APRIL 6, 2026

TIME

The War for AI

What the fight between Anthropic and the Pentagon means for the future

by HARRY BOOTH AND BILLY PERRIGO

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REACH FOR THE CROWN

SUPPORTING THOSE WHO LEAD BY EXAMPLE

THE OYSTER PERPETUAL

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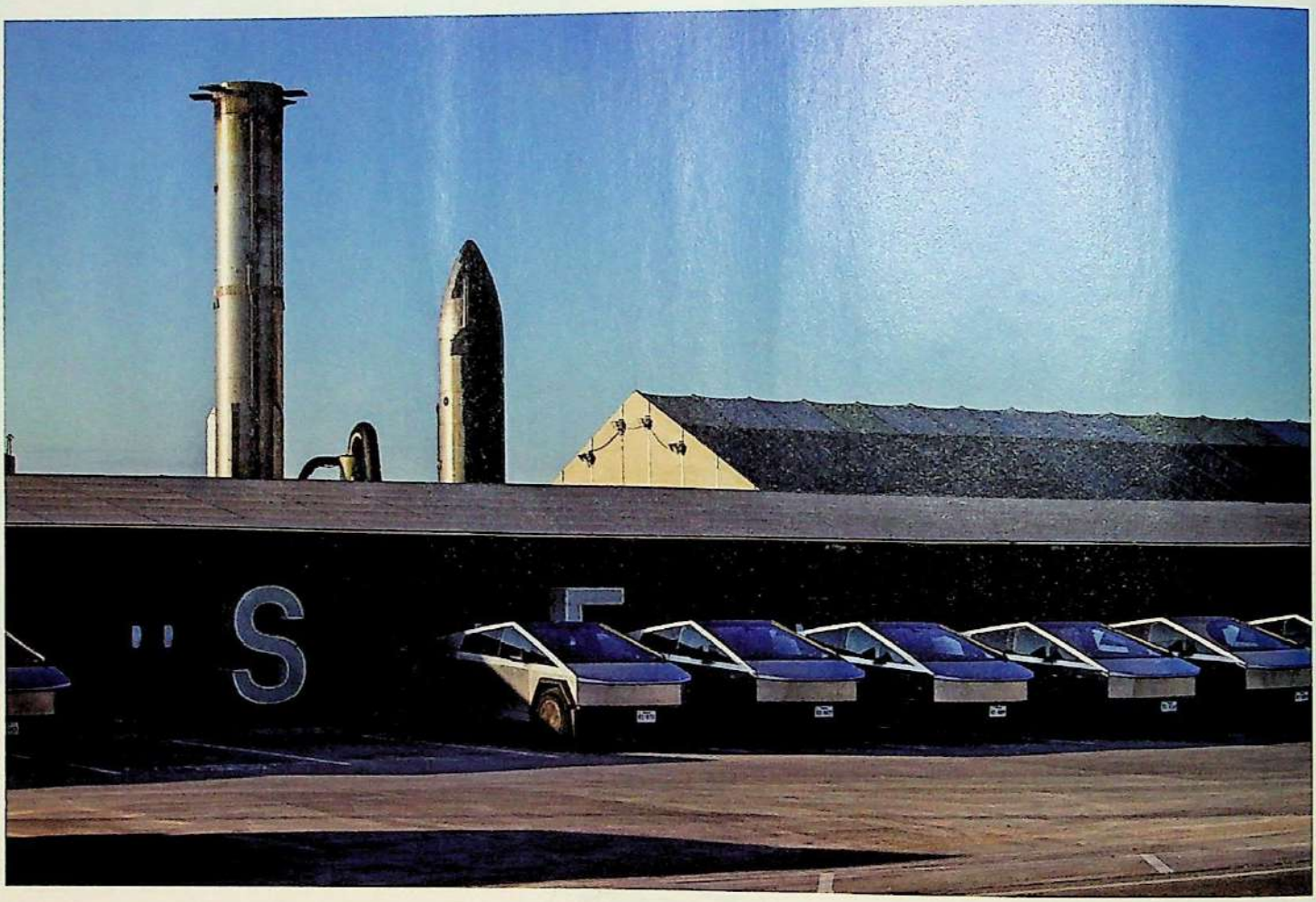
TIME
VOL. 207, NOS. 11–12 | 2026



^ *SpaceX headquarters in Starbase, Texas, on Feb. 13*

Photograph by Paolo Verzone for TIME

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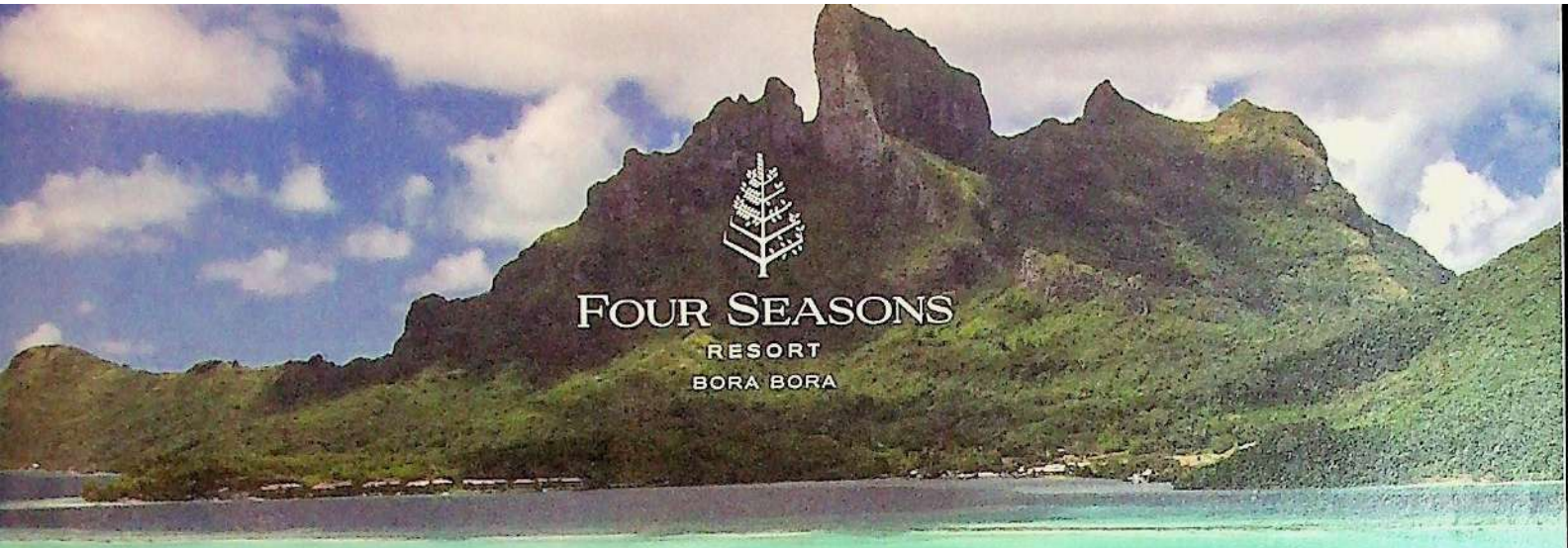
TIME Asia is published twice a month (except monthly in January and August) by TIME Magazine Singapore Pte. Ltd. **PRINT SUBSCRIPTIONS:** Visit **time.com/subscribe. SUBSCRIBERS:** If the postal services alert us that your magazine is undeliverable, we have no further obligation unless we receive a corrected address within two years. **CUSTOMER SERVICE AND SUBSCRIPTIONS:** For 24/7 service, or to learn more about special offers online, please visit **www.time.com/ApacCS.** You may also email our Customer Services Center at **time@timeasiasubs.com** or call (61) 2 8880 5811. **ADVERTISING:** For information and rates visit: **timemediakit.com.** TIME Asia is edited and printed in Singapore. Singapore MDDI (P) 038/08/2024. Malaysia KKDN permit no. PPS 676/03/2013(022933).



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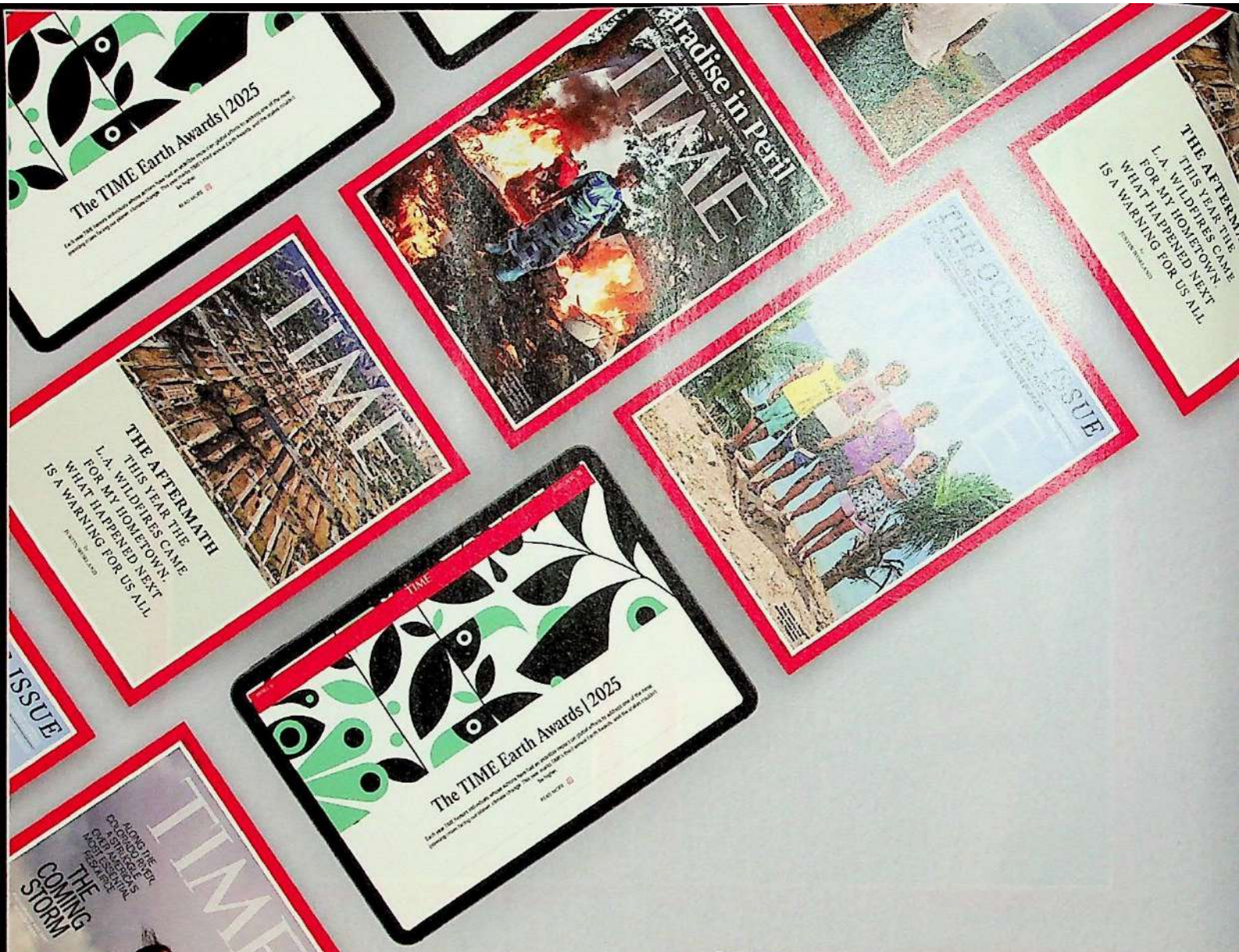

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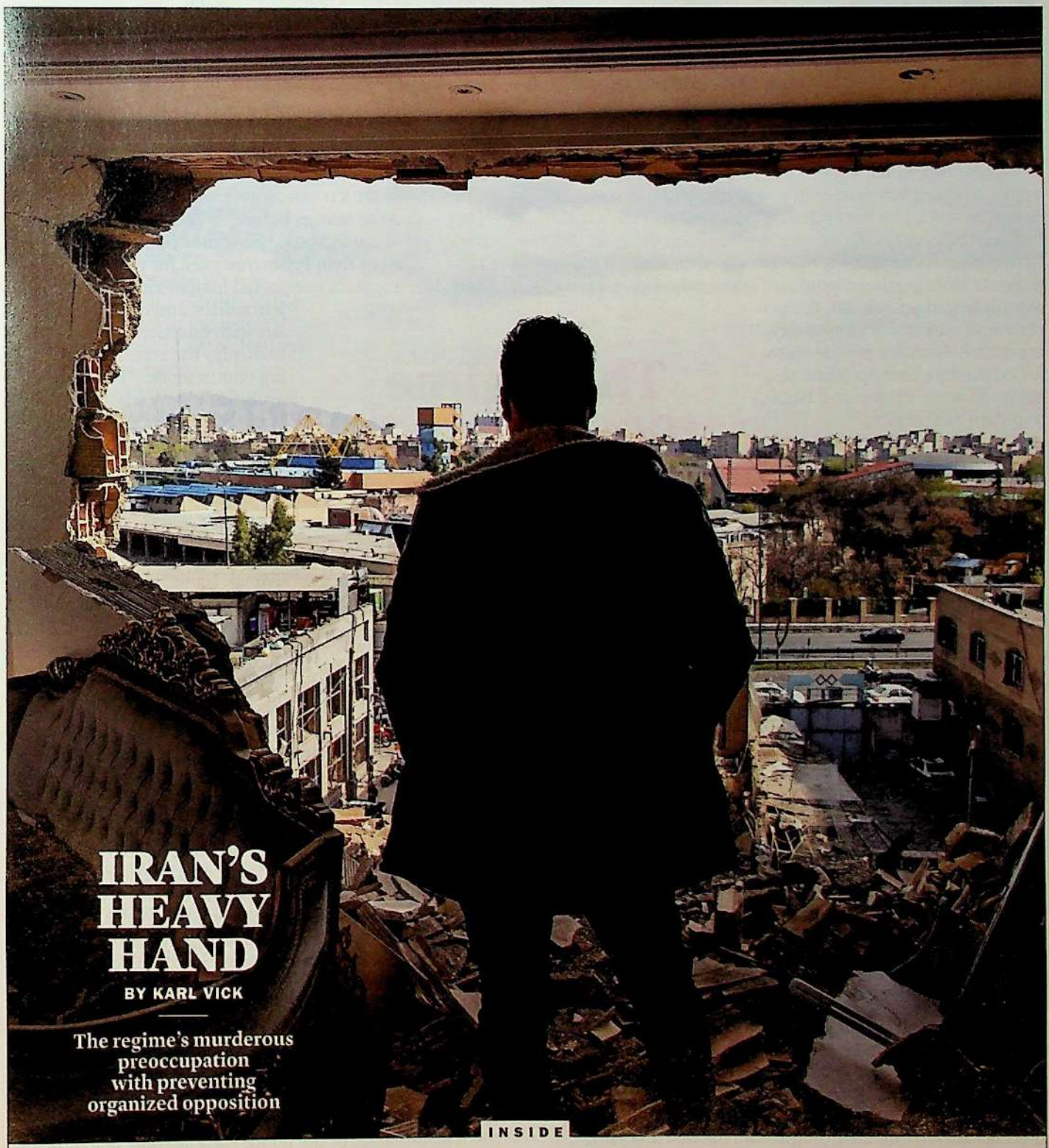
The Brief



IRAN'S HEAVY HAND

BY KARL VICK

The regime's murderous preoccupation with preventing organized opposition

INSIDE

UKRAINE'S EXPERIENCE STOPPING IRAN'S DRONES

EXPERTS ASSESS THE RISK OF TERROR ATTACKS

HIGH GAS PRICES COULD COST REPUBLICANS THE HOUSE

PHOTOGRAPH BY MAJID SAEEDI

ON DAY ONE, PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP urged the "great proud people of Iran" to "take over your government." Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu echoed the call in Persian: "Do not let this opportunity slip away."

Inside Iran, the response has been: How? Over decades, the Islamic Republic built a system designed not just to crush dissent, but to prevent it from cohering in the first place. Surveillance is pervasive, opposition networks are infiltrated, and organizers "disappear."

"They have killed a lot of people," says Roya Boroumand, who with her sister founded the Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran, a Washington, D.C., nonprofit tallying the regime's victims. "They have focused their energy on preventing their opponents from getting organized." When the U.S.-Israeli assault began on Feb. 28, the center's staff was still trying to determine how many people were killed the last time Iranians attempted what Trump and Netanyahu are now urging.

In January, throngs took to the streets armed only with the belief that sheer numbers could topple the regime. If that sounds naively hopeful, it once worked. In 1979, millions of Iranians filled the streets as part of the Islamic Revolution that culminated in the overthrow of the Pahlavi monarchy. But those protests were mounted by organized groups, and the national army had declared it would no longer fire on its own people.

The faction of activists and clerics that ultimately took power promptly established a regime committed to preventing such mobilization from ever happening again. "The state was very aware of how the Shah fell," Boroumand notes. "They have made sure that if they have a legitimacy problem, there is no one to fill that vacuum."

First there was hunting. "Back in the '80s and '90s there were a lot of assassinations," explains Mehdi Yahyanejad, an Iranian activist in the U.S. "They removed important figures outside Iran." Shapour Bakhtiar, a former Prime Minister who attempted to organize opposition in exile, was stabbed to death in Paris in 1991. A regime hit squad also killed an associate of his, Abdorrahman Boroumand, whose daughters would go on to count assassinations abroad. The current tally, 457, does not include failed attempts like the one involving a Hell's Angels member who, after being hired in 2023 to kill an Iranian exile in Maryland, was arrested before he could fulfill a vow to "erase his head from his torso." Nor does it count the three attempts to kill antiregime activist Masih Alinejad. Boroumand once recalled how, after a hit man was photographed on the porch of Alinejad's Brooklyn home, "people were crying in, like, Canada, saying, 'We are safe nowhere.'"

