sauna culture has taken off nationwide, both at naturally fed *onsen* and inner-city *sentō*. Online reviews now brim with tips on cold plunges, amenities and even seasonal scents. Reflecting this shift, many Centurion properties have invested heavily in expanding their sauna offerings, complete with daily *auguss* services. Believed to have originated in



Centurion Hakone Bettei features a large forestside hot spring bath.

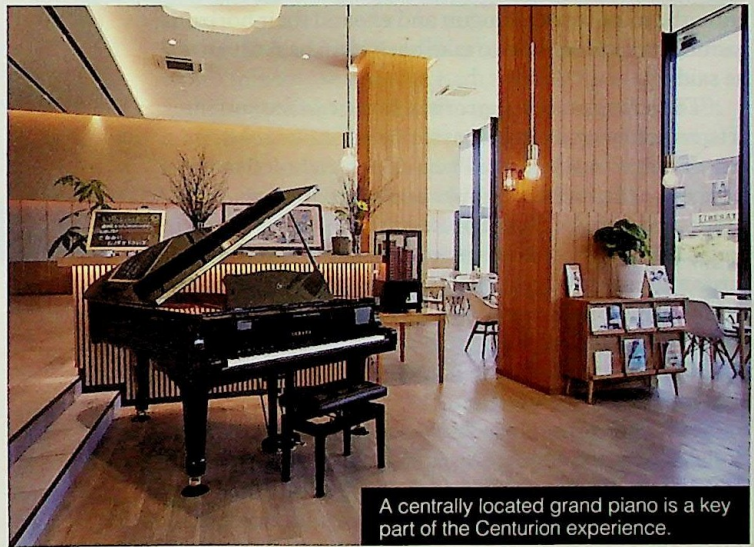
Germany, the aufguss ritual has taken Japan's sauna scene by storm. A sauna master pours scented oils and water onto heated stones, then fans the steam toward participants to encourage sweating and relaxation. The experience is often accompanied by music, from ambient tracks to J-rock, adding a distinctly Japanese touch. After hydrating, guests cool off in cold baths before resting in dedicated relaxation areas. Yanagawa notes that the service is "extremely popular," not only with hotel guests but also with wellness seekers looking for a few peaceful hours away from busy city life.

Variety is also central to the Centurion experience, with each room featuring furniture and facilities designed to spark curiosity. From traditional *shoji* paper dividers and curated artwork to rooms with kitchens and mezzanine staircases for larger groups, every space offers a distinct stay while maintaining consistent quality. Moving away from the one-size-fits-all approach of many large international chains is key to the brand's strategy. "Although we are still a small company, we aim to become number one in Japan by focusing on what makes us unique," Yanagawa said.

That sense of individuality is set from the moment guests arrive. Each Centurion lobby features a grand piano, creating a signature ambience across properties, whether in major cities or at their mountainous Hakone retreat. "Guests are free to play at any time, and we also invite professional musicians to perform concerts every Saturday," Yanagawa explained. Design-wise, Centurion embraces the *wayo secchu* approach, a blend of Japanese and Western influences popularized in luxury spaces during the Meiji era (1868–1912). Think 1920s Americana paired with Japanese wood-block prints, or traditional hot pot dishes enjoyed alongside European wines. The result is a refined mix that appeals to both local and international guests, with warm service as the common thread. "Smiles, good service and a warm greeting have always been our motto," said Yanagawa. As a veteran of the hospitality field, Yanagawa is confident that Centurion can compete for overseas tourists seeking a more authentic stay in Japan. "We believe it is important to tailor each facility to its location," he said. "Based on my experience in this industry, I know we can compete through wholehearted service."



The Centurion Sauna Rest & Stay Sapporo with dual heaters from makers METOS and Harvia.



A centrally located grand piano is a key part of the Centurion experience.



Rooms are designed with a *wayo secchu* mix of Japanese and Western influences.

NEOLD

WELLNESS WITH SHOGUN SPIRIT

The “shogun spirit” encompasses the concept of *bushido*—cultivated over 500 years ago by Japan’s warrior elite as a way of life. Embodying principles such as determination, physical discipline and strategic wisdom, this code of conduct is as relevant today as it was then—particularly for the modern business leader.

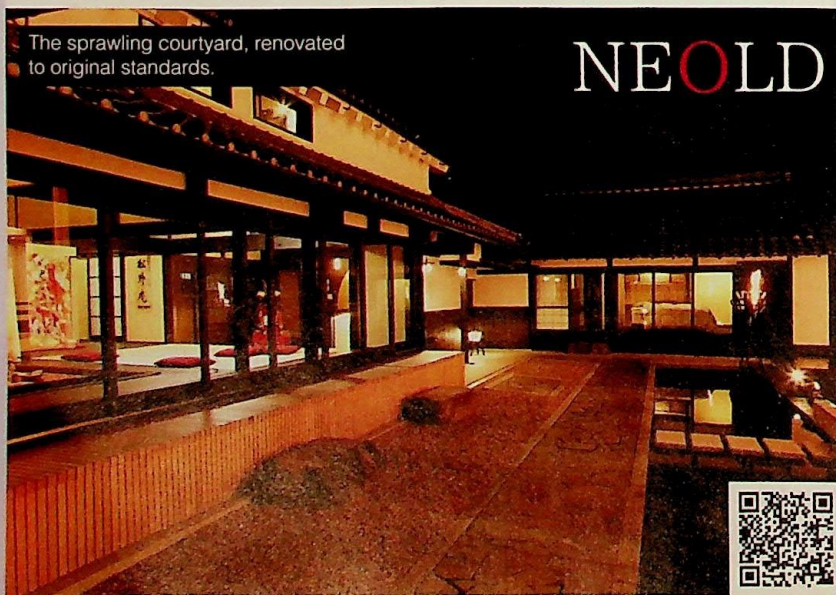
Set in Yoshino, Nara Prefecture, a UNESCO World Heritage site and location of over 30,000 sakura trees, NEOLD Private House is a one-of-a-kind facility for cultivating this shogun mindset. Combining a guesthouse, retreat and theater stage, NEOLD provides a space for global leaders to find inspiration in the same manner as great figures of the past. Founder of the space, Toshihide Nonaka, sees strong parallels between today’s professionals and the shoguns of the past—this served as initial inspiration. “Through our original programs, guests will enter the mindset of a shogun and expand their horizons, gaining intangible skills to take back into the real world,” he said.

The shoguns were patrons of both warfare and the arts, maintaining a retainer system not unlike modern-day artist residencies. Their circles included master chefs, calligraphers, monks and martial artists, all supported with the aim of preserving and elevating their crafts. NEOLD’s wellness plans take key inspiration from this, gathering top-level international experts across multiple disciplines. Guests at NEOLD learn to hone their mental and physical selves, to reach the next stage of their potential. When Nonaka first acquired the historic property, as part of its renovation, he made a decision to install a stage for performances of *Noh*, the centuries-old traditional dance-drama performed with masks. Inspired by the history of Japan’s oldest performing art and a desire to share deeper shogun culture with a wider audience, Non-



Guests learn about the 14th century practice of *Noh*.

aka spent months consulting with master craftspeople across Japan for its construction. This cohort included Taichiro Nomura, the highly revered performer of *Noh* and *Kyogen* (Japanese comic theater) who is part of the wider *Mansaku no Kai* school. Other features of NEOLD seek to integrate shogun wellness routines. A centerpiece is the *irori*, a sunken charcoal fireplace, offering a communal meeting point with a direct view of the *Noh* stage outside. Meanwhile, the stars over Yoshino’s clear skies are visible from the outdoor *rotenburo*, an open-air hot spring bath. Each aspect is intended to provoke curiosity and reflection for guests. Nonaka is confident that NEOLD can preserve not only the legacy of the local area, but also the spirit of shogun rulers. “I see business leaders occupying a similar position,” he said. “They can benefit from practices such as the tea ceremony—activities that contribute to mental discipline. We hope visitors can take what they learn at NEOLD with them around the world.”



The sprawling courtyard, renovated to original standards.

NEOLD

Ikenotaira Hotel & Resorts

AN EXPERIENCE LIKE NO OTHER

Nestled between the western foothills of Mount Tatehina and the Yatsugatake range, Lake Shirakaba is a picturesque example of what Nagano Prefecture has to offer. Sitting on a plateau more than 4,600 feet above sea level, the area provides year-round opportunities for recreation, from golf and cycling to winter sports. In this serene mountain environment, visitors can choose to fill their days with activity, or simply do nothing at all. While many properties in the area lean toward the rustic, Ikenotaira Hotel & Resorts brings a touch of refined elegance, particularly appealing to families seeking a comfortable stay. Recognized annually as one of the country's leading lakeside resorts, Ikenotaira offers year-round accommodation and activities for guests seeking time away from the commotion of Japan's major cities.