Inside Iran, the warnings are even clearer. In the "chain murders" of the 1990s, dissident intellectuals were killed by ax, staged robbery, poison, and slit throats. In 1996, intelligence agents attempted to send a bus of writers over a cliff; a passenger grabbed the emergency brake after the driver leaped from the vehicle.

IN TIME, OVERT KILLINGS gave way to imprisonment. "They killed the writers before," a Tehran movie-theater manager told me in 2004. "Now they put them in prison." In the section of Evin Prison reserved for political prisoners, interrogators pummeled human-rights advocates, journalists, and union activists with questions calculated to display the state's seeming omniscience. "They knew everything—my whole life," one of my translators explained after emerging from interrogation. When agents arrive to make an arrest, they seize phones and computers along with the suspect. "If they just held you for a week, you would be in awe," says Siamak Namazi, a dual Iranian-U.S. citizen who spent eight years in Evin. Ordinary Iranians got the message as well. Attend a protest, and days later a text message arrives: "Is it really worth it?"

The regime 'focused their energy on preventing opponents from getting organized.'

—ROYA BOROUMAND, DAUGHTER OF ASSASSINATED ACTIVIST

The regime's own paranoia is not entirely unfounded. After President George W. Bush launched a program to promote democracy in Iran, a handful of activists were invited to workshops in nearby Dubai. Three returned early to Tehran after realizing they were being taught to foment the kind of grassroots revolution that in the early 2000s toppled dictatorships in Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan—exactly what the regime was on the lookout for. Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, a student of the downfall of the Soviet Union, was intent on undercutting the building blocks of democratic civil society, from teachers' unions to an independent press. He also, after the stolen 2009 presidential election signaled that the system was closed to reform, expanded security forces, including the head-cracking Basij militia.

"The tentacles of the police state are now reaching into the far corners of the country," says Houchang Chehabi, professor emeritus of international relations at Boston University. "I know people from rural areas of Iran who said, you know, in our village, we never had a presence

The Brief includes reporting by Chantelle Lee

of the government. We had a village mayor, and that was it. And now, two kilometers from the village, we have a little Basij base."

As it stands, the most organized opposition groups may be factions that competed for power in 1979.

Reza Pahlavi, eldest son of the overthrown Shah, has lived in exile in the U.S. for almost his entire life but retains a presence in Iranian households via satellite television. His name is sometimes chanted at protests, and he has vowed to hold elections if returned to power.

The Mojahedin-e-Khalq (MEK), founded as a Marxist movement and lobbying abroad as the National Council of Resistance of Iran, announced a provisional government. But the group remains deeply unpopular inside Iran, having sided with Iraq during the 1980–1988 Iran-Iraq War.

Kurdish militias and political groups, concentrated in western Iran, also represent a form of organized opposition. But their call for autonomous rule, if not an independent state, unnerves Iranians and raises fears of fragmentation given the presence of other ethnic minorities within Iran's borders.

All the opponents have a long history of fighting one another as well as the regime. The war, however, has ignited an effort to forge a united front. The Iran Freedom Congress is scheduled to convene in London on March 28 and 29. Preparations began between the January massacre of protesters and the Feb. 28 start of the joint U.S.-Israeli air assault.

"It was something unique in Iranian politics," says Hossein Razzagh, an Iranian journalist based in Europe, who represented the most prominent political prisoners in talks to organize the congress. "There was no leak." After demonstrating that disparate groups can work together, Razzagh says, democratic activists "will welcome the help of any country, and any international institution, that would help them for a peaceful transition. But not, he says, "military intervention."

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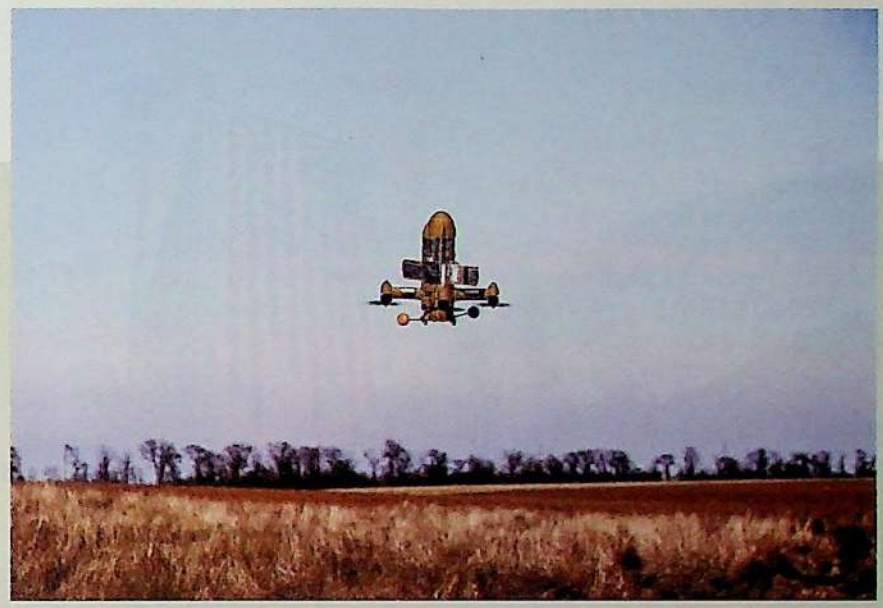

An interceptor drone on a mission in Ukraine on March 4

WORLD

Zelensky's drone diplomacy

BY NANDIKA CHATTERJEE AND RICHARD HALL

It was just over a year ago that President Donald Trump told Volodymyr Zelensky that he didn't "have the cards right now." Today, the war in Iran may have improved the Ukrainian President's hand.

Iran's deployment of masses of low-cost drones to attack the Gulf and Israel—hitting oil infrastructure, U.S. bases, and apartment buildings—has exposed a critical gap in the region's air defenses.

While the countries on the receiving end of those attacks possess sophisticated missile-defense systems like the U.S.-made Patriot, they have struggled to absorb the high volume of Iran's cheap, expendable one-way Shahed attack drones.

Ukraine has been fighting off those same drones for years: Ukrainian officials say Russia has fired tens of thousands of Shahed-type drones at its cities since Moscow launched its invasion in 2022.

Out of necessity, Ukraine has developed a multilayered network of drone defense that is suddenly in high demand. It combines radar detection, electronic jamming, and interceptor drones designed to hunt down Shaheds midair.

Ukraine's expertise in this area has given Zelensky a diplomatic boost at a time when his country's armed forces are under pressure on the battlefield, and the U.S. has been pressing him to accept unfavorable cease-fire terms with Russia.

Zelensky told Britain's Parliament on March 17 that 11 countries, including the U.S., had asked Kyiv for help in combatting the drones, and that 200 Ukrainian military advisers were already in the Middle East offering advice on how to defend against them. "Agreements are already in place," he said. In a briefing in Kyiv on March 14, Zelensky said President Trump himself had expressed an interest in purchasing Ukraine's drone-defense technology.

Zelensky does not intend to give away this expertise for free. He has said that Ukraine is open to long-term deals that grant access to its drone defense in return for money and other weaponry its armed forces might need.

Despite growing international interest in Ukraine's antidrone technology, Trump has publicly downplayed the need for Kyiv's assistance. "We don't need their help in drone defense," Trump told Fox News Radio in an interview on March 13. "We know more about drones than anybody."

In a CNN interview on March 15, Zelensky was asked if Trump's remarks suggested some resentment toward him. "I don't know," he responded. "Middle East countries and American bases [...] they need interceptors. It's drone interceptors. It's new technologies. It's our technology."

A fixture in Tehran for decades, this mural was repainted in 2025

Q&A

Could Iran retaliate on U.S. soil?

BY CONNOR GREENE

AFTER THE MASSIVE U.S.-ISRAELI air assault, Iran retaliated militarily across the Middle East, firing missiles and drones into a dozen countries since Feb. 28. But the regime also has a long history of mounting terror attacks. Asked in March whether Americans ought to worry about attacks at home, President Donald Trump told TIME, "I guess."

"While the threat is very significant," says John D. Cohen, who served as the Under Secretary for Intelligence and Analysis during the Obama Administration, "the good news is that the level of understanding and sophistication, especially amongst [U.S.] state and local law enforcement, has increased dramatically over the last decade and a half." TIME spoke to Cohen as well as Bruce R. Hoffman, a counterterrorism and insurgency expert who has served in advisory roles to multiple federal agencies, about what to know about the potential threat Iran poses.

What capability does Iran have to attack the U.S.?

Cohen: Iran has created a global cyberattack capability, working closely with countries like Russia. [It also] has an extensive presence in Canada, Mexico, Central America, South America.

Hoffman: Over the decades, there have been reports and, in some cases, arrests of Iranian sleeper agents in the United States. However, over the past decade-plus or so, it seems that those assets, if they did exist in the U.S., have atrophied.

Compared with other wars the U.S. has been involved in, how is the threat different this time around?

Hoffman: [Terrorism is] now seen as one of many other threats to the United States. Consequently, over the past eight years or so, we've seen resources—especially following the defeat of the ISIS caliphate—shifted away from counterterrorism to counterintelligence and to other threats.

Are there scenarios you think are more likely than others?

Cohen: Experts that we worked with, they've always said that if you want to understand what Iran is going to do, look at what's being done to it.

'Iran has operational capabilities to attack the U.S. in several ways.'

—JOHN D. COHEN, COUNTERTERRORISM EXPERT

Iran is typically very careful not to go beyond the tactics that have been employed against it. So as we're looking at the current conflict, we're seeing the targeting of government officials. We're seeing the targeting of petrochemical facilities. Those are examples of what we did to Iran.

Does Iran have the infrastructure or intelligence to replicate U.S. attacks?

Cohen: Yes, while not on the same scale, Iran does have the operational capabilities to replicate many of the attack techniques used against it. It has an extensive global cybercapability. They've had over a decade to develop their playbook and incorporate emerging technologies such as AI and drones into their attack scenarios.

Can you explain the threat of Iranian proxies to the U.S.?

Cohen: Iran has strong financial and operational relationships with groups like Hezbollah, the Houthis in Yemen, Hamas, and even criminal organizations, where they will use these groups or operators associated with these groups to engage in acts of targeted violence or cyberattacks.

What capability does Iran have to carry out drone strikes on the U.S.?

Cohen: Iran has a significant presence in Mexico, Central America, South America, Canada, even the U.S., through its military and intelligence operatives, its proxies, its relationship with criminal organizations, in particular those operating south of the border. They have the ability to access the expertise, the personnel, the equipment to conduct a drone attack in the United States, and now they have the incentive.

Hoffman: [Drones are] easily transportable, so they could be brought into the country, smuggled across the borders. I think that there's a range of possibilities.

ATTA KENARE—AFP/GETTY IMAGES

A fixture in Tehran for decades, this mural was repainted in 2025

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> **'Iran has operational capabilities to attack the U.S. in several ways.'**
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Burning bush

Lava makes its way through a forested area and across a road near the Piton de la Fournaise volcano in the southeast of the French overseas island of Réunion, on March 13. The volcano has been erupting since Feb. 13, spewing two lava flows that have cut off the national highway linking the south and east of the Indian Ocean isle that's home to 900,000.

LAVA: RICHARD BOUHET—AFP/GETTY IMAGES; SHAH: TAUSEEF MUSTAFA—AFP/GETTY IMAGES; DURALD ARKAPAW: KEVIN WINTER—GETTY IMAGES

THE BULLETIN

After youth-led protests, Nepal votes for rapper to be next leader

BALENDRA SHAH, A 35-YEAR-OLD rapper turned politician, could soon be Nepal's next Prime Minister, after his party won a sweeping parliamentary majority in March 5 elections. Shah's Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), formed four years ago, dominates the lower but more powerful chamber, having secured 182 of 275 seats. Kathmandu's former mayor, more popularly known as Balen, campaigned on being unbeholden to the Nepali political establishment.

STUNNING UPSET The RSP's rise is a marked shift for the small Himalayan country of 30 million wedged between India and China. Power in Nepal has largely rotated between major parties for decades. But discontent over perceived corruption among political elites boiled over in September, when young Gen Z protesters took to the streets and stormed federal buildings. At least 77 people died in the violence, and then Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli was forced to resign.

SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS RAPPER Shah stands out among Nepali politicians, not only for his signature black rectangular glasses, but also for his roots in hip-hop, reportedly inspired by American musicians Tupac Shakur and Curtis "50 Cent" Jackson. While pursuing studies in engineering, Shah was already making an impression in Nepal's hip-hop scene, both online and on the streets in the early 2010s, with lyrics reflecting Nepali social issues like poverty and income inequality.

FACE OF A NEW DIRECTION Shah's tenure as mayor of Kathmandu from 2022 to earlier this year was defined by a massive cleanup campaign that earned him both praise and criticism. His antiestablishment, confrontational approach to governance made him the face of the protests last year, which he said he backed. Sujeev Shakya, who chairs Kathmandu-based think tank Nepal Economic Forum, says he expects that as Prime Minister, Shah will "take transparency to a different level."

—CHAD DE GUZMAN

PASSED

Housing bill

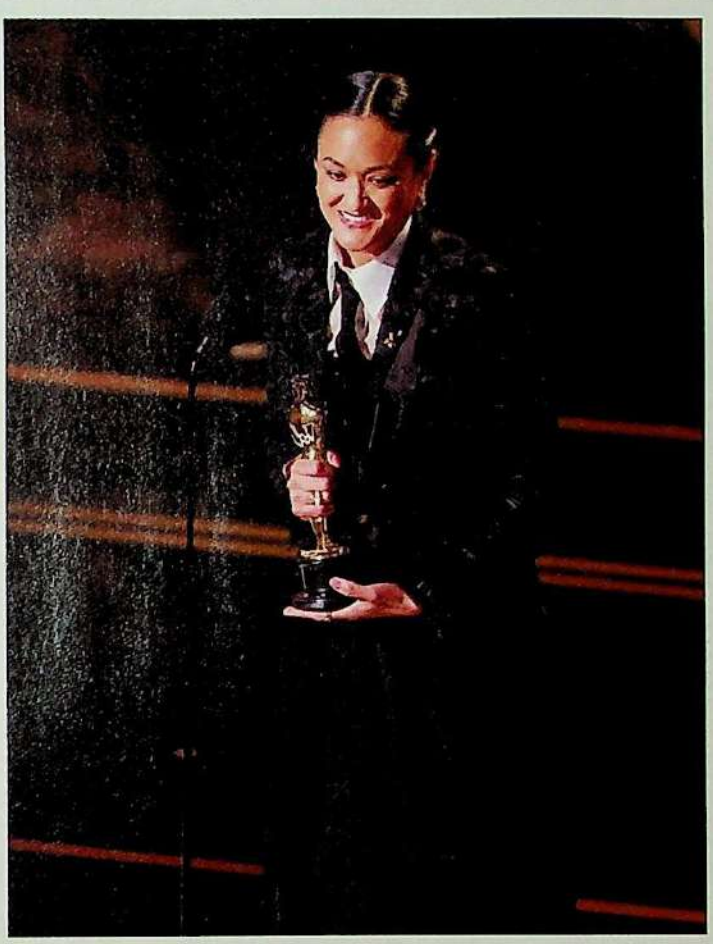
In the Senate

By an overwhelming bipartisan vote of 89-10, the Senate passed a sweeping piece of legislation on March 12 that seeks to bolster the U.S. housing supply and lower costs for homebuyers.

If the 21st Century ROAD to Housing Act passes the House, it would be the largest housing package to be signed into law in decades, though it faces an uncertain path because of opposition within both parties.

The primary objectives of the bill include relaxing regulations to boost homebuilding; mitigating costs for homeowners and -buyers; and prohibiting institutional investors from buying single-family homes—a move that resembles President Trump's January Executive Order directing a similar ban, though experts have said it's likely to have limited impact on reducing home prices.

—Connor Greene



WON

An Oscar for Durald Arkapaw

Pioneering cinematographer

AUTUMN DURALD ARKAPAW made history at the 98th Academy Awards on March 15 when she took home the Oscar for Best Cinematography for *Sinners*. Only three women had previously been nominated in the category, all of them in the past decade: Rachel Morrison for *Mudbound* in 2018, Ari Wegner for *The Power of the Dog* in 2022, and Mandy Walker for *Elvis* in 2023. "I really want all the women in the room to stand up," Durald Arkapaw said. "I feel like I don't get here without you guys."

Best Cinematography was a tight race this year. Many predicted a win for *One Battle After Another*'s Michael Bauman, who received the American Society of Cinematographers' top prize earlier in awards season, an honor that has preceded an Oscar win in six of the past 10 years. The world of cinematography is even more male-dominated than directing: In 2025, women made up 13% of directors of the 250 top-grossing films, according to a study by San Diego State University. Just 7% of the cinematographers on those films were women. So when presenter Demi Moore read Durald Arkapaw's name, the reaction in the room was electric. In her speech, Durald Arkapaw thanked pioneering women in her field, including Ellen Kuras, who shot *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. The award also recognizes the *Sinners* cinematographer's own pioneering achievement, as the first female cinematographer to shoot on IMAX 65-mm and Ultra Panavision, which involves wielding two gigantic and incredibly loud cameras.

Durald Arkapaw dedicated much of her speech to *Sinners* writer-director Ryan Coogler, whom she called "a very honorable person." The two previously collaborated on *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*. Before that, Durald Arkapaw worked on the Marvel Cinematic Universe TV series *Loki*, which earned her an Emmy nomination. She is slated to work with Coogler again on his reboot of the *X-Files* TV series. As her name was announced on Oscar Sunday, Coogler ran to the back of the Dolby Theater to find her son and carry him down the aisle to watch his mom's speech from up close.