Run by Yoshihiro Yajima, grandson of the resort's founder, Ikenotaira's growth has long been intertwined with that of the surrounding area. For more than 80 years, the Yajima family has emphasized sustainable development, from digging wells to supporting local mountaineering initiatives. "Because of our remote location, encouraging guests to stay for more than two nights and fully enjoy the property was a challenge," Yajima said. "Having built the resort from the ground up, we invested in ski slopes, amusement facilities and trained guides who can take guests into the surrounding mountains. Our approach is closer to community building than conventional resort development."

No stay at a Japanese mountain retreat would be complete without a visit to an *onsen* hot



Ikenotaira provides the perfect blend of modern elegance with relaxed lakeside charm.

spring. At Ikenotaira, tradition meets modern comfort with a mixed-use outdoor bath suitable for couples and families, alongside a more traditional indoor bath crafted from hinoki cypress wood. A standout feature is the sauna, which offers panoramic views of the lake. Yajima believes that these wellness facilities are a major draw. "Nagano Prefecture is known for having one of the longest life expectancies in the country, thanks to a combination of lifestyle, diet and strong community ties," he said.

Looking ahead, Yajima plans to deepen these efforts through collaboration with local partners. "In cooperation with Matsumoto University, we are developing healthcare initiatives and offering personalized wellness services for guests," he said. "Our approach goes beyond conventional hospitality. We hope to share our way of life with those who visit."




Ikenotaira
Hotel & Resorts

Tokyo Metropolitan Park Association

DO YOU KNOW THE “REAL” TOKYO?

A walk through Tokyo’s Hama-rikyu Gardens offers a rare escape from the city’s frantic bustle. Wandering past the historic teahouse and ponds, whether during spring’s cherry blossoms or autumn’s warm foliage, it is easy to forget you are standing in the heart of one of the world’s largest metropolises. The year-round upkeep of Hama-rikyu, along with many of Tokyo’s finest green spaces—including Komazawa Olympic Park and Jindai Botanical Gardens in the city’s western suburbs—is handled by the Tokyo Metropolitan Park Association (TMPA).

Chairperson Toshiki Yaoka traces the roots of the city’s green spaces to the postwar period, around the time the association was established in 1954. “We place great importance on maintaining gardens in the best possible condition, while also showcasing their stories and even the trees themselves. Each stone, pond and bridge has its own symbolic meaning dating back to the Edo period,” he said. “We also work to create nighttime experiences by illuminating gardens, cherry blossoms and autumn foliage, encouraging more people to visit in the evenings.”

TMPA now manages 65 facili-

ties across Tokyo. In 2024, its parks and gardens welcomed over 60 million visitors, highlighting the scale of its operations and the need for constant care. Beyond preservation, TMPA also invests in the future of the city’s greenery. “Across Tokyo, we contribute to public services that improve urban greening. These activities include raising public awareness and training human resources in order to enrich greenery across Tokyo. We also hold events that allow visitors to better acquaint themselves with nature, all while communicating the importance of the urban greenery,” said Yaoka.

Working to merge the physical and digital realms, TMPA has launched an app that allows visitors to view scenes from historic gardens of the past, as well as a “digital stamp rally” to showcase new charms of parks and gardens. On the waterfront, one of TMPA’s key responsibilities is to provide water bus services, running from the popular temple district of Asakusa to the Odaiba entertainment area, along Tokyo’s scenic Sumida River. “The water buses also provide vital transportation in times of disaster,” said Yaoka. “Tokyo offers far more than its most familiar sights. Even if you have visited many times in the past, Tokyo still has a world of attractions to discover.”



Toshiki Yaoka
Chairperson

TOKYO’S SEASONAL FLOWERS AND EVENTS

Plum Blossoms: The “spring messengers” bloom with their elegant fragrance towards the end of winter.

Recommended: Koishikawa Korakuen Gardens, Shiba Park, Hama-rikyu Gardens, Mukojima-Hyakkaen Gardens.

Events: Plum Blossom Festival, February 7th–March 1st (Koishikawa Korakuen Gardens, Mukojima-Hyakkaen Gardens), February 10th–March 1st (Jindai Botanical Gardens).

Cherry Blossoms: World-famous sakura where many go for hanami picnics.

Recommended: Yoyogi Park, Koganei Park, Rikugien Gardens.

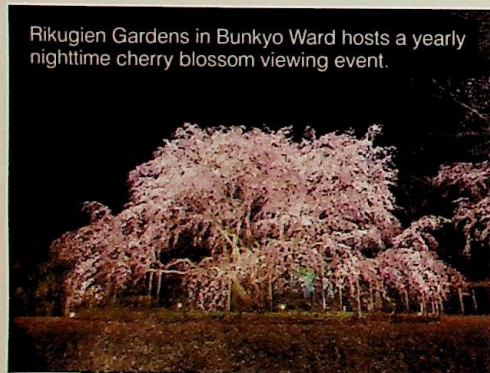
Events: Nighttime Cherry Blossom Viewing, mid-to-late March (Rikugien Gardens).