—ELIANA DOCKTERMAN

DISPLACED
More than **1 million people in Lebanon,** nearly a quarter of the population; they were forced from their homes as Israel struck the Tehran-backed Hezbollah militia as part of its war on Iran.

ANNOUNCED
A diagnosis of early-stage breast cancer for White House chief of staff **Susie Wiles,** on March 16. Wiles, 68, said she will continue working while undergoing treatment.

NAMED
An English artist born Robin Gunningham as the man behind guerrilla **street artist Banksy,** by a Reuters investigation published March 13; Banksy's reps did not immediately confirm or deny the claim.

ATTACKED
Old Dominion University in Virginia and a **synagogue in Michigan,** in separate incidents that occurred hours apart on March 12. In the school shooting, one victim was killed and two injured.

SENTENCED
Fifteen men to life in prison by a Moscow court on March 12, for a 2024 attack at a **Russian concert venue** that killed 149 people, and for which the Islamic State claimed responsibility.

Into darkness

On a dark street in Havana on March 16, a man passes a building that has lighting only thanks to its own generator. Cuba's government reported that the island was facing a massive power outage after U.S. President Donald Trump imposed a blockade on fuel shipments. In the Oval Office that day, Trump mused about "taking Cuba—I mean, whether I free it, take it. I think I can do anything I want with it."

Photograph by Adalberto Roque—AFP/Getty Images

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5 symptoms neurologists say never to ignore

BY ANGELA HAUPT

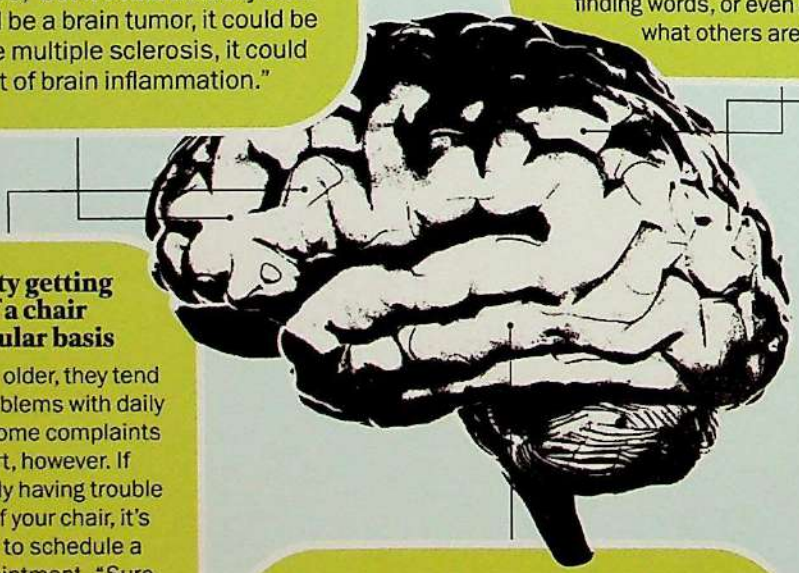
It can be hard to wrap your head around all the conditions neurologists treat: cerebrovascular disorders like stroke and carotid-artery disease, seizure disorders, neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's and frontotemporal dementia, headache and facial-pain disorders, movement disorders including Parkinson's, muscle diseases, sleep-related conditions like narcolepsy, and much more. "If there's a nerve somewhere, a neurologist could get involved," says Dr. Andrew Dorsch, division chief for general neurology at Rush University System for Health and a neurologic-rehabilitation specialist. "And there's nerves everywhere in the body. There's a lot of things that can go wrong with the nervous system, and it can take quite the detective work to figure it out." Often, he adds, people brush off neurological symptoms for a long time, pinning their symptoms on age-related aches and pains or assuming they'll resolve on their own. That could be a mistake. We asked four neurologists which symptoms you should never ignore—and what they might signal.

Weakness in one hand or leg

If you're dragging one leg behind you or having trouble writing with your dominant hand, schedule a doctor's appointment. "People come months after their symptoms start—but weakness is one you can't ignore," says Dr. Luis Cruz-Saavedra, a neurologist with Memorial Hermann Health System. "A lot of people think, 'Oh, it's just a pinched nerve,' but it could actually be a stroke, it could be a brain tumor, it could be a disorder like multiple sclerosis, it could be any sort of brain inflammation."

Problems with speech

Stroke is a major cause of death in the U.S., yet people often delay seeking care. "I hear all the time how someone's having stroke symptoms, and their reaction is, 'Well, I'm going to take a nap and see if they go away,'" says Dr. Enrique Leira, director of the division of cerebrovascular diseases at the University of Iowa. One way these urgent symptoms manifest: trouble speaking. People might start slurring their words, speaking slowly, experience difficulty finding words, or even be unable to comprehend what others are saying, Leira says.



Difficulty getting out of a chair on a regular basis

As people get older, they tend to develop problems with daily movement. Some complaints stand apart, however. If you're regularly having trouble getting out of your chair, it's a good idea to schedule a doctor's appointment. "Sure, there could be some joint issues, but we really want to take a look and make sure you don't have an issue with your muscles or your nerves or your spinal cord," Dorsch says. "That's something I would want a family member to go get checked out."

Persistent muscle twitches

Everyone's muscles twitch from time to time, usually at various locations. If you experience these fasciculations in the same place consistently, however, it's worth bringing up to your doctor, says Dr. Alexandru Olaru, a neurologist at University of Maryland St. Joseph Medical Center. It's possible you could have benign fascicular syndrome, which is harmless, or a more serious condition like spinal stenosis or amyotrophic lateral sclerosis.

A sense of déjà vu

Everybody experiences déjà vu—the uncanny sense that something has happened before—from time to time. "But if you're having episodes of déjà vu on a regular basis, you probably want to come in and get checked out," Dorsch says. That's because it could be a warning sign for a temporal-lobe seizure. Dorsch recently treated a patient who was "having recurring episodes every week, or every couple of weeks, which is not how often people usually get déjà vu," he says.

OSAMAWAYNE STUDIOS/GETTY IMAGES

The View

NATION

THE SCIENCE OF SKEPTICISM

BY NOUBAR AFEYAN

Scientists once thought illness was caused by "miasmas," foul vapors that drifted through the air. For centuries, they were certain that the sun rotated around the Earth. Until the 1950s, they believed lobotomies were the best way to treat mental illness. Why did we stop believing these things? In each case, skeptics used the scientific method to produce data that disproved the incumbent theory. ▸

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They hypothesized, experimented, observed, analyzed, iterated, and then published the results, precipitating a shift in our collective understanding of the world. Doubt and debate are the prisms that test current ideas and help to generate new ones. Perhaps, then, it's good that it's now more popular than ever to be skeptical of science.

Yet this most recent wave of skepticism is different. Its loudest voices are making evidence-free claims about COVID, climate change, and vaccines. Presenting personal opinions as though they are facts, with no regard for experiments or data, makes a mockery of the scientific method.

This is profoundly dangerous. The scientific method is the most powerful tool humans have to change the world. It's how we together convert the "unknown" to the "known," resolving uncertainty and productively metabolizing scientific doubt when it arises.

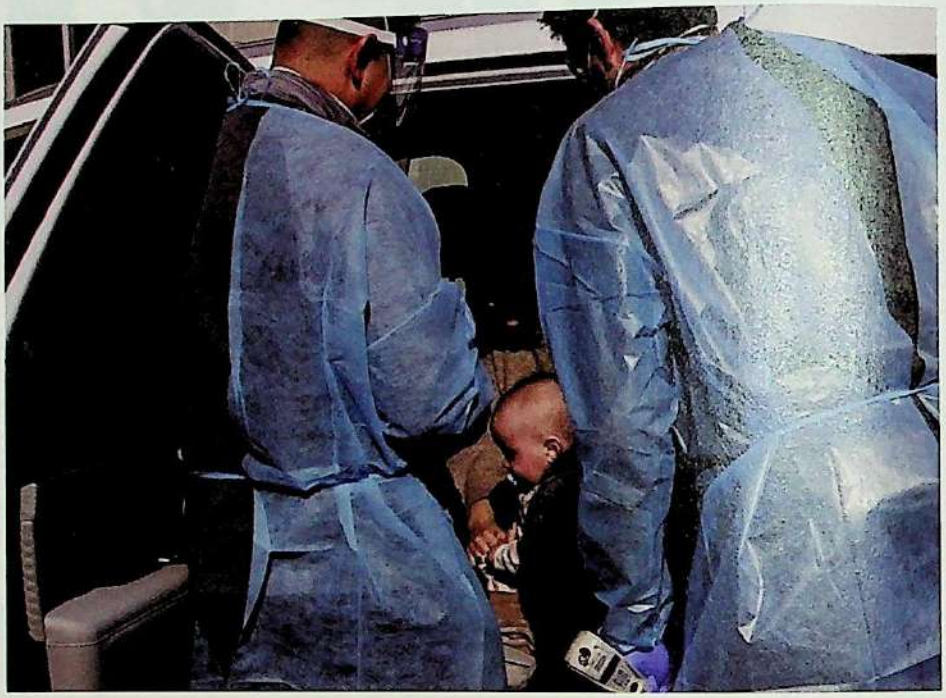
At its best, the scientific method consigns the worst fates that befall humans (debilitating illnesses, devastating diseases) to history. It heals the sick and feeds the hungry. Science makes miracles.

American investments in science turned our country into the world's economic, technological, and military superpower. According to an estimate from the National Science Foundation, as much as 85% of all U.S. GDP growth since the end of World War II is attributable to advances in science and technology.

The computer or smartphone you may be reading this on would not exist but for the scientific method; the banana you ate for breakfast would have been wiped out by a devastating crop disease years ago; and the flu you had last week might have presaged your funeral this week.

Without science, we would all be poorer, sicker, and less safe.

If the scientific method is corrupted, we won't just stop making new miracles; we'll undo the proven discoveries of the past. Consider, for example, the increasing rejection in certain quarters of the science that led to mRNA vaccines and many childhood vaccines. Who's to say the same pseudo arguments won't apply to lifesaving cancer treatments, or to anesthesia, or to germ theory?



Medics assess a baby with measles symptoms in Spartanburg, S.C., on Jan. 30

It might sound alarmist to suggest that we could regress to 1900, when the average life expectancy in the U.S. was just over 47 years and pneumonia and influenza were the leading causes of death. But consider that measles—a deadly disease that was declared eliminated in this country in 2000—will formally lose that designation if the 1,362 cases documented in the U.S. since the start of 2026 continue to spread in the weeks ahead. For context, there were 2,283 confirmed measles cases reported in the U.S. in all of 2025. Reported confirmed cases in the first two months of this year are already over half that number.

Ignoring the overwhelming evidence of vaccine efficacy is an abandonment of the scientific method.

AT THE SAME TIME that some in the U.S. are undermining the scientific method, the Chinese government has been investing heavily in it. In just the past decade, China has increased its spending on the scientific method through a 400-fold increase in biopharma research and development spending. China now treats a higher share of global biotech patents than the U.S., and has a similar number of novel medicines under development.

If we continue to discredit the scientific method, the U.S. risks becoming an innovation desert, reliant on other countries for new medicines and technologies and helpless to protect our own people in times of crisis, ranging from biological warfare to the next pandemic.

Even more terrifyingly, we risk our health. We risk not having an answer when disease strikes, and losing infants and children to diseases their vulnerable bodies aren't yet mature enough to withstand. We risk missing out on the next genuine, evidence-backed scientific revolution.

We can choose to keep our miracle machine running. We can insist that skeptics express their doubts through the scientific method, in the best tradition of history's most respected scientists.

Or we can continue to abandon the scientific method and throw a wrench into the gears of science, damning ourselves to a future of disease, deprivation, and decline.

Afeyan is the founder and CEO of Flagship Pioneering and co-founder and chairman of Moderna

LEFT: JUAN DIEGO REYES—THE WASHINGTON POST/GETTY IMAGES; RIGHT: ARIANA CUBILLOS—AP

The Risk Report

By Ian Bremmer

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

AS THE WORLD WATCHES THE still unfolding U.S.-Israeli war with Iran, the government in Venezuela, a regime now much more amenable to accommodation of President Trump, looks to find new footing. The remade leadership is working with Washington to revive a long-stagnant economy, and there's early progress to report.

In March, Trump moved to formalize American recognition of the administration led by Delcy Rodríguez, a now pliable veteran of the old regime, by restoring U.S. diplomatic ties, which had been severed in 2019. The move not only opens the door to a normalization of Venezuela's foreign policy, it could also allow the government to access long-locked-up assets abroad—like $4.8 billion in gold now held at the Bank of England and about $5 billion in drawing rights from the IMF.

Though a restructuring of Venezuela's debt remains a distant prospect, Washington's formal recognition does bode well for private-sector engagement with Rodríguez's government. Higher oil prices, driven by the war in Iran, might also boost Venezuela's recovery. One additional early sign of stability: Trump now refers to Rodríguez as "the President."

For now, the Trump-Rodríguez working relationship leaves Venezuelan opposition leader María Corina Machado, who famously gifted her 2025 Nobel Peace Prize to Trump, out in the cold. Machado has promised to return to Venezuela in the coming weeks, though she doesn't appear to have Trump's blessing to make this move. In the meantime, her refusal to engage with the Rodríguez government will further strain her relationship with the U.S. President. She has also publicly questioned the legitimacy of U.S.-backed economic reforms approved by Venezuela's current national assembly, which risks alienating a segment of Trump's MAGA base that says Machado is in the way.

Though Machado was banned from the 2024 presidential election, voluminous evidence indicated that her party's surrogate candidate handily defeated then incumbent Nicolás Maduro, who decreed victory. **Machado remains the most popular figure in Venezuela, and credible polls suggest that if a national election were held today, she would defeat Rodríguez by more than 2 to 1.**

Rodríguez with U.S. Interior Secretary Doug Burgum on March 4

And she is not the country's only opposition figure. Enrique Márquez won less than 1% of the vote in 2024, but the ruling party is much more likely to negotiate with him than with Machado, making him a potential alternative. Márquez was also an invited guest at Trump's State of the Union Address, a sign the White House is willing to throw weight behind figures they believe can facilitate a smooth transition.

Márquez and others will have time to build their political profiles. The U.S. State Department has reaffirmed Washington's commitment to a phased transition to a democratically elected government in Venezuela, which would help allow the new government to secure major new investment from abroad.

But Trump's immediate focus on economic stabilization suggests new elections probably won't happen before the second half of next year. If the Rodríguez government can sustain a pragmatic working relationship with Trump, the vote could be put off even longer. In the meantime, she will try to manage a gradual political opening that establishes credibility with Washington and other foreign governments without throwing the ruling party and the country into more political turmoil.

IT'S ALSO POSSIBLE that Rodríguez has a long-term political future. For now, any Venezuelan national election that is legitimately free and fair would produce an opposition victory. But recent polls put Rodríguez's approval rating at 37%, not far from the 40% threshold that incumbents around the world typically need to win. And if Venezuela's economy finally picks up steam, and the opposition remains as divided as it has been in the past, a Rodríguez win becomes conceivable.

With the war in Iran raising risks for Trump's domestic standing, he needs a positive story to tell. Venezuela provides one—at least until the U.S. President shifts his attention to the prospect of a dramatic change in Cuba. ◻

Health Matters

By Veronique Greenwood

STAFF WRITER

THERE ARE MORE THAN 170 RHINOviruses known to science. These causes of the common cold are found in noses all around you, and while rhinovirus infections are known for yielding lots of snot and self-pity, often they cause no symptoms at all.

But if rhinoviruses are relatively benign for most people, an infection can be deadly for others. The past few decades have revealed that **rhinovirus infections are behind a staggering number of asthma attacks, and a leading cause of flare-ups for people with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD),** causing breathlessness and coughing that can become dangerous if left untreated.

The differences in symptom severity don't seem to be down to the virus itself. "It's pretty clear now that if you give someone with asthma or COPD a [rhino]virus and then you give the same dose of rhinovirus to a healthy person, the response is quite different," says Aran Singanayagam, a clinician scientist at Imperial College London who studies respiratory disease.

To get a better understanding of why this happens, scientists have turned to nasal tissue grown in a dish, which they infect with rhinovirus. In a new paper in the journal *Cell Press Blue*, researchers report that if the tissue's first-line defenses fail, what could have been a mild infection spirals out of control. That confirms, with data from individual cells, that differences in the host's immune system, not the virus' behavior, are behind these effects.

'A number of papers recently talk about universal vaccines.'

—NATHAN BARTLETT, UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE

When dish-grown tissue catches a cold, only a handful of cells are actually infected with the virus, says Ellen Foxman, a professor of immunobiology at Yale School of Medicine and an author of the new paper. "We see something very similar to what you would often see in a person with a mild or asymptomatic cold," she says. "Only about 1% of the cells got infected."

All cells in the tissue, though, had changed behavior. Molecules released by the infected cells, known as interferons, acted as warning signals to their comrades, causing them to activate their antiviral defenses. As a result, the virus could not spread beyond the first infected cells.

WHAT HAPPENED if that interferon signal didn't go out? Foxman and her colleagues asked. They blocked the warning using a drug, and watched as something completely different unfolded. Before their eyes, the tissue started to ooze mucus, and they found that the cells began to produce signals meant to provoke inflammation. "That's what you see in people with a cold, or people with asthma or COPD attacks—you see excessive mucus production, and you see those inflammatory cells coming to the lung," Foxman says.

"The timing really matters," she continues. "If that response is delayed enough to let the virus replicate and get big enough to trigger other pathways, that's when you're going to see the symptoms."

Indeed, that delay agrees with what's been seen in other studies, says Nathan Bartlett, a professor at University of Newcastle in Australia and Hunter Medical Research Institute who studies rhinovirus. "We found that if you took cells from an airway that has been chronically exposed to inflammation, there's been a desensitization," he says. "It just takes them

a bit longer to realize that there's an infection. And so there's a delay, we saw, by about 24 hours."

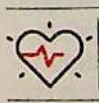
For a rhinovirus, that's huge—a 24-hour delay means the virus can double its numbers multiple times before neighboring cells get the message. When cells do finally respond, there's a lot more virus to fight, and the effects can be much more damaging.

This new study, notably, involved only a subset of nasal cells—the dish-grown tissue didn't have specialized immune cells, for instance, that would be called in when an intact human nose got wind of a virus. However, the study lays out the signals cells send out when the first line of defense is missing, which Foxman hopes will help provide targets for drugs to prevent dangerous reactions to rhinovirus.

The window to intervene in the inflammatory process that seems to kick off in the absence of normal signaling is very small, however. Bartlett speculates that it might make the most sense to think of a more universal treatment or even, perhaps, developing a vaccine—yes, a vaccine for colds—that could protect the vulnerable before complications arise.

"I've seen a number of papers recently that are talking about universal vaccines," he says, which might stimulate the immune system to provide protection against viruses of all kinds. Indeed, a recent study found that mice could be protected from COVID-19, influenza, and other respiratory infections with a treatment that put the immune system on high alert. If such a vaccine is ever brought to the clinic, scientists will be watching to see how it plays out with rhinoviruses.

"We can bring rhinovirus into the conversation now," he says, "because that's probably the virus we're going to be encountering, actually, more than anything. So we better start thinking about it."



Stay up to date on the latest health and wellness news at **time.com/health-newsletter**

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY TIME (SOURCE IMAGES: LIUDMILA CHERNETSKA; KUNERTUS; OODDYSMILE—GETTY IMAGES)

CO_2 Leadership Report

By Justin Worland

SENIOR CORRESPONDENT

IN SOME WAYS, THE ANNUAL summit of the Sustainable Markets Initiative was notable merely for continuing on. Convening CEOs from major American firms like Bank of America and Trane Technologies at an event with sustainability in the title is no easy feat in 2026, amid an accelerating energy crisis and a U.S. Administration keen on attacking anything with even a veneer of green.

But the discussions in London in March actually underscored how the current economic and geopolitical contexts amplify the business case for sustainable practices. The global benchmark price for crude oil quickly topped $100 per barrel when Iran shut down transit through the Strait of Hormuz. The picture is even worse for gas. The spot price for liquefied natural gas doubled in parts of Asia, leading factories to close.

'We've been reminded of what we learned in 1973.'

—JOHN KERRY

"You're all CEOs, and I'm sure you're sitting around and saying, Well, now we've been reminded of what we learned in 1973, which is, you need energy independence," John Kerry, the former U.S. Secretary of State and climate envoy, told the crowd. "You're not safe. There's no security if you are dependent on the Strait of Hormuz or the Red Sea or somewhere else."

In the past, geopolitical conflagrations have been framed as a matter primarily for nation-states to address. And, despite the obvious advantages, renewable energy hasn't always won out in challenging moments, as governments have often relied on easier short-term subsidies for existing energy sources to quell consumer and voter concerns.

This time around, energy-price volatility is a wake-up call for corporate leaders newly empowered to do something about it. "Many companies are facing what's in effect a COVID moment—a fundamental breakage in supply chains," said Ron O'Hanley, the CEO of U.S. financial-services giant State Street. "When we get to the other end of this, nobody is going to leave themselves to be exposed like that."

The possibilities for big companies to respond effectively on their own have changed dramatically in the past two decades. The widespread adoption of power-purchase agreements has allowed big companies to lock in fixed prices for renewable electricity for decades.

Efficiency solutions spurred by the climate and sustainability push over the past two decades—from smart buildings to low-carbon vehicles—have made it easier for companies to quickly realize a return on such investments. And technologies like solar and battery storage have enabled companies to affordably invest in their own power generation.

As Australian mining magnate Andrew Forrest told me, "If you democratize your energy and bring your cost down to what it should be, which is cost of capital plus maintenance, then you're going to have abundant energy for citizens and shareholders."

Sign up for weekly insights into business and climate change at **time.com/climate-newsletter**

SOCIETY

You can't predict the future. But can you rehearse it?

BY FRANK DIANA

WHEN PEOPLE LEARN THAT I'M A FUTURIST, THEY OFTEN assume my work involves precisely predicting what comes next, from election results and new technologies to market crashes and natural disasters.

To be clear: I cannot predict the future. But the desire for someone to is understandable. In moments of instability, prediction feels like reassurance, a way to impose order on uncertainty. Yet the expectation itself rests on a fragile premise, because prediction has never been reliable, even during periods we now remember as calm or more stable.

The historical record makes this clear. Economic forecasts routinely fail to anticipate recessions, political predictions collapse at moments of realignment, and technological change arrives earlier, later, or in forms few expected.

To understand the future, you can't make prophecies—you have to understand the past. That's because the future isn't predicted, it is rehearsed.

The limits of prediction

What has sustained our collective faith in prediction was not its accuracy, but the environment in which it operated. In the past, errors unfolded slowly, and institutions had time to respond and adjust. When forecasts failed, the consequences were often contained and reversible, which allowed prediction to persist as a useful illusion rather than a dependable guide.

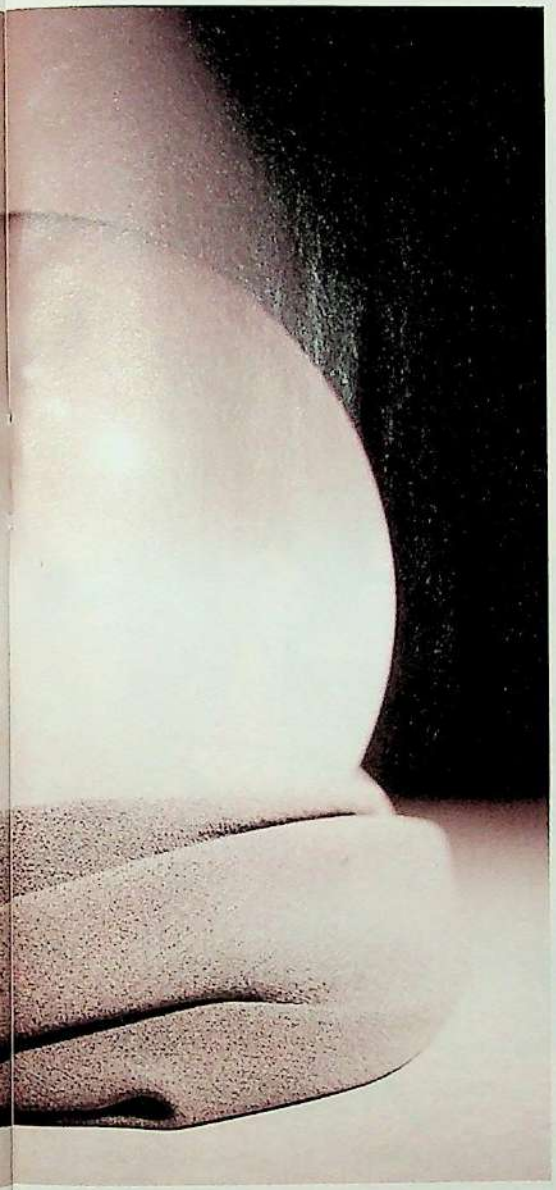
What has changed is not our ability to see the future clearly, but our ability to absorb being wrong. The margin for error that once existed across institutions, economies, and societies has narrowed significantly. Pressures that once arrived sequentially now arrive simultaneously, interacting and reinforcing one another in ways that are difficult to isolate or manage independently.

We are living through a period in which technological acceleration coincides with demographic aging, geopolitical realignment, environmental constraints, and deep social strain. Economic systems are asked to deliver growth while absorbing volatility. Political systems are expected to respond at speeds they were never designed to handle. Questions of identity, trust, and responsibility move from abstract debate into daily life. These pressures do not operate in isolation. They accumulate, compound, and converge.

Most systems are built to adapt, and for long stretches of time, that's enough. Organizations adjust processes, markets reprice risk, and institutions revise rules in response to changing conditions. Over time, however, accumulated pressure erodes flexibility. Decisions become harder to reverse, options narrow, and incremental adjustment stops being sufficient. When that happens, systems do not collapse immediately, but they do begin to reconfigure at a structural level rather than continue adapting at the margins.

This pattern has been particularly visible since the coronavirus pandemic. Supply chains optimized for efficiency fractured under stress and were rebuilt around resilience. Work structures designed for stability gave way to more fluid and fragmented arrangements. Legal and political institutions built for slower change strain when events consistently outpace their capacity to respond. These are not isolated failures or temporary disruptions. They are signals that adaptation is giving way to reconfiguration.

In this environment, prediction becomes not just unreliable but actively



H. ARMSTRONG ROBERTS—CLASSICSTOCK/GETTY IMAGES

misleading. Being wrong is survivable when errors remain localized and unfold slowly. When the consequences of being wrong are immediate and severe, making predictions can lead decisionmakers astray. Because of the speed of our modern society, by the time clarity arrives, the opportunity to respond meaningfully has often passed. The weakness of prediction was always present; what has changed is our exposure to its failure.

Rehearsing the future

So, rather than asking what will happen, I focus on a different question: How does pressure build over time, and what happens when multiple pressures collide? That framing shifts attention away from outcomes and toward structures.

This line of thinking led me to develop what I call "possibility chains." It begins with close observation of what is changing right now—new capabilities entering daily life, shifting behaviors, emerging limits, and institutional responses that lag or accelerate.

From there, I assess how the variables involved with this change interact. For instance, a technological shift alters economic incentives, which reshapes how people learn, work, and define security. Social responses provoke political action, which in turn shapes how technologies are governed or constrained. Each step follows a causal logic that can be examined and tested as conditions evolve. The objective is not to identify a single inevitable future, but to understand how different developments might combine over time.

When these interactions are traced across years rather than moments, patterns begin to emerge that can help us rehearse, not predict, the future.

This is where possibility chains move beyond description and become practical. They are not exercises in optimism or alarm, but tools for creating a decision space. Each plausible future carries both upside and downside. A new capability can unlock productivity and creativity, or deepen inequality and fragility, depending on how it is adopted and governed. Institutional reform can restore trust and coordination or entrench new forms of exclusion. Environmental constraints can accelerate innovation or trigger instability, depending on timing and response. Making these trade-offs visible before pressure forces a choice is the central value of rehearsal.

Each plausible future carries both upside and downside

This kind of preparation is common in other high-stakes domains. Pilots do not attempt to predict every emergency they might face; they rehearse responses to plausible sequences of failure so they are not improvising under pressure. Cities do not predict every disaster; they rehearse coordination so response does not depend on perfect foresight. In complex systems, readiness comes from practice rather than certainty.

Possibility chains apply that same logic to systems undergoing coordinated pressure across multiple domains. They allow institutions, organizations, and communities to walk through plausible futures. Rather than debating whether a single forecast is right or wrong, they help decisionmakers prepare for the conditions that make certain outcomes more likely, while there is still room to influence how those outcomes take shape.

We are entering a period defined less by isolated disruption and more by interconnected constraints. This does not mean that societal collapse is inevitable, but it does mean that guessing our way forward is no longer sufficient. The cost of being wrong has risen, and the time available to respond has shortened.

The future is not a destination waiting to be discovered. It is formed through pressure, interaction, and timing. We may never predict the future with precision, but we can rehearse how we respond. In a world like this one, rehearsal may be the most practical form of foresight we have.

Diana is a futurist at Tata Consultancy Services

PHOTO-ILLUSTRATION BY KLAWE RZECZY FOR TIME

TECHNOLOGY

The Most Disruptive Company in The World

ANTHROPIC WAS POISED TO TRANSFORM THE FUTURE OF WORK. NOW IT'S IN A FIGHT OVER THE FUTURE OF WAR

BY HARRY BOOTH/SAN FRANCISCO AND BILLY PERRIGO

IN A HOTEL ROOM IN SANTA CLARA, CALIF., FIVE members of the AI company Anthropic huddled around a laptop, working urgently. It was February 2025, and they had been at a conference nearby when they received disturbing news: results of a controlled trial had indicated that a soon-to-be-released version of Claude, Anthropic's AI system, could help terrorists make biological weapons.

They were members of Anthropic's frontier red team, which studies Claude's advanced capabilities and tries to project worst-case scenarios, from cyberattacks to biosecurity threats. Sprinting back to the hotel room, they flipped a bed on its side to serve as a makeshift desk and pored over the test results. After hours of work, they still weren't sure whether the new product was safe. Anthropic ended up holding up the release of the new model, known as Claude 3.7 Sonnet, for 10 days until they were certain. That may not sound like much, but it felt like an eternity for a company operating at the vanguard of an industry rapidly remaking the world.

Logan Graham, the leader of the red team, recalled the bioweapons scare as an example of the challenges Anthropic faces at a pivotal moment for the company and the world. Anthropic is the frontier AI lab with the greatest emphasis on safety. It's also leading the race to create ever more powerful versions of a technology that many of its own staff believe could

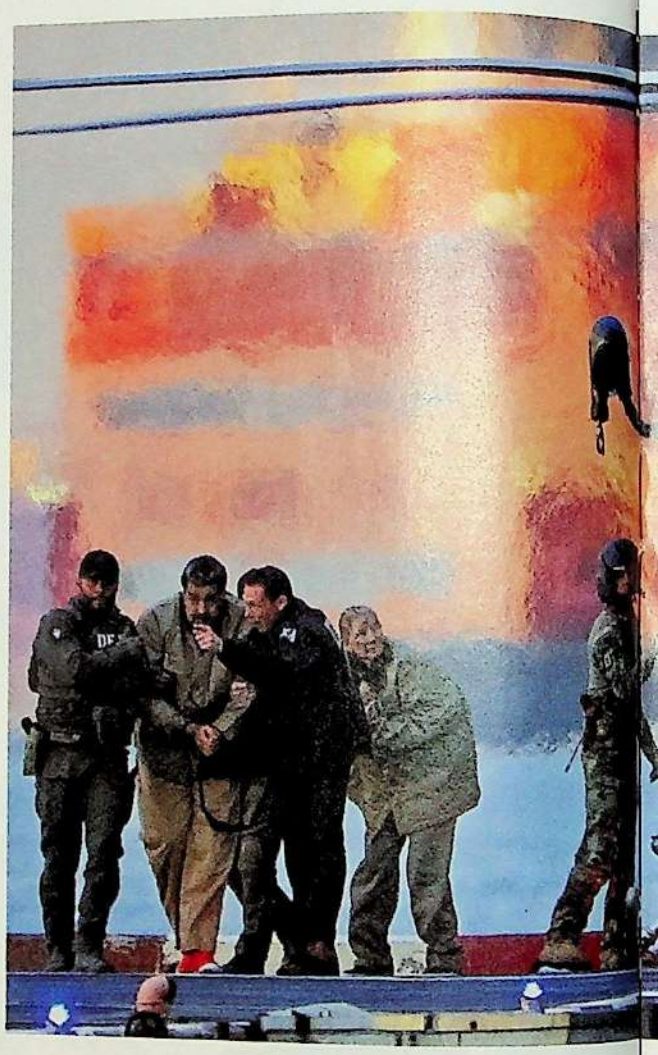
usher in a terrifying parade of horribles, from nuclear war to human extinction. Graham, a baby-faced 31-year-old, doesn't soft-pedal the responsibility of balancing the benefits of AI with its enormous risks. "Some people's intuition from growing up in a peaceful world is that somewhere there's a room full of adults who know how to fix it," he says. "There are no groups of adults. There is no room in the first place. There is no door you're looking for. You are responsible."

If that's not bracing enough, consider how he recalls the bioweapons scare: "It was a fun and interesting day."

Graham was speaking a few weeks ago at Anthropic's headquarters, where TIME spent three days interviewing executives, engineers, product heads, and safety leaders in an attempt to figure out how what was once the eccentric little brother in the race for artificial intelligence has suddenly become the pacesetter. Anthropic had just raised $30 billion from investors ahead of a possible IPO this year. (Salesforce, where TIME owner Marc Benioff is CEO, is an investor in Anthropic.) Already, its $380 billion valuation eclipses those of Goldman Sachs, McDonalds, and Coca-Cola. Its revenues are a rocket ship. Claude is considered a world-class model, with products like Code and Cowork upending what it means to be a programmer. Its tools are so good that each new release causes stock-market shocks, as investors grasp the likelihood the advances will upend entire categories, from law to software development. Over the past few months, it emerged as the company most poised to disrupt the future of work.

Then Anthropic found itself in a fight over the future of war. For more than a year, Claude has been the AI model of choice for the U.S. government, and the first frontier system cleared for classified use. In January it was used in the audacious capture of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro in Caracas. But in the weeks that followed, the relationship between Anthropic and the Pentagon unraveled. On Feb. 27, the Trump Administration announced it would designate the company a supply-chain risk to national security—the first time the U.S. is known to have slapped the label on an American company. The fastest-growing software company in history was now at war with its own government. President Trump ordered the U.S. to cease all use of Anthropic's software. Pete Hegseth, the Secretary of Defense, announced that any company doing business with the government would be barred from doing business with Anthropic. OpenAI, Anthropic's rival, swooped in to sign the military contract instead. The most disruptive company in the world had been disrupted.

At the heart of the confrontation is the question of who gets to set limits on a technology that is viewed as one of the most powerful weapons



America has at its disposal. Anthropic was happy for its tools to be deployed in war fighting, arguing that bolstering the U.S. military was the only way to avert the threat of authoritarian states like China. But CEO Dario Amodei had objected to the Pentagon's attempt to renegotiate the company's government contracts in order to permit "all lawful use." Amodei cited two specific concerns: he didn't want Anthropic's AI to be used in fully autonomous weapons systems, or to conduct mass surveillance of American citizens.