Spring Roses: While they bloom twice a year, the spring varieties are often larger and more vibrant. Best to see from April until June.

Recommended: Kyu-Furukawa Gardens, Jindai Botanical Gardens, Yoyogi Park.

Events: Rose Festival (Kyu-Furukawa Gardens, Jindai Botanical Gardens).

*Planned dates for 2026.



Rikugien Gardens in Bunkyo Ward hosts a yearly nighttime cherry blossom viewing event.



Hama-rikyu Gardens offers a pleasant retreat in the center of Tokyo.



Scan to learn more



公益財団法人 東京都公園協会
Tokyo Metropolitan Park Association

Architects of Experience

With Japan aiming for over 60 million international visitors by 2030, industry leaders share their outlook.

James Park, General Manager, Global Travel Management Department, Rakuten Travel:

“The government is enhancing the appeal of accommodation and increasing flight capacity. We at Rakuten Travel have been offering tailored information that promotes Japan as a global travel-friendly destination.”

Shin Katsumata, Chairman of Hakone Town Tourism Association:

“Hakone has been a tourism destination for the last 150 years, always adapting to travelers’ needs. Rather than relying on top-down initiatives, we involve all actors in the community, ensuring that each participates with a shared commitment to finding solutions.”

Yoshiro Shimoji, Chairman and Representative of Okinawa Tourism DX Promotion Organization:

“Okinawa is famous as a beach resort area with strong cultural resources. MICE tourism is becoming more prominent too. Being the bridge from Japan to the rest of Asia, we see ourselves as for both the domestic and overseas tourism markets and are currently still evolving.”

Positive dream persons Inc.

MAKING LIFETIME MEMORIES

From a first date to the honeymoon, from birthdays to anniversary trips, choosing the right location for life’s memorable moments is a critical decision.

Tokyo-based Positive Dream Persons (PDP) is leading a custom-made approach to creating these experiences, offering everything from bespoke properties to tailored wedding planning. “We focus on providing unique, traditional venues that can accommodate diverse needs,” said Takamasa Sugimoto, the company’s founder. “Our experiences are often specifically designed for overseas visitors seeking something special during their stay in Japan.” PDP is also behind the refined SCAPES THE SUITE development in the beachfront town of Hayama, which Sugimoto describes as “designed for maximum relaxation and immersion in nature.” He believes that intimate, personalized experiences represent the future as Japan’s tourism industry continues to evolve.



Takamasa Sugimoto
Founder

Positive dream persons

Tokyo Dome City

ROLLERCOASTERS AND RELAXATION, ALL IN THE CENTER OF TOKYO

Planning to catch a top-tier baseball game and a performance on a global concert tour in the same place is no small feat. Add riding an 80-meter-high rollercoaster to that itinerary, and the challenge only grows. Tokyo Dome City, a sprawling entertainment complex in the heart of Tokyo, brings all of this together in one place. Home to a wide range of facilities designed to satisfy all visitors, the site combines amusement rides, dining and shopping with a whole suite of accommodation and wellness venues, including the “Spa LaQua” hot spring—perfect for unwinding after a full day of excitement.

With themed events running throughout the year, Tokyo Dome City offers a carefully curated, all-in-one urban escape. Tsutomu Nagaoka, president of Tokyo Dome Corporation, sees closer engagement with the city’s thriving tech sector as key to the complex’s future. “By integrating digital entertainment technologies such as XR (Extended Reality), we aim to create new experiences where the real world and digital visuals seamlessly merge. We have already unveiled several new XR activities, including a Godzilla-themed attraction,” says Nagaoka.