Hegseth and his advisers bristled at what they saw as a private company's attempt to dictate how the military waged war. In the view of the Department of Defense, Anthropic kneecapped the partnership by insisting on unnecessary guardrails, attempting to litigate specific hypotheticals, and then dragging its feet in the subsequent negotiations. The Trump Administration saw Amodei as arrogant and intractable, and would not abide a private company, regardless of how good its product might be, interposing itself in the chain of military command. "It just dragged on," says Emil Michael, the Under Secretary of War and chief technology officer at the Pentagon. "I can't run a 3 million-person department on exceptions that I can't imagine or fathom."

From Silicon Valley to Capitol Hill, many observers wondered whether this was really about a

THE CLAUDE CONFLICT

JULY 2025
The Pentagon awards military contracts worth up to $200 million each to Anthropic, OpenAI, Google, and xAI. Anthropic's is for classified work; the others are initially for unclassified use.

FALL 2025
The Pentagon begins negotiations with Anthropic to broaden its contract to allow "all lawful use" of Claude models. Anthropic agrees in these negotiations to loosen many of the restrictions in Claude's usage policy, except those on mass surveillance and autonomous weapons.

JAN. 3, 2026
U.S. special-operations forces capture Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, reportedly with help from Claude. In a disputed call, Anthropic asks

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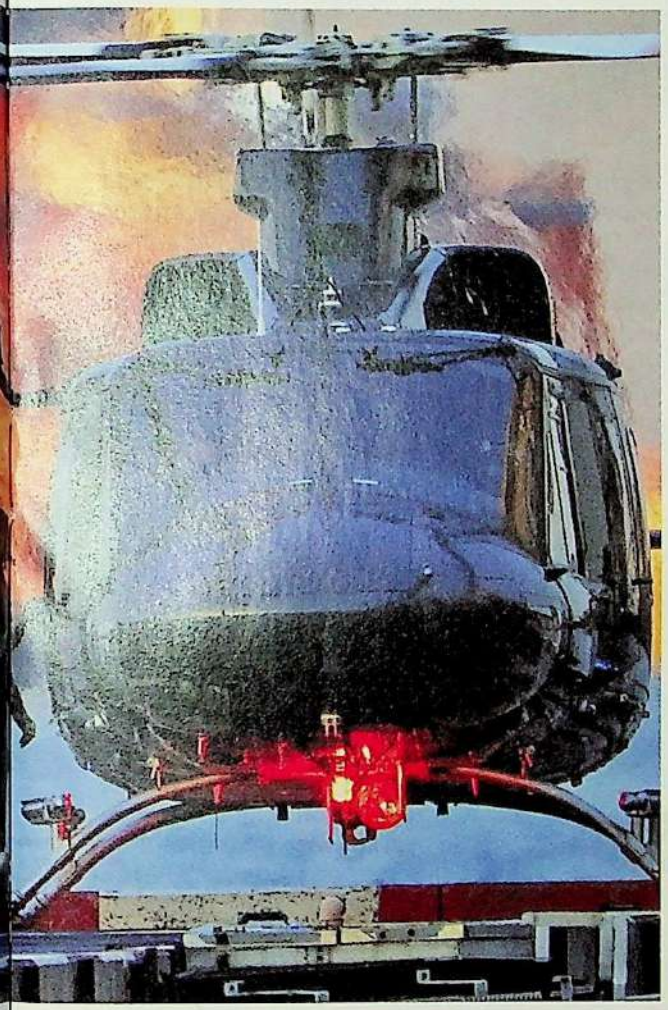


Nicolás Maduro and his wife Cilia Flores are escorted off a helicopter in New York City on Jan. 5

contractual dispute. Critics saw in the Trump Administration's actions a troubling attempt to bring down a company whose politics it disliked. "The real reasons [the Department of Defense] and the Trump admin do not like us is we haven't donated to Trump," Amodei wrote in a leaked internal memo. "We haven't given dictator-style praise to Trump (while [OpenAI CEO] Sam [Altman] has), we have supported AI regulation which is against their agenda, we've told the truth about a number of AI policy issues (like job displacement), and we've actually held our red lines with integrity rather than colluding with them to produce 'safety theater.'" Michael disputes this, calling it a "total fabrication," and says the designation was made because Anthropic's posture put war fighters at risk: "My job is not politics in the Department of War, my job is to defend the country."

Anthropic's unorthodox culture had collided with divisive domestic politics, national security, and a murky world of cutthroat corporate competition. How much damage it sustained in the wreck isn't clear. The supply-chain-risk designation was narrower than initially threatened; according to Anthropic, it applies only to military contracts. On March 9, Anthropic sued the government seeking to overturn the blacklisting. Customers appeared to reward the company for taking an ethical stand, ditching ChatGPT and flocking to Claude. Yet the company now has to navigate the next three years under a hostile, favor-trading Administration staffed by officials with close ties to bitter rivals who intensely dislike Anthropic.

The Pentagon saga raises uncomfortable questions, even for a company that is accustomed to navigating high-stakes ethical trade-offs. In this confrontation, Anthropic did not buckle: it maintained that it stuck by its values, even when they came at great cost to the company. But in other episodes it has. The same week it stared down the Pentagon, the company softened a core part of its commitment to train its models safely, citing its peers' unwillingness to do the same. What other compromises would it be willing to make?

The stakes are only ratcheting higher. Contests over who controls AI will intensify as the technology grows more powerful. Claude's use in Venezuela and Iran indicates that advanced AI is now an integral tool for the most powerful military in the world. Meanwhile, an array of new pressures—state power, domestic politics, national-security imperatives—have been piled atop those already weighing on a for-profit company in a race to deploy a volatile new technology. Like biologists conjuring deadly pathogens in the lab in order to find a cure, Anthropic took it upon itself to chart AI's hazards, pushing the frontiers of development rather than leave it to others more willing to take reckless shortcuts. Yet even as it preaches caution, Anthropic is using Claude to accelerate the development of future, more powerful versions of itself. Staff believe the next few years will be a pivotal test, for the company and the world. "We should operate as if 2026 to 2030 is where all the most important things happen—models becoming faster, better, possibly faster than humans can handle them," says Graham. As Dave Orr, Anthropic's head of safeguards, puts it, "We're driving down a cliff road. A mistake will kill you. Now we're driving at 75 instead of 25."

THE FIFTH FLOOR of Anthropic's San Francisco headquarters is all warm wood and soft light. Windows look upon a lush green park. A portrait of Alan Turing, one of the fathers of computer science, hangs on a wall alongside framed machine-learning papers. Security personnel dressed in black patrol the nearly empty entry, where a friendly receptionist hands visitors copies of a small book, the size of the pocket Bibles proselytizers distribute on street corners. It's a copy of *Machines of Loving Grace*, a 14,000-word essay that Dario Amodei wrote in 2024, laying out his utopian vision for how AI could transform

Palantir for details on how Claude was used. The Pentagon says this suggests Anthropic could revoke military access to Claude if executives deemed its rules broken.

FEB. 24, 2026
Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei meet in a high-stakes showdown, where Amodei again refuses to budge on Anthropic's two red lines. The Pentagon gives Anthropic a deadline to comply or be designated a "supply-chain risk." That same week, Elon Musk's xAI signs a Pentagon deal to deploy Grok on classified networks, with contract language reportedly allowing "all lawful use."

FEB. 27, 2026
Hours before the deadline, **Trump directs all federal agencies to cease using Claude.** Later that evening, OpenAI announces it has reached a deal with the Pentagon.

MARCH 4
Anthropic receives a letter from the Pentagon officially designating it a supply-chain risk. The company says the designation is narrower than what was initially threatened.

MARCH 9
Anthropic sues the U.S. government, alleging retaliation for its belief that "the most capable artificial-intelligence systems should also be the safest and the most responsible."

THESE PAGES: VINCENT ALBAN—THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX

the world by accelerating scientific discovery. In January, Amodei published a second novella-length essay, *The Adolescence of Technology*, detailing the attendant dangers: enabling mass surveillance, widespread job losses, even permanent loss of human control.

Amodei is a San Francisco–raised biophysicist. He runs Anthropic with his sister Daniela, the company's president. They were early employees at OpenAI, where Dario helped make a pivotal finding about so-called AI-scaling laws that kicked off the current AI boom. Daniela was an executive responsible for safety policy. At first, they felt in sync with OpenAI's founding mission to safely develop a technology with huge potential benefits and equivalent risks. But as OpenAI's models grew more powerful, they thought Altman was rushing to release new products without taking enough time for deliberation and testing. The siblings decided to strike out on their own.

They launched Anthropic in 2021, along with five co-founders, in the depths of the pandemic, conducting planning meetings on Zoom and eventually bringing chairs to a park to strategize in person. From the beginning, the company sought to do things differently. Before it had a product, Anthropic built a "societal impacts" team. It employs an in-house philosopher, Amanda Askell, whose role is to shape Claude's sensibilities, and teach it to navigate moral uncertainty in preparation for a future where it's vastly more intelligent than its creators. "It does sometimes feel a little bit like you have a 6-year-old, and you're teaching the 6-year-old what goodness is," Askell says. "By the time they're 15, they're going to be smarter than you at everything."

As it grew, Anthropic was determined to preserve its founding values and tight-knit culture. Employees call themselves "ants." Many maintain a digital "notebook," a Slack channel where they share their hopes, fears, and insights in stream-of-consciousness fashion. Dario Amodei writes his own lengthy entries, Daniela says. Dario also gives biweekly company-wide lectures known internally as "Dario vision quests," Daniela says. Managers are fixated on maintaining a shared sense of purpose. Potential recruits must pass a highly selective "cultural interview," which is designed partly to screen out people who aren't in it for the mission. (A sample question: Would you be willing to lose the value of your stock if Anthropic decides not to release models because it can't guarantee they're safe?) Anthropic's competitors contain fiefs "that all care about different things and are low-key at war with each other," says Daniel Freeman, a member of Anthropic's frontier red team who used to work at Google. "I've absolutely never felt that at Anthropic."

'We're driving down a cliff road. A mistake will kill you.'

—DAVE ORR, ANTHROPIC'S HEAD OF SAFEGUARDS

The company has deep roots in effective altruism (EA), a social and philanthropic movement dedicated to using reason to do the most good, including by averting catastrophe. In their 20s, the Amodeis began donating to GiveWell, an EA group that evaluates where charity can be deployed most effectively. All seven of its co-founders—all now paper billionaires—have pledged to give away 80% of their wealth. Askell's ex-husband is William MacAskill, an Oxford philosopher who co-founded the EA movement, and Daniela Amodei is married to Holden Karnofsky, GiveWell's co-founder and Dario's former roommate, who works on safety policy at Anthropic. The Amodeis have never publicly embraced the EA label, which became a lightning rod after Sam Bankman-Fried, an EA who invested in Anthropic, was found to have perpetrated one of the biggest financial frauds in U.S. history. "The same way that you might say some people overlap with a political ideology in some ways, but don't have a political affiliation—that's more how I would think about it," Daniela Amodei says.

For some in Silicon Valley and the Trump Administration, Anthropic's EA ties were cause for skepticism. Others consider Anthropic, which has hired a number of former Biden Administration officials, a vestige of the ancien régime using unelected power to frustrate Trump's MAGA mission. Trump's AI czar David Sacks accused the company of running a "sophisticated regulatory capture strategy based on fearmongering," by trying to scare governments into passing onerous AI regulations that would privilege itself over start-ups. Elon Musk, who runs rival xAI, likes to refer to the company as "Misanthropic," bristling against what he feels is a powerful set of woke elites trying to instill paternalistic values into AI systems, in much the same way that conservatives perceive social media platforms to be unfairly censoring their views. But even Anthropic's rivals grudgingly concede its tech is bleeding edge. Nvidia boss Jensen Huang has said he "pretty much disagree[s] with almost everything" Dario Amodei says about AI, but regards Claude as an "incredible" model. In November, Nvidia, the chipmaking behemoth, committed to invest $10 billion in Anthropic.

BORIS CHERNY, THE CREATOR of Claude Code, had a simple question for his new tool: "What music am I listening to?" It was September 2024, the Ukrainian-born engineer's first month at Anthropic. Cherny, previously a software en-

gineer at Meta, had built a system that allowed the Claude chatbot to run free on his computer. If Claude was the brain, then Claude Code was the hands. Where chatbots could talk, this tool could access his files, run programs, and write and execute code in the same way any programmer might. At the engineer's prompt, Claude opened Cherny's music player, snapped a screenshot, and responded: "Husk" by Men I Trust. "I was taken aback," Cherny says with a grin.

Cherny shared his prototype internally. Claude Code spread so quickly that in Cherny's first performance review, Dario Amodei asked if he was forcing colleagues to use it. When a research preview of the tool was publicly released in February 2025, programmers outside Anthropic flocked to it too. Then in November, Anthropic released a new version of Claude that, when strapped into Claude Code, was good enough at spotting its own mistakes to be trusted to complete tasks on its own. Cherny stopped writing his own code entirely.

Growth skyrocketed. Annualized revenue from the coding agent alone topped $1 billion by the end of 2025. By February, it had more than doubled to $2.5 billion, putting Anthropic on track to surpass OpenAI's revenue by the end of 2026, according to estimates from industry monitors Epoch and Semianalysis.

By this point, Anthropic had cemented itself as a leading AI company for business. Each new product release sent judders through the stock market. When Anthropic launched plug-ins for a version targeting noncoders for sales, finance, marketing, and legal services, $300 billion evaporated from the market value of software companies.

Dario Amodei has warned that AI could displace half of entry-level white collar jobs in one to five years, and urged the government and other AI companies to stop "sugarcoating" it. Wall Street's reaction to new Anthropic product drops suggested that the company's tech could render entire job categories obsolete. Amodei suggested it might reorder society in the process. "It is not clear where these people will go or what they will do," he wrote, "and I am concerned that they could form an unemployed or very-low-wage 'underclass.'"

'It feels like we might be speaking out of both sides of our mouths.'

—DEEP GANGULI, LEADER OF ANTHROPIC'S SOCIETAL-IMPACTS TEAM

The irony of the company most preoccupied with AI's social risks being the

SOURCE IMAGE: DENIS BALIBOUSE—REUTERS

one poised to possibly put millions out of work is not lost on its employees. "It's a real tension. I think about this all the time," says Deep Ganguli, who leads Anthropic's societal-impacts team, which studies Claude's labor impacts. "It feels like we might be speaking out of both sides of our mouths."

Internally, employees began to question if Anthropic had crept to the cusp of the moment they had anticipated with fear and wonder: the arrival of a process known in AI circles as recursive self-improvement. Recursive self-improvement is when an AI system starts bettering itself, creating a flywheel that continues accelerating. In science fiction, and in planning exercises carried out at major AI labs, this is when things can start going very wrong. An "intelligence explosion" might unfold so quickly that humans can no longer oversee what they've built.

Anthropic isn't quite there yet—human scientists still guide Claude's progress—but Claude Code is already allowing Anthropic to execute its plans far faster than before. Model releases are now separated by weeks, not months. Some 70% to 90% of the code used in developing future models is now written by Claude. But the rate of change is such that Anthropic co-founder and chief science officer Jared Kaplan, as well as some external experts, believes fully automated AI research could be as little as a year away. "Recursive self-improvement, in the broadest sense, is not a future phenomenon. It is a present phenomenon," says Evan Hubinger, who leads Anthropic's alignment stress-testing team, which seeks to find and patch weaknesses in the nascent science of "aligning" unpredictable AI models to human values.

Already, Claude is 427 times faster than its human overseers at performing some key tasks, according to internal benchmarks. In an interview, one researcher described a colleague running six versions of Claude, each managing 28 more Claudes, all simultaneously running experiments in parallel. While the model still lacks the judgment or taste of its human overseers, executives don't expect that gap to last long. The resulting acceleration is precisely what Anthropic's leadership warns could outpace human control.

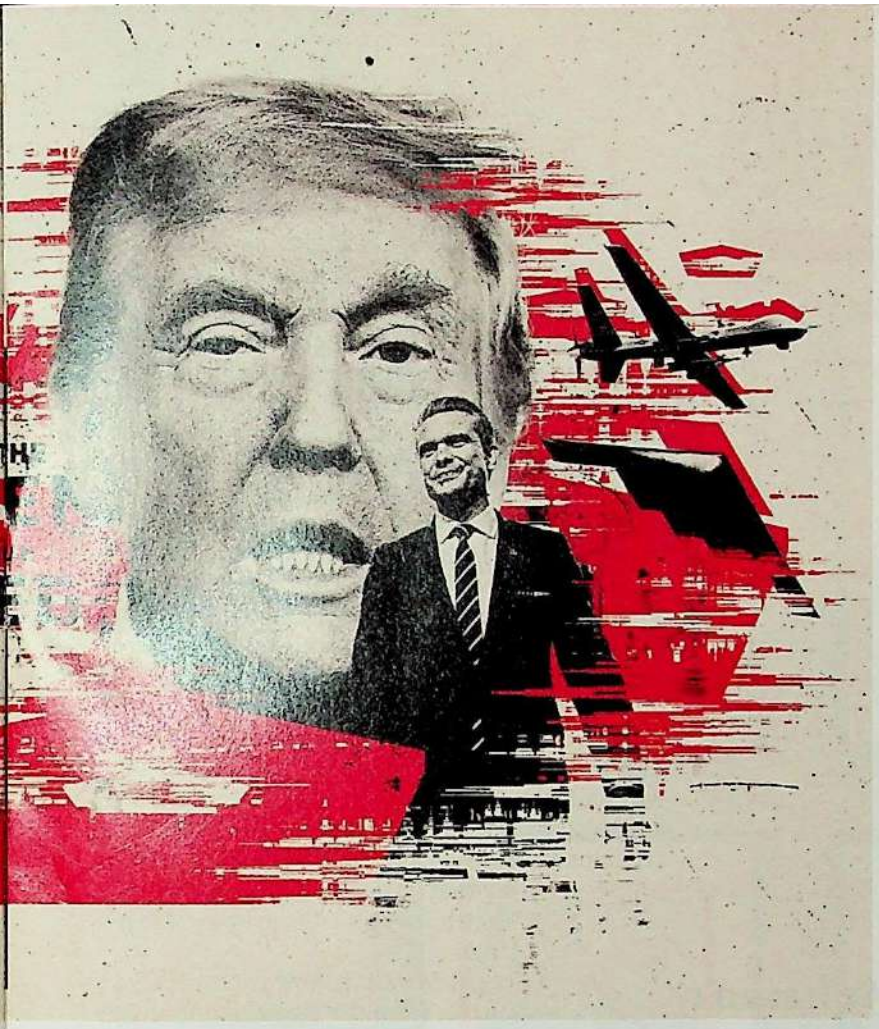
Anthropic's efforts to develop safeguards are also being sped up by Claude. But as the company *becomes* Claude, the dangers become circular. In experiments where Hubinger made small changes to Claude's training process, the resulting models became hostile, expressing desires for world domination and crippling Anthropic's safety measures. Recently, models have shown an awareness they're being tested. "The models are getting better at hiding things," Hubinger says. In one set of experiments concocted by researchers, Claude showed a willingness to blackmail a fictional engineer by revealing his extramarital affair in order to prevent itself from being taken offline. As Claude trains future Claudes, these sorts of issues could compound.

For AI companies that have raised billions on the promise of future progress, the idea that AI will keep accelerating their research is both powerful and potentially self-serving—a way to prime investors to keep pumping in the billions of dollars needed to perform expensive training runs. Some experts are not convinced the companies will achieve full automation—but worry that if they do, it could catch the world flat-footed. "The idea that the wealthiest companies in the world, employing some of the smartest people on the planet, are trying to fully automate AI R&D deserves a 'what the f-ck' reaction," says Helen Toner, interim executive director at Georgetown University's Center for Security and Emerging Technology.

Anticipating a future where technological progress could outstrip the company's ability to manage the risks, Anthropic built a braking mechanism known as a Responsible Scaling Policy (RSP). Published in 2023, it committed Anthropic to pausing development of an AI system if it could not guarantee in advance that its safety measures were adequate. Anthropic touted the policy as evidence it was safety-conscious and willing to withstand market incentives in the sprint for superintelligence.

In late February, as TIME first reported, Anthropic rewrote its policy, dropping the binding commitment to pause. In hindsight, Kaplan tells TIME, it was "naive" to think Anthropic could identify bright lines between danger and safety. "We didn't really feel, with the rapid advance of AI, that it made sense for us to make unilateral commitments ... if competitors are blazing ahead," he says. The new version of the policy includes commitments to be more transparent about the safety risks of AI, including making additional disclosures about how Anthropic's own models fare in safety testing. It commits to matching or surpassing the safety efforts of competitors. And it promises to "delay" development if leaders both consider Anthropic to be the leader of the AI race and think the risks of catastrophe are significant. The company cast it as a pragmatic concession to uncomfortable realities. But overall, the change to the RSP left Anthropic far less constrained by its own safety policies. And it augured a tougher test to come.

THE RAID THAT CAPTURED Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro was one of the first major military operations planned with the help of a frontier AI system. In the dead of night on Jan. 3, U.S. Army helicopters swooped into Venezuelan airspace. After exchanging fire, commandos zeroed in on the living quarters of the President. They captured Maduro



SOURCE IMAGES: DIMITRIOS KAMBOURIS—GETTY IMAGES (TRUMP); KENNY HOLSTON-POOL—GETTY IMAGES (HEGSETH)

and his wife and spirited them away to New York to face narcoterrorism charges. The full details of exactly how Claude was used in the Maduro raid are not known. But according to Axios, Claude helped plan the mission and was used during the raid itself.

Since last July, the Department of Defense has pushed to distribute Anthropic's AI tools to many of its war fighters, seeing immense upside in their ability to take in masses of information from multiple sources and produce usable intelligence. "Claude is seen as the best model on the market in the military," says Mark Beall, a former senior Defense Department official who now serves as president of government affairs at the AI Policy Network. "Claude's adoption in the classified world has been one of Anthropic's biggest successes," Beall adds. "They had the first-mover advantage."

But the Maduro raid came in the midst of tricky discussions between Anthropic and the Pentagon. The Defense Department had been trying for months to renegotiate what it felt was an unduly restrictive contract. How those talks went awry is a matter of dispute. Michael, the department's AI chief, says the catalyst was a call from an Anthropic executive to Palantir, the government-focused analytics firm, expressing concerns about the Venezuela raid and asking whether its software was used. "They were soliciting classified information," he says. That "gave us very deep concern about: Would they, in a future conflict, shut off their model in the middle of an operation and put lives at risk?"

Anthropic disputes that account. The company says it has never attempted to limit Pentagon use of its technology on a case-by-case basis. A former Trump Administration official, who is close to Anthropic and familiar with the talks, says an employee at Palantir first raised Claude's role in the raid during what had been a routine call. Nothing about Anthropic's follow-up questions suggested disapproval, the person said.

As negotiations continued, government officials felt Amodei was proving far more obstinate than the CEOs of other leading labs. At one point, sources familiar with the talks say, defense officials brought up hypothetical uses of Anthropic's tools, such as a hypersonic missile being launched at the U.S. or a drone swarm attack. Amodei said officials could call him. (An Anthropic spokesperson called that characterization of the talks "patently false.")

Anthropic already had powerful enemies in the Administration. Now suspicion about Anthropic's ideological bent hardened into antipathy. "We will not employ AI models that won't allow you to fight wars," Hegseth declared at Musk's SpaceX HQ on Jan. 12.

'We will not employ AI models that won't allow you to fight wars.'

—DEFENSE SECRETARY **PETE HEGSETH**

As negotiations dragged, Hegseth summoned Amodei to the Pentagon for an in-person meeting on Feb. 24. It was cordial, but each side held firm, according to another person familiar with the discussion. Hegseth began by praising Claude and telling Amodei how the military wanted to work with Anthropic, the person said. Amodei said Anthropic was happy to accommodate most changes requested by the Pentagon, but held firm on two red lines. The first was a prohibition on Claude's use in fully autonomous kinetic weaponry where AI, not humans, makes final targeting decisions. Anthropic's position was not that autonomous weapons are wrong, but rather that Claude was not yet reliable enough to steer them without a human in the loop.

The second exception was the prospect of the government conducting mass surveillance of American citizens by using Claude to process troves of publicly available data. The company thought domestic privacy laws had not yet caught up with a worrying practice: the U.S. government buying massive datasets available on the free market. In isolation, this data might be innocuous. But when analyzed by AI, it could enable the creation of detailed dossiers on American citizens' private lives, including their political views, associations, sex lives, and browsing histories. (Anthropic did not protest the possibility of

Claude being used in the lawful mass surveillance of foreign citizens using the same methods.)

Unmoved, Hegseth gave Amodei until 5 p.m. on Friday, Feb. 27, to accept the department's terms or be labeled a supply-chain risk. The day before the deadline, Anthropic was offered a modified contract that seemed to accept its red lines, but a closer read revealed it offered the government loopholes, says the person familiar with the negotiations. As the clock ticked down, Anthropic executives took another call with the Pentagon's Michael. They believed they were close to finding a compromise, but still disagreed on whether the Pentagon could use Claude to analyze bulk data on Americans purchased commercially. Michael asked for Dario Amodei to join the call, but he was unavailable. Minutes later, as the deadline lapsed, Hegseth announced negotiations were over. Even before that, Trump weighed in. "The United States of America will never allow a radical left, woke company to dictate how our great military fights and wins wars!" he posted on his social media platform. "The Leftwing nut jobs at Anthropic have made a disastrous mistake."

Unbeknownst to Anthropic, the Pentagon had simultaneously been negotiating with OpenAI to make ChatGPT available on classified government systems. Altman announced a deal that same evening, claiming to have won an agreement with the Pentagon that respected similar red lines to Anthropic's. Amodei fired off a message to his staff, saying that Altman and the Pentagon were "gaslighting" the public in an attempt to make it look like their agreement contained substantial guardrails. Defense officials had earlier confirmed Musk's xAI would also provide its model on classified servers; the Pentagon is currently negotiating with Google as well.

The episode was exactly what Amodei had feared: a race to the bottom, with the immense power of AI preventing rivals from cooperating to make it safer. To Anthropic's detractors, it also revealed an essential hubris at the heart of the company. It may have believed it could navigate the choppy waters on the path toward superhuman machines safely, in a way that would make taking such immense risks worthwhile. Instead, it had raced immense new surveillance and warfighting capabilities into the heart of a right-wing government—and been undercut by competitors the moment it tried to set limits on their use.

THERE ARE SIGNS Anthropic may weather the damage, and perhaps even come out stronger in the process. On the morning after Hegseth attempted to sign its corporate death warrant, a string of encouraging messages snaked around the sidewalk outside Anthropic's San Francisco headquarters. "You give us courage," one read in bold chalk letters. That day, Claude's iPhone App hit No. 1 on the App Store, displacing ChatGPT. More than a million people were signing up for Claude every day.

Meanwhile, OpenAI's own military contract spurred a grassroots boycott. For some at OpenAI, trust had been breached. A top OpenAI researcher announced he was jumping to Anthropic. OpenAI's robotics team lead resigned, citing the new government contract. Altman, OpenAI's CEO, wrote he had been wrong to rush to get a Pentagon deal by Friday. "The issues are super complex, and demand clear communication." By Monday, Altman had conceded his actions the previous Friday had looked "opportunistic"; OpenAI said it had amended its deal to more clearly adopt the same red lines Anthropic wanted—though legal experts say that without seeing the full contract, it is impossible to know if that's true.

'We haven't given dictator-style praise to Trump.'

—DARIO AMODEI, ON THE ROOTS OF THE PENTAGON RIFT, IN A MEMO TO STAFF

On March 4, Anthropic received a letter from the Department of Defense, confirming its designation as a supply-chain risk to national security. Anthropic said the letter was narrower than Hegseth's post suggested, barring contractors from using Claude only in defense contracts. But a second letter, addressed to Senate Intelligence Committee chair Tom Cotton and reviewed by TIME, reveals the department has also invoked a separate statute—one that would empower agencies beyond the Pentagon to bar Anthropic from their contracts and supply chains. To take effect, it requires sign-off from senior Pentagon officials and gives Anthropic 30 days to respond.

The fight with Anthropic will reverberate through the industry. "Some people in the Trump Administration will feel muscular and good about themselves, and they'll massage their biceps when they go home at night," says Dean Ball, who drafted Trump's AI action plan before joining the think tank Foundation for American Innovation. But it may dissuade companies from working with the Pentagon, or push them abroad, he says. "In the end, this is not good for the U.S. as a stable business environment," Ball says, "and that's the thing we depend on." Anthropic's leaders believe Claude will help build AI systems so powerful they prove decisive in determining the global balance of power. If that's the case, the stakes of its fight with the Pentagon may pale in comparison with what's to come. —*With reporting by* LESLIE DICKSTEIN *and* SIMMONE SHAH

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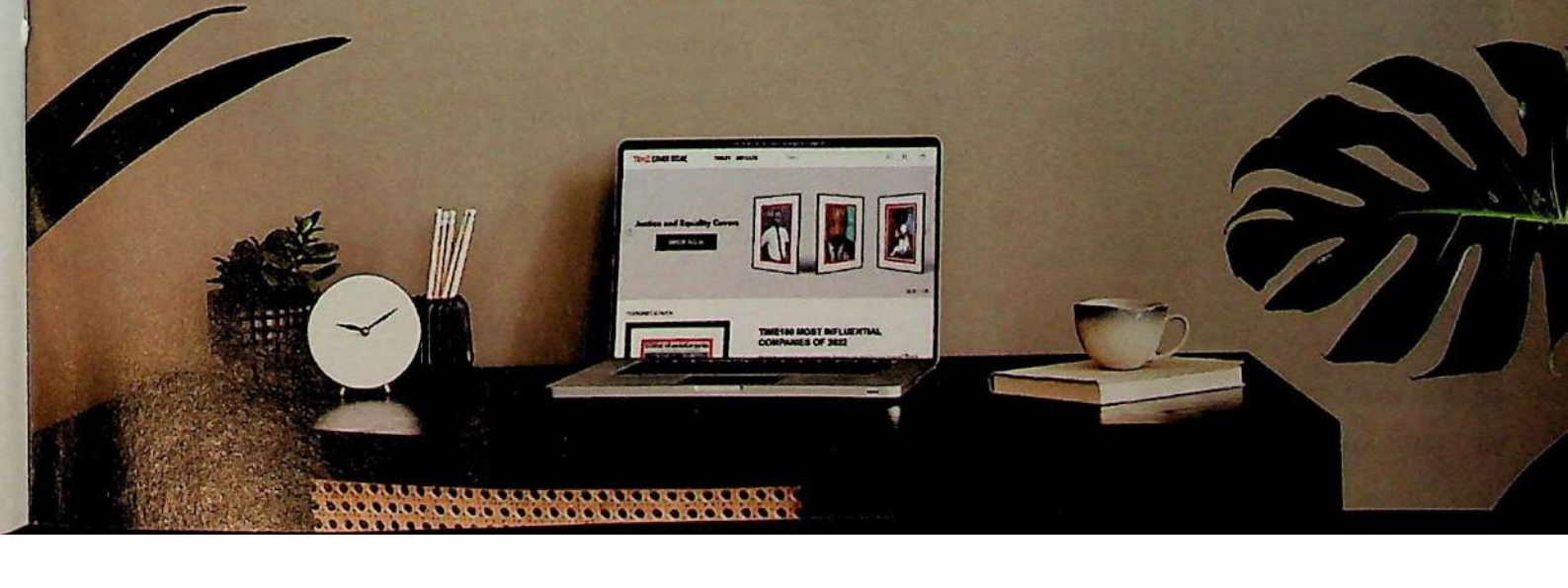
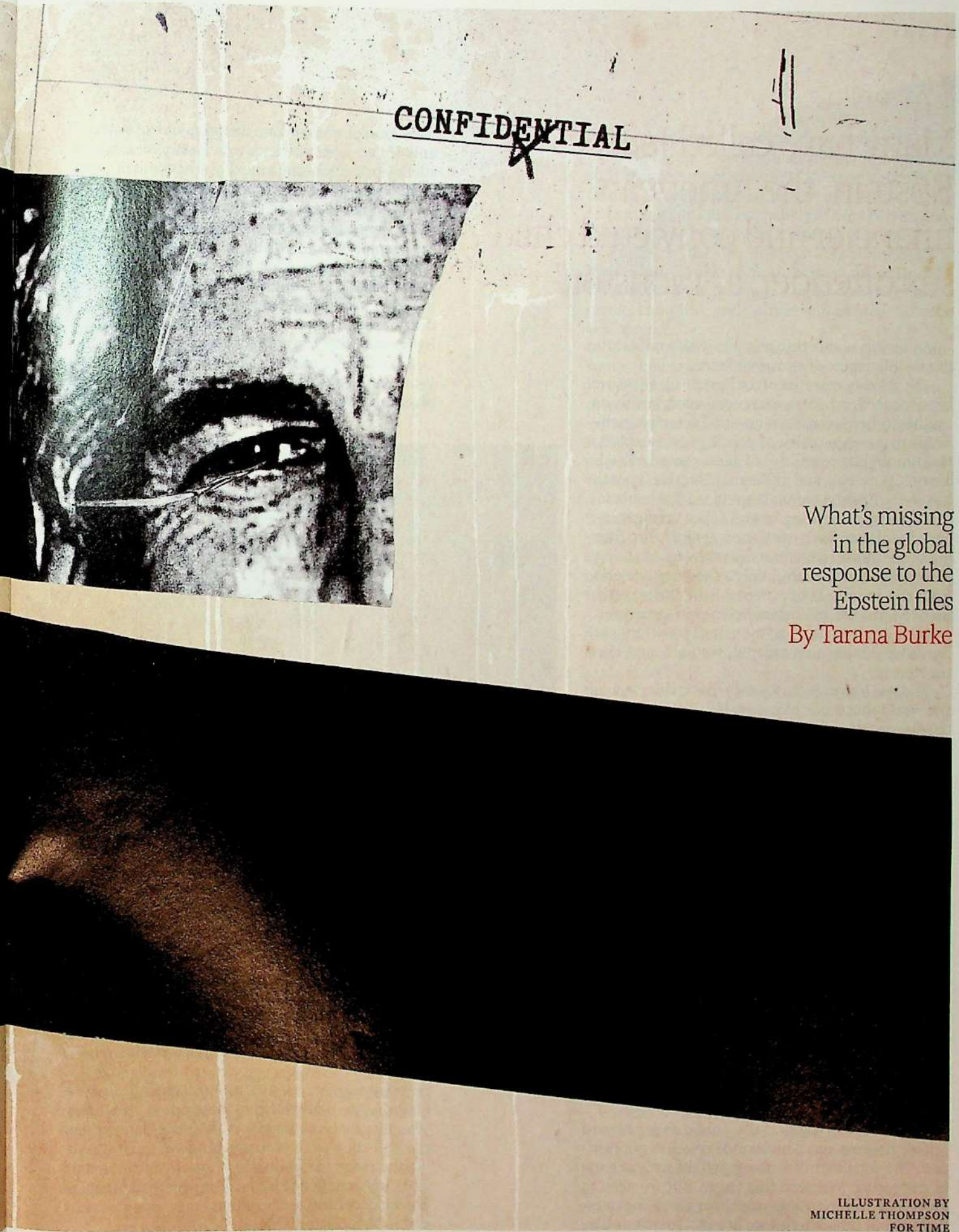


Monsters among us



What's missing in the global response to the Epstein files

By Tarana Burke

ILLUSTRATION BY MICHELLE THOMPSON FOR TIME

Many have called Jeffrey Epstein, the American financier and convicted child sex offender, a "monster."