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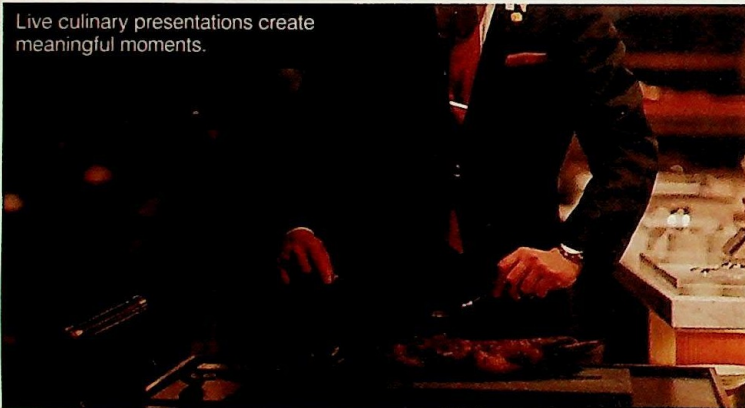
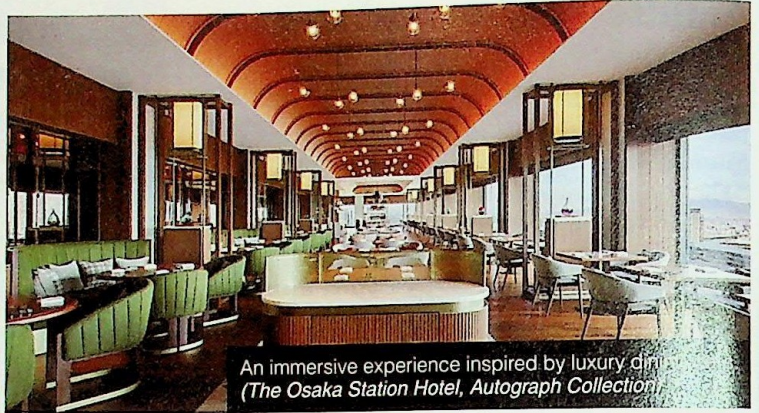


JR-West Hotels

CELEBRATING THE BEST OF THE WEST

As a country blessed with dramatic coastlines, soaring mountain ranges and more than 30 national parks, Japan offers endless discoveries for curious travelers. Japan's western region, stretching from snow-laden Hokuriku through the ancient capitals of Nara and Kyoto to the northern reaches of Kyushu, is home to a unique blend of cultures, cuisines and local dialects. Thanks to a highly developed transport network, this captivating area is easily accessible for independent exploration.

The driving force behind much of the region's transport infrastructure development has been JR-West (West Japan Railway Company). With its *machizukuri* value-creation concept, JR-West Hotels has been elevating the tourism appeal of the area through a wide portfolio of hotel brands. "We believe diversity will be key for tourism going forward," says President Eiji Tsubone. "Hotels will increas-

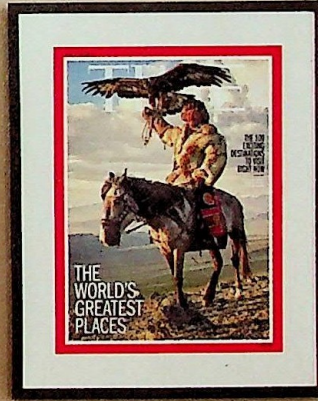
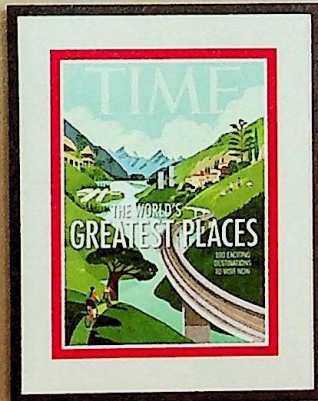
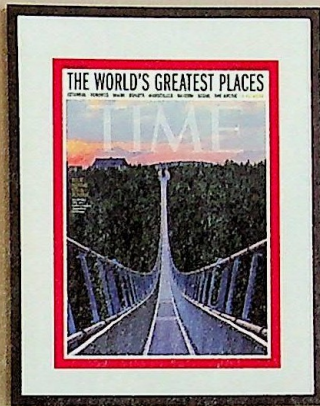


ingly be selected based on individual interests and occasions. We aim to collaborate with JR West on travel throughout this region, allowing visitors to engage with local culture more deeply."

JR-West Hotels places great emphasis on creating "extraordinary moments," allowing guests to step outside their everyday lives. Strong relationships with local stakeholders ensure each location tells a story through its décor and ingredients. "For example, at our Hotel Granvia Hiroshima South Gate, guests can enjoy local conger eel from Miyajima, famous for its red torii gate, and even taste local sake first thing in the morning," says Tsubone. "In areas such as Kyoto and Toyama, we deepen engagement with local communities and create experiences that go beyond a traditional stay."

With Japan's tourism sector continuing to grow and diversify, JR-West Hotels is committed to putting more lesser-known destinations on the map, revitalizing local economies and showcasing the wonder that western Japan has to offer.