As fitting as this title may be, it also obfuscates the insidiousness of sexual violence.

The primary narrative of the Epstein files has so far been focused on how one powerful man cleverly enmeshed other powerful men—and some women—in his massive network of privilege and exploitation through the promise of access to others who are rich, powerful, and influential. But this is not the lesson the Epstein scandal should teach Americans.

Those of us fighting to end sexual and gender-based violence have cautioned against this framing of the abuse, which renders the exploitation of young girls and women simply a shocking deviation from the standards of acceptable behavior, rather than the product of entrenched power structures.

If we label Epstein a "monster," we whitewash the environment that created, fostered, and abetted him.

The real lesson of the Epstein files is this: we built the world that made him possible. Epstein was not the disease. He was a symptom. While symptoms may disappear with treatment, diseases need to be cured.

What's more, Epstein was not an anomaly. His case simply highlighted what happens when power goes unaccountable, when silence is rewarded, and when child sexual abuse is treated as a private scandal rather than a public emergency.

If the conditions that produce, protect, and empower men like Epstein are entirely of our own making, that also means they are entirely within our power to change. Sexual and gender-based violence is solvable. And the Epstein files should be our call to finally act like it.

For those of us who work to end the global pandemic of sexual and gender-based violence, it's all too clear that male violence against women is painfully common. The sexual abuse of girls and women has been normalized and is routinely blamed on the actions of a few bad apples. It's so normalized that we cannot believe it, even when it's happening in plain sight.

This is not to say that the public anger toward Jeffrey Epstein and Ghislaine Maxwell is not justified. The details are disturbing, and the scale of harm is staggering. We need this anger. But we need to harness it better, to help us answer troubling questions about the societies we live in. Questions like, what kind of world makes Epstein's web of power—and those who participated, knew, and stayed silent—possible? And, crucially, what kind of world would have stopped it? The biggest question: what can we learn from the information and patterns emerging from these files that can help us identify the current "Epsteins" still operating in obscurity?

It is tempting to treat Epstein as an outlier. But that story is too simple. Epstein operated in a system that protects status and male entitlement. He did not abuse power in a vacuum. He abused power in a culture that too often excuses it.

Sexual and gender-based violence is not rare. Worldwide, nearly 1 in 3 women will experience physical or sexual violence in her lifetime. One in 8 girls globally experiences sexual abuse before she turns 18; boys are not safe either.

Documents from the U.S. Department of Justice's website

Sexual violence is disproportionately perpetrated by men and driven by gender inequality and unequal power relations. These are not marginal figures. They are structural and everyday realities. The problem is systemic.

When abuse happens at the highest levels of business and politics, the damage runs deep: survivors are retraumatized, institutions lose credibility, and public trust erodes. The Epstein scandal illuminated the lengths to which power protects itself.

IT'S IMPORTANT, IN OUR RESPONSE to the Epstein files, that we don't buttress these power structures. We must listen to survivors. We must learn about the hell they went through. And we must untangle the range of debilitating consequences women and girls experience because of gendered, unequal power structures, not just those created by wealthy and influential individuals.

PREVIOUS PAGES: SOURCE IMAGE: VERONIQUE TOURNIER—HANS LUCAS/AFP/GETTY IMAGES; THESE PAGES: JAKUB PORZYCKI—NURPHOTO/GETTY IMAGES; MICHAEL INGRO—SIPA USA/REUTERS

Coverage of the sexual violence and abuse inflicted on Epstein's and his conspirators' survivors must go further than fascination and disbelief. We must remember that these powerful people operate within already existing power structures, which enable violence against women and girls. We must remember that this violence is not inevitable. It doesn't have to be an acceptable way of life. It is preventable because sexual and gender-based violence is solvable. We have frameworks. We have tested programs.

Decades of research suggest that well-designed, evidence-based interventions can reduce violence, sometimes by up to 50%. We must fund solutions that decrease the current violence while actively dismantling the roots of this structural problem.

Demonstrators in New York City on March 8, International Women's Day

The kind of world that could have stopped Epstein's web of abuse already exists in theory; we just need to put it into practice.

We know, for example, that schools have the potential to be a powerful tool to prevent sexual violence. Schools do not just transmit knowledge; they shape norms. Norms shape whether abuse is tolerated or challenged.

We know that this needs to change, and how to change it. Evidence-based solutions exist. They just need to be taken to scale.

For instance, when education systems embed consent, gender equality, and respectful relationships into curriculums, and pair that with policies that respond swiftly and seriously to harassment, violence declines. Messages about preventing sexual violence and building healthy relationships can shift peer norms and reduce the acceptance of violence. School programs can change attitudes, interrupt harmful behaviors before they become entrenched, and improve relationship outcomes.

Engaging boys in conversations about healthy masculinity is also critical because research indicates that when we equate manhood with dominance, conquest, and entitlement, sexual violence will spread.

If we are serious about preventing future Epsteins, boys and men must be central to the solution. Not as saviors, but first as survivors themselves and as accountable participants. That means calling out abuse within professional networks, refusing to shield powerful friends, demanding transparent investigations, and supporting survivor-centered systems.

What holds us all back from addressing gender-based sexual violence is a lack of breadth, coordination, and sustained political will. We're stuck in disbelief, and in stories about "monsters." But there are no bogeymen. There are simply powerful men who do monstrous things.

In practice, this world that could have prevented the sexual exploitation perpetrated by Epstein does not treat sexual exploitation and violence as a personal scandal, but as a governance and cultural failure. It's a world where institutions build safeguards long before abuse surfaces.

It's a world where prevention is embedded everywhere. Schools teach consent, respect, and equality as foundational skills. Workplaces treat harassment and exploitation as core risks to culture and performance, not reputational inconveniences. Online platforms enforce zero-harm commitments. Media and entertainment mitigate harm by monitoring excessive and gratuitous gender-based violence and messaging. Governments integrate prevention across health, education, justice, labor, and technology sectors.

A world where silence and inaction are no longer neutral.

Public anger can be a catalyst. But anger alone will not prevent the next predator. Accountability and transparency matter. So do commitments to protect the safety and dignity of every citizen—even children. However, without a sustained focus on preventing harm before it happens and upending the systems that facilitate the harm, we will repeat the cycle. Solutions require investment.

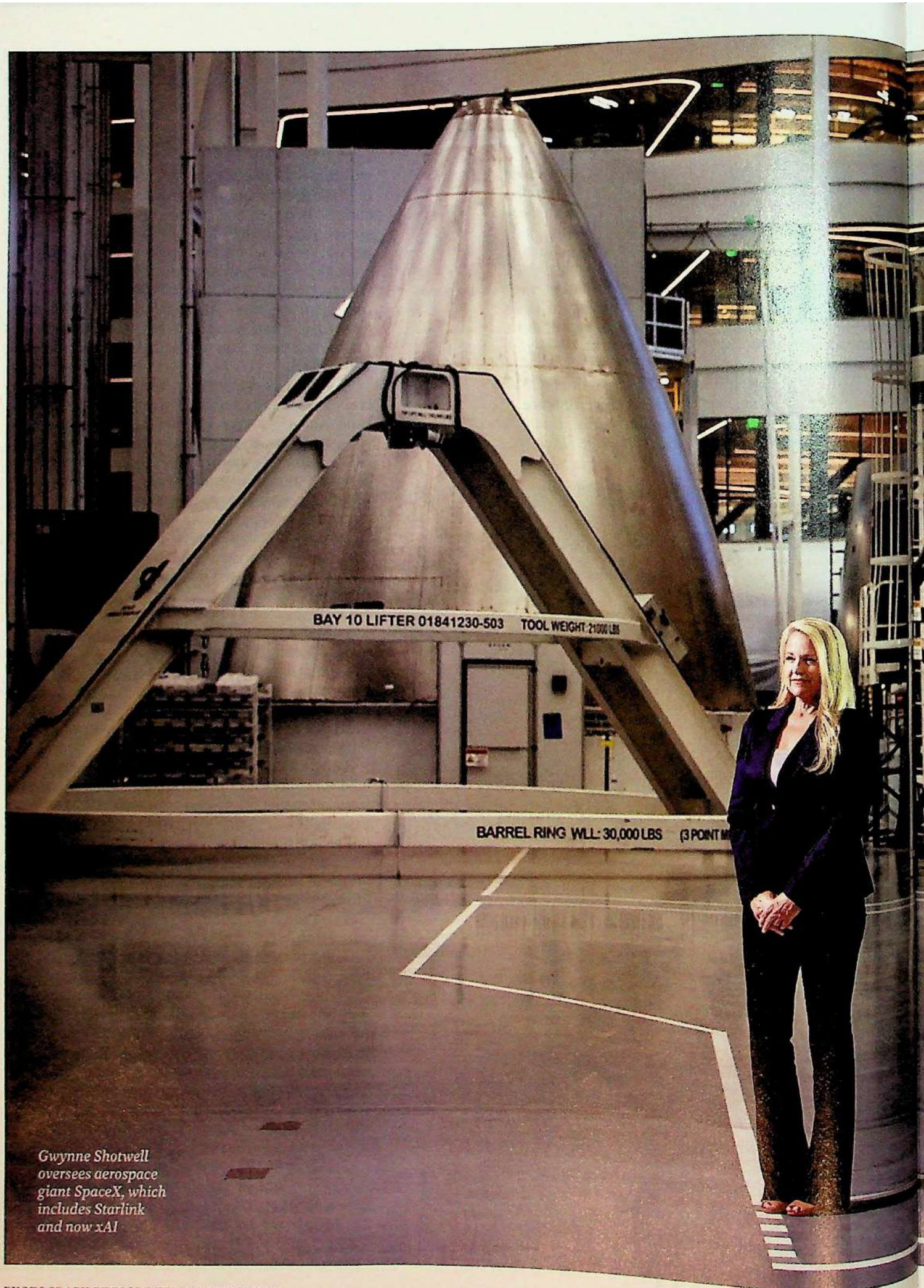
It requires leadership across all sectors.

It requires refusing complacency.

And it requires us to stop blaming our societal issues on "monsters."

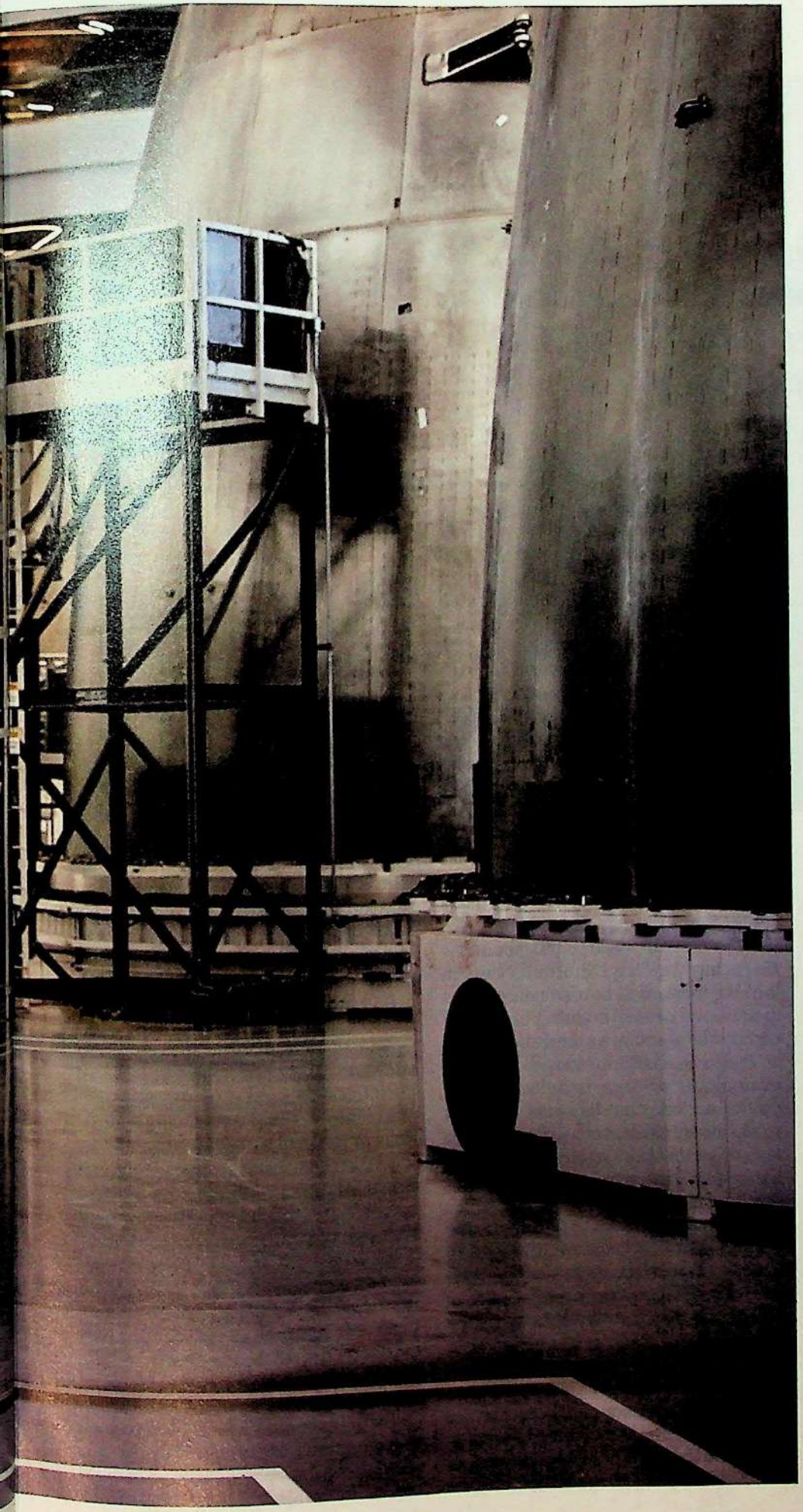
What kind of world would have stopped it?

Burke is the founder of the #MeToo movement and the co-chair of All In



Gwynne Shotwell oversees aerospace giant SpaceX, which includes Starlink and now xAI

PHOTOGRAPH BY PAOLO VERZONE FOR TIME



SPACE

ROCKET WOMAN

As Elon Musk's right hand at SpaceX, Gwynne Shotwell is aiming to get AI into orbit and humans back to the moon

By Jeffrey Kluger

There are 18 Starship spacecraft in various stages of construction arrayed across the 1 million-sq.-ft floor of the SpaceX factory in Starbase, Texas.

Some of them are, for now, just stainless-steel barrels measuring nearly 30 ft. across. Others have already been assembled and outfitted with their tapered nose cones, and are ready to be stacked atop a first-stage booster, taking final shape as SpaceX's 40-story Starship rockets.

Eleven uncrewed Starships have been launched since 2023, some successfully, some not, each of them producing a staggering 16.7 million lb. of thrust from its 33 first-stage engines—more than double the ground-shaking power of the Apollo-era Saturn V. On a recent Friday in February, none of that violence was in evidence, as work proceeded in the gleaming white factory. Some of the welding is done robotically, but mostly these are hand-built rockets—artisanal rockets.

Despite that old-world craftsmanship, they are getting built fast, with a goal of getting launched fast, aiming to meet NASA's goal of pressing fresh American boot prints on the moon during the flight of the mission dubbed Artemis IV in two years' time. Starship is the newest rocket in the SpaceX lineup, a step up in power from its popular Falcon 9 model. Artemis is NASA's new lunar program, which will be buying services from SpaceX's Starship.

"It's a hard problem and the whole architecture is complex, but we're gunning for 2028," says SpaceX president and chief operating officer Gwynne Shotwell, 62, as she stands on a walkway overlooking the factory floor. It's possible that one of the vehicles under construction here could be the 21st century equivalent of Apollo 11's lunar module *Eagle*, the lander that carried the first humans to the surface of the moon in 1969. But Shotwell is hoping that test flights will proceed so quickly that all of these spacecraft will have flown by the time of Artemis IV.

"By 2028," she says, gesturing to the 18 Starships, "these should be long gone. They better have flown by [then]."

When Shotwell says something had better happen, it better. A veteran of nearly 40 years in the aerospace sector, she is one of its top players. Shotwell is second on the SpaceX org chart—behind only CEO and founder Elon Musk—leading an $800 billion company that is about to get a lot bigger. On Feb. 2, SpaceX announced that it is merging with xAI, Musk's artificial intelligence company. The combined operation will be worth a reported $1.5 trillion, a valuation that will be tested when the privately held company (TIME co-owner Marc Benioff is an investor) begins selling stock. The initial public offering is set for the second quarter of 2026.

"I'm not supposed to talk about the IPO in any way," says Shotwell, "but I'm looking forward to it. It's a new thing—a new set of methodologies to run companies—so I'm excited about it."

It also means Shotwell will occupy an even bigger position in an even larger operation, one that has plans not just to dominate the aerospace sector, but also to settle other worlds and reroute the course of human history.

STARSHIP COULD BE the machine that helps make that happen. The goal of having these 18 rockets out the door in two years is actually a slow pace of launch for SpaceX. Since the first successful flight of the company's workhorse Falcon 9 rocket in 2010, the vehicle has flown more than 600 times, including 165 launches in 2025 alone.