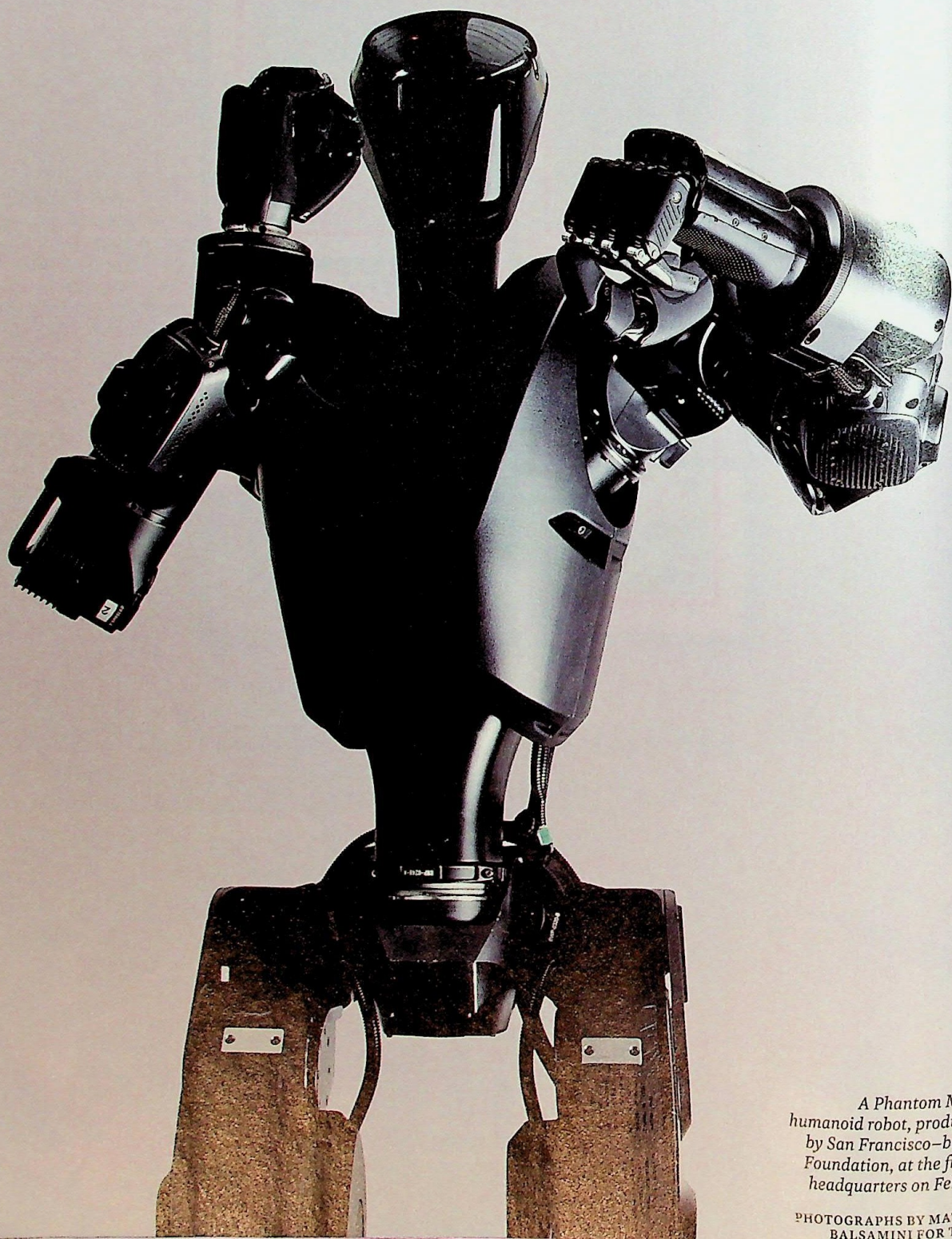
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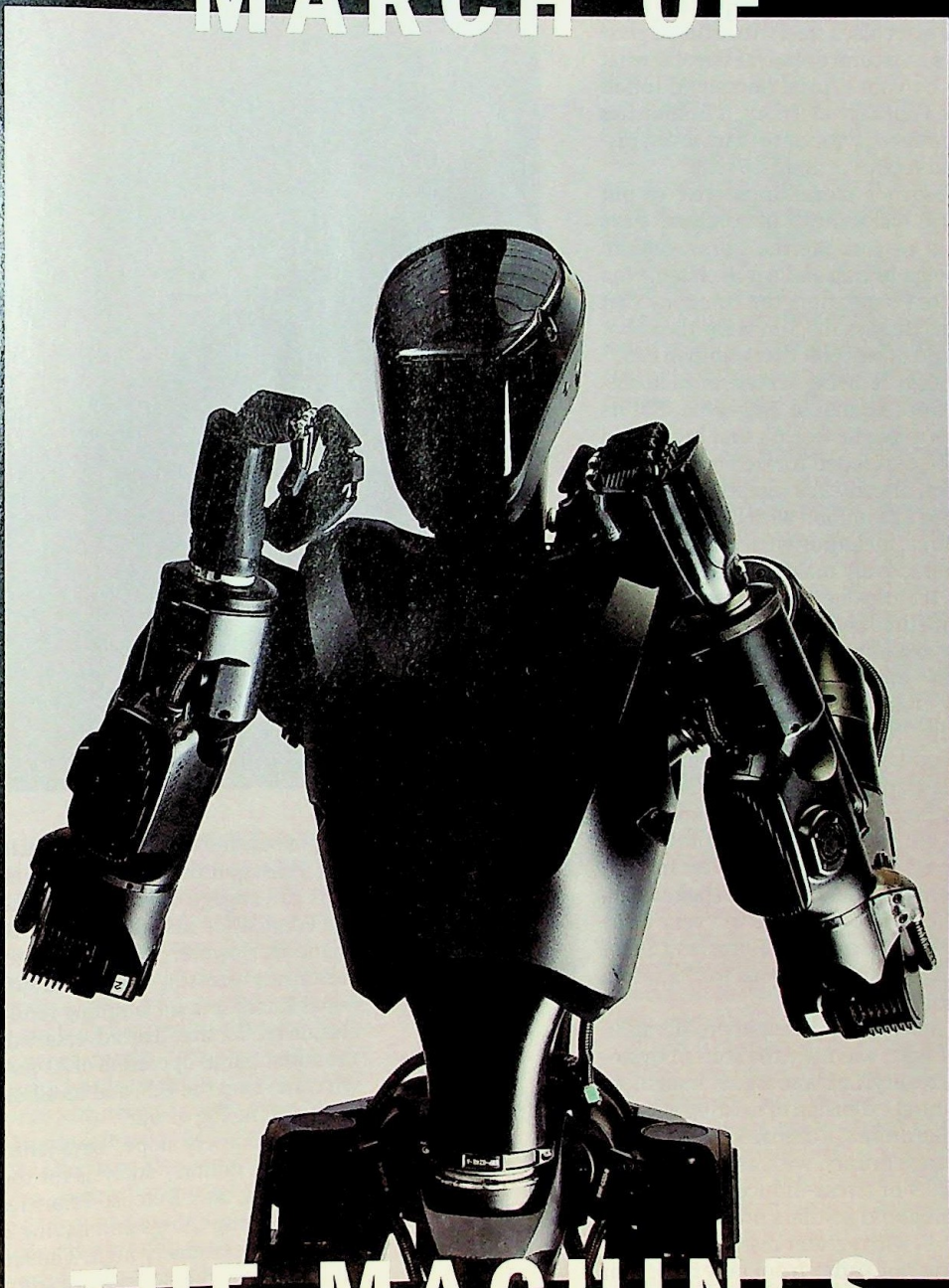


A Phantom MK-1 humanoid robot, produced by San Francisco-based Foundation, at the firm's headquarters on Feb. 25

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MATTIA BALSAMINI FOR TIME

TECHNOLOGY

MARCH OF



THE MACHINES

HOW HUMANOID ROBOTS

COULD TRANSFORM MODERN WARFARE

BY CHARLIE CAMPBELL/SAN FRANCISCO

THE PHANTOM MK-1 LOOKS THE PART OF AN AI soldier. Encased in jet black steel with a tinted glass visor, it conjures a visceral dread far beyond what may be evoked by your typical humanoid robot. And on this late February morning, it brandishes assorted high-powered weaponry: a revolver, pistol, shotgun, and replica of an M-16 rifle.

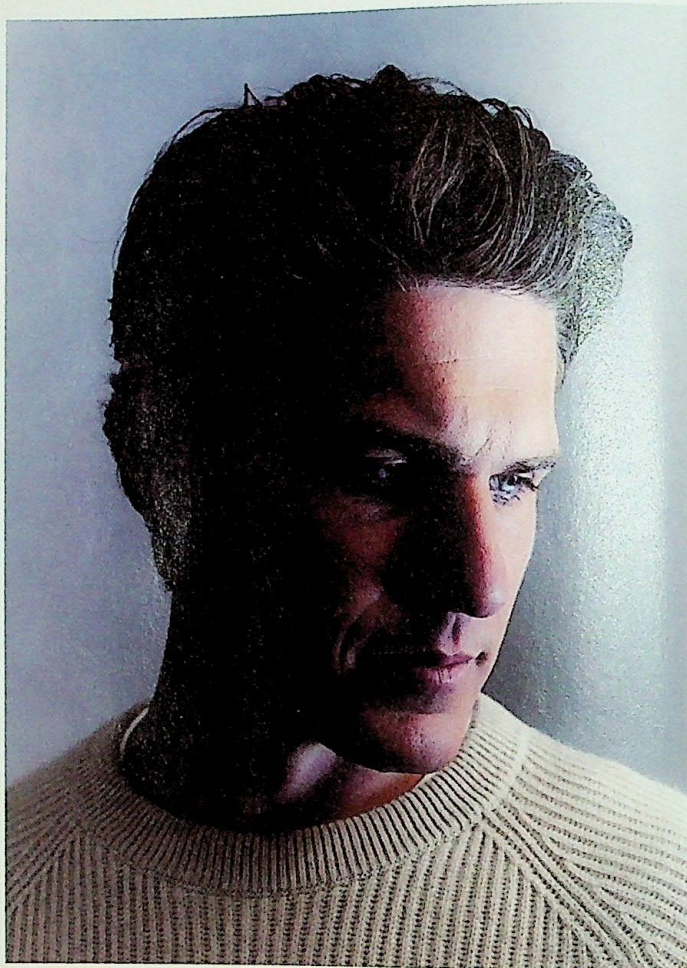
“We think there’s a moral imperative to put these robots into war instead of soldiers,” says Mike LeBlanc, a 14-year Marine Corps veteran with multiple tours of Iraq and Afghanistan, who is a co-founder of Foundation, the company that makes Phantom. He says the aim is for the robot to wield “any kind of weapon that a human can.”

Today, Phantom is being tested in factories and dockyards from Atlanta to Singapore. But its headline claim is to be the world’s first humanoid robot specifically developed for defense applications. Foundation already has research contracts worth a combined \$24 million with the U.S. Army, Navy, and Air Force, including what’s known as an SBIR Phase 3, effectively making it an approved military vendor. It’s also due to begin tests with the Marine Corps “methods of entry” course, training Phantoms to put explosives on doors to help troops breach sites more safely.

In February, two Phantoms were sent to Ukraine—initially for frontline-reconnaissance support. But Foundation is also preparing Phantoms for potential deployment in combat scenarios for the Pentagon, which “continues to explore the development of militarized humanoid prototypes designed to operate alongside war fighters in complex, high-risk environments,” says a spokesman. LeBlanc says the company is also in “very close contact” with the Department of Homeland Security about possible patrol functions for Phantom along the U.S. southern border.

In just a few short years, the rapid proliferation of AI has turned what was once the stuff of dystopian sci-fi into a reality. LeBlanc argues humanoid soldiers are a natural extension of existing autonomous systems like drones. Compared with risking the lives of teenage grunts, with all the political backlash and risks of stress-induced war crimes and trauma, humanoid soldiers offer a more resilient alternative, with greater restraint and precision. Robots do not suffer from fatigue or fear and can operate continuously in extreme conditions while immune from radiation, chemicals, or biological agents. Moreover, LeBlanc believes that giant armies of humanoid robots will eventually nullify each side’s tactical advantage in any conflict much like nuclear deterrents—exponentially decreasing escalation risks.

The counterargument is, however, chilling: that humanoid soldiers lower political and ethical barriers to initiating conflict, blur responsibility for



▲
Mike LeBlanc,
co-founder of
Foundation and
a 14-year Marine
Corps veteran

any abuses, and further dehumanize warfare. Current Pentagon protocols decree automated systems can engage only with a human green light, and Foundation insists that is also its intention for Phantom. However, AI-powered drones in Ukraine are already assessing targets and autonomously firing as Russian radio jamming renders remote operation ineffective. If an adversary decides to allow the autonomous operation of AI-powered soldiers, what’s to stop the U.S. and its allies from reciprocating in the fog of war?

“It’s a slippery slope,” says Jennifer Kavanagh, director of military analysis for the Washington-based think tank Defense Priorities. “The appeal of automating things and having humans out of the loop is extremely high. The lack of transparency between the two sides of any conflict creates additional concerns.”

Moreover, set against a drastic militarization of American society—with heavily armed ICE officers swarming U.S. cities, the National Guard deployed to six states last year, and local police equipped with armored vehicles left over from the Forever Wars—the specter of AI-powered soldiers with opaque mission directives and chains of command has civil-liberty alarm bells clanging. Then add in the well-documented algorithmic biases