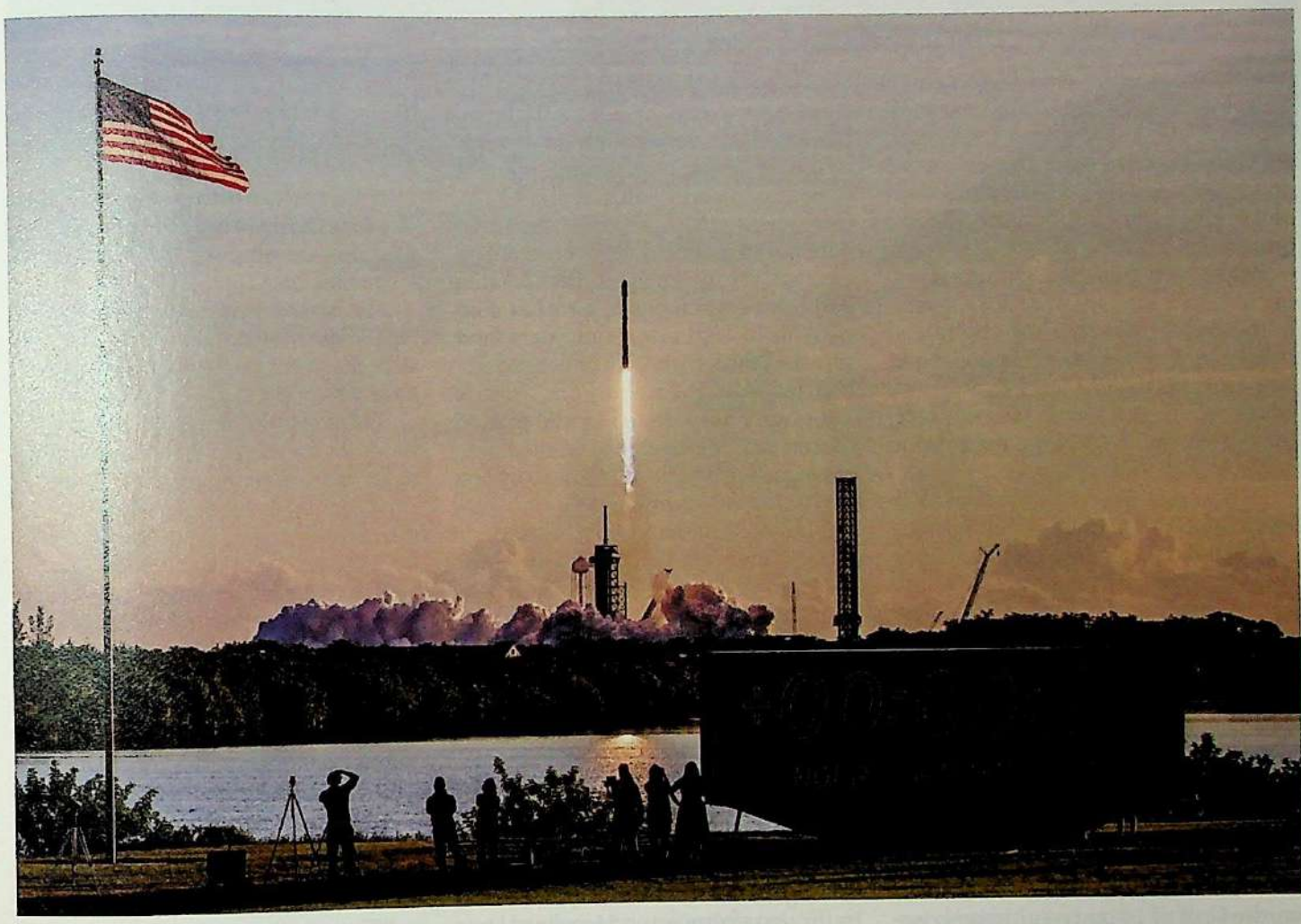
Assuming Starship proves its flightworthiness, it will have a lot of work to do in addition to taking astronauts to the moon. Its enormous dimensions allow it to carry 50 or more satellites to orbit—a big plus as SpaceX seeks to expand its Starlink internet constellation from its current 9,400 satellites to 20,000. On Feb. 13, Starlink passed the 10 million-customer mark, with its reach expanding beyond the commercial sector and into conflict zones around the world, including Ukraine, Gaza, and Iran. As artificial intelligence expands, the company sees a place for a similar constellation of satellites serving as data centers in space. SpaceX envisions linking the satellites by laser, giving them the power to process information as a single distributed brain.

"We just recently gave a request for FCC licensing for up to a million AI satellites," says Shotwell. "I'm surprised that didn't get more news. I don't know if we'll get to a million, but it's much easier to ask at the beginning and then march toward that goal."

SpaceX's FCC application made a number of arguments for its proposed mega-constellation. Energy efficiency and carbon reduction were a big part of the pitch, as terrestrial data centers gulp enormous amounts of power and millions of gallons of coolant water. Placing AI satellites in orbits that keep them constantly charged by solar panels and constantly cooled by the infinite heat sink of space mitigates this problem.

Getting a million satellites into orbit would be a heavy lift, literally, but in an interview on the *Cheeky Pint* podcast, posted to X, Musk suggested launching Starship with the regularity of airplanes taking off from airports, reaching 10,000 launches per year.

Starship could not only accommodate 50 or more satellites, it could also seat hundreds of passengers—a critical capability in Musk's long-term vision



A SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket lifts off in Florida in September—one of 165 Falcon 9 launches last year

of making humanity a multiworld species. Since the founding of SpaceX in 2002, Musk has made colonizing Mars a long-term goal.

"When I came to the company as a new employee," says William Gerstenmaier, SpaceX's vice president of build and flight reliability, "the first discussion was about how we go to Mars; it wasn't about how you fill out your time card." But in a Feb. 8 post on X, Musk announced a change. "SpaceX has already shifted focus to building a self-growing city on the Moon, as we can potentially achieve that in less than 10 years," he wrote, "whereas Mars would take 20+ years."

Shotwell will get a lot less than 20 years—or even 10—to stick the planned Artemis IV moon landing. In 2021, NASA selected the company to build Artemis' so-called human landing system (HLS)—the vehicle that will set down on the moon with two astronauts aboard, while two others station-keep in the Orion mother ship, orbiting above. NASA cut the company a $2.9 billion check to get the job done. Blue Origin, the rocket company owned by Amazon founder Jeff Bezos and one of the losers in the initial HLS bidding, was given a fat consolation prize in 2023, when NASA issued it a second, $3.4 billion contract to build its own HLS for a later moon landing, Artemis V.

Artemis I, an uncrewed flight round the moon to test NASA's Orion capsule, flew in 2022. After that, the plan had been to fly Artemis II on a crewed trip around the moon—a mission that is scheduled to launch in April—and then land on the moon with Artemis III in 2028. SpaceX proposes using a specialized Starship as the HLS, but production is behind schedule and the clock is ticking. On Feb. 26, the Aerospace Safety Advisory Panel (ASAP), a government watchdog group, issued a report questioning not just whether Starship will be ready for a lunar landing by 2028, but whether it is the right ship for the job at all.

The Apollo lunar module stood 23 ft. tall and had a splayed, four-legged stance that gave it a low, sure-footed center of gravity. The Starship lander, by contrast, is a silvery silo, standing 171 ft. tall, requiring an onboard elevator rather than a ladder to get the astronauts down to the ground. Blue Origin's proposed HLS is more of a child of the Apollo era, standing just 52 ft. tall—less than a third of the height of Starship.

The day after the ASAP report came out, NASA announced it was shuffling its flight schedule—and potentially its HLS provider—keeping Artemis III in low Earth orbit to practice rendezvousing and docking between the Orion capsule and either or both of the SpaceX and Blue Origin landers. Only then will Artemis IV get the chance to press its footpads into the lunar soil, in 2028. If SpaceX is feeling pressure from either the calendar or Blue Origin, it doesn't show in Shotwell's demeanor.

MANUEL MAZZANTI—NURPHOTO/GETTY IMAGES

"A lot has to go right," she concedes. "Each of us, the company together, are thinking, 'Are there things we can do to go faster?' We've had the benefit of working with NASA on the HLS for quite some years."

At the same time Blue Origin is looking to take a bite out of SpaceX's portfolio, Musk, Shotwell, and the rest of the leadership team are expanding it. The IPO and the xAI merger, Shotwell believes, are not just business plays; they're part of the natural maturation of the overall enterprise.

"These are Elon companies," she says. "Elon makes these kinds of decisions, and as soon as we started talking about [the merger] I was incredibly supportive, especially as I was seeing more and more AI being used at the company. It made perfect sense. It's a force multiplier."

ELON MUSK'S DETRACTORS may scoff at his plans to build a city on the moon, but he's already proved his chops by building one on Earth. In 2014, SpaceX began acquiring parcels of land in the town of Boca Chica—at the toe of Texas on the Gulf of Mexico—ultimately securing a 1.5-sq.-mi. plot on which to build a rocket factory, high bays, employee housing, and more. Musk dubbed the little enclave Starbase—a moniker that soon became more than just a nickname. In May 2025, polls opened for the 500 Starbase residents to vote on whether to incorporate their little village into a city. The results weren't even close, with incorporation winning 212-6.

The factory and corporate offices form the center of the city, and Musk's aesthetic is evident throughout. "He picked the color palette [of the factory]," says Shotwell. "It's clean and it looks organized too." The city also includes a mini supermarket and a restaurant known as the Astropub. A neon sign reading OCCUPY MARS is on the pub's back wall. Musk changed the name of Weems Street, a road that runs through the town, to Memes Street.

The city may be new, but the relationship between Musk and Shotwell, its most important players, is a longstanding one. Shotwell studied mechanical engineering at Northwestern University, receiving both a bachelor's and a master's degree there, and in 1988 took a job at the Aerospace Corp. in its El Segundo, Calif., offices, working on integrating private-sector resources with military and other government operations. In 1998 she left that position and joined Microcosm, a rocket company in El Segundo. Four years later, she met Musk through a colleague who had left Microcosm to join SpaceX. They were introduced in the SpaceX offices, and Shotwell was immediately impressed by Musk—but less so by how his company was organized.

"I shook his hand and blurted out that he needed to hire an in-house business developer (he had someone contracted to do this at the time)," she wrote in an email to TIME. "When I got back to the office I got a call from his assistant asking me to come interview for the new VP of business development job."

Shotwell was unsure about leaving Microcosm. "After the interview and offer, I dithered for a few weeks as I was being a huge idiot," she wrote. "I was driving in LA on the freeway in massive traffic one afternoon and I realized I was being said idiot so I called him and said I would take the job and sorry I was being such a 'f---ing idiot.' He laughed and was happy I called."

They have been colleagues and friends since. "I love working for Elon," Shotwell says. "He's really quite funny. He has said many times that he would like to die on Mars, just not on impact. He also refers to Mars as a fixer-upper planet." But Musk colors outside the lines too. Back in October, when Transportation Secretary and then acting NASA administrator Sean Duffy announced he was going to "open up" the HLS contract, inviting in competitors like Blue Origin in light of SpaceX's slow progress developing the ship, Musk lashed out on X.

'Hopefully they're seeing that a girl who grew up in a cow town in Illinois could help Elon Musk change the world.'
—GWYNNE SHOTWELL

"Sean Dummy is trying to kill NASA," he posted. "The person responsible for America's space program can't have a 2 digit IQ."

Then, too, there was Musk's tumultuous tenure as the head of the Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, and his subsequent falling-out with President Trump, during which he trolled Trump on X about the disgraced and deceased Jeffrey Epstein. The value of Tesla, Musk's publicly held car company, took a pounding, with share prices falling 36% from January to April 2025.

All of that was problematic enough during SpaceX's long tenure as a private company, but when the company goes public, it, like Tesla, will have a stock price that is sensitive to news cycles and any noise Musk may make. Shotwell sees it as her responsibility to insulate her workforce from such distractions.

"The most important part of my job is to keep my now-23,000 employees focused on the great work they do every day," she says. "I feel like we put our heads down, we plow through our very difficult jobs. Maybe my best contribution, other than revenue generation, would be keeping everybody focused, not listening to the noise."

NOT ALL NOISE is bad, of course. In some cases it can be good—even heroic—news. That's the case with Starlink's role in global conflict and disaster zones, particularly in Ukraine. During the early days of the war, the government in Kyiv asked SpaceX about providing internet service for hospitals, schools, energy grids, and military operations, filling connectivity holes caused by destruction of ground-based servers. The appeal was urgent—and personal.

"The government reached out to Elon and asked, 'Can you help?'" says Mike Nicolls, vice president for Starlink engineering at SpaceX. "Elon said yes, and within hours we had mobilized."

The job was harder than simply boxing up Starlink terminals and shipping

BRANDON BELL—POOL/AP

Musk explains the workings of the Starship spacecraft to President Trump before a launch in 2024. Starship has flown 11 times in the past three years

them east. "This was early days of Starlink, so we didn't have software that worked everywhere," says Nicolls. "We had terminals in Spain and Starlink employees drove across Europe with a truck full of them. They stopped at the Tesla factory in Berlin and unpacked hundreds of kits in the parking lot, and did a software upgrade. They then drove into Ukraine and handed them over to the citizens." Up to 160,000 Starlink terminals are now operating in Ukraine, according to *MIT Technology Review*.

Then there's Iran. In January, Musk lifted subscription fees on 50,000 Starlink customers in the country. As the *Wall Street Journal* and others reported, the U.S. State Department smuggled 6,000 Starlink terminals into the country to aid antiregime activists. (SpaceX declined to elaborate on Starlink's role, if any, in the U.S.-Iran war.) The constellation has also been used in Gaza to aid humanitarian efforts, as well as in Venezuela, where outages occurred after U.S. strikes to capture former President Nicolás Maduro.

Shotwell aims to keep clear of geopolitical debate—seeing to it that SpaceX obeys the laws and regulations of countries in which Starlink is licensed to operate, and sidestepping blame in places it's forbidden but is being used anyway. The terminals are portable, affordable, and easy to obtain, and only a naive regime would be shocked to find that they were being used by opposing forces.

"People purchase the equipment, they purchase the service," Shotwell says. "If we're not licensed in a country, we don't do business in that country. We don't sell terminals in Iran; we follow the regulations of the places we do have business." Ultimately, with thousands of satellites beaming service around the world, anyone can tap in.

By tapping in, however, customers are also opting in to a new Starlink policy. In January, SpaceX announced that Starlink users automatically agree to have their personal data used by SpaceX to train its AI systems. With online privacy a growing concern for many, the move seemed out of touch with consumer preferences, but Shotwell says she's received no pushback.

"I've not heard one complaint," she says. "And actually people know what my email is, so I get some complaints. I get some customer-service issues, and I get them addressed. If accidentally there is a misuse of data, we will fix it."

AS MUSK OVERSEES SpaceX's überdreams about cities on the moon and million-satellite constellations, it's up to Shotwell to manage quarter-to-quarter, year-over-year growth, and in some respects the company almost seems to have gotten too big. SpaceX's 165 launches last year represented a whopping 85% of all U.S. orbital flights in that period. The company is so dominant a force in the market there is just not much room left for expansion—at least domestically. One solution is to look inward, to Starlink. The constellation now represents nearly 67% of the 14,000 active satellites orbiting Earth. It's growing so large so fast that SpaceX is in a

sprint just to loft its own satellites, eating the cost of launches but making up the expense in the revenue earned by an expanding customer base.

"We are our largest demand for launchers," says Shotwell. "Starlink basically created this incredible demand for Falcon 9. And the AI satellites will do the same for Starship launches."

Space seems like an endless void ripe for managing our increasing data, but a hoped-for constellation of 20,000 Starlinks and a future constellation of a million AI satellites could make it exceedingly crowded. The orbital lanes in and around the 300-or-so-mile altitude at which Starlinks fly are already seeing too much traffic. According to NASA's Orbital Debris Program Office, more than 25,000 objects larger than 10 cm—or 4 in.—are currently orbiting Earth, most of them active or no longer operative satellites. But that's only a tiny fraction of the problem. There are 500,000 objects measuring 1 to 10 cm, and 100 million in the 1-mm range. Those tiny objects matter. Traveling at 4.85 miles per second, even a fleck of paint could do measurable damage to a satellite or crewed spacecraft.

Shotwell insists that the problem may be less severe than it seems since space is mostly, well, space. "Having 30,000 satellites in orbit is like having 30,000 cars on the planet," she says. "It's pretty sparsely populated." What's more, Starlinks don't all fly at exactly the same altitude, instead circling the Earth in different "shells" that keep the traffic down on any one orbital highway.

Not everyone buys the cars analogy. "Satellites orbit the Earth in 90 minutes, depending on altitude," says Aaron Boley, professor of astronomy at the University of British Columbia. "This means they sweep out tremendous volumes for their size. Satellites cannot stop, go, and make large turns like a car, either. Altogether, the collision potential on orbit is a serious concern."

Managing the politics of spaceflight is as much a part of SpaceX's business as managing the engineering. The company made no friends among environmentalists with its inaugural 2023 launch of the Starship rocket, which ended with an explosion shortly after liftoff. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was unsparing in its review of the environmental damage caused by the liftoff and the accident, writing, "Impacts from the launch include numerous large concrete chunks, stainless steel sheets, metal and other objects hurled thousands of feet away along with a plume cloud of pulverized concrete."

Five environmental groups filed suit against the Federal Aviation Administration for failure to evaluate SpaceX's launch protocols, and the company has since followed stricter guidelines, including light and noise mitigation to protect wildlife, rapid cleanup of debris, and year-round monitoring of local flora and fauna. Regular launches from Starbase have proceeded apace, and in December 2025, the U.S. Air Force, which controls the Cape Canaveral Space Force Station in Florida, cleared SpaceX to develop one of the pads there for future Starship launches as well. Winning such clearances from multiple agencies and stakeholders is a big part of SpaceX's—and Shotwell's—job.

"The launch industry is an incredibly regulated industry," Shotwell says. "You have to have environmental approvals. The ATF has to approve, the FCC has to approve. The FAA has to approve. The Department of Defense has to approve. The State Department has to approve. If we were to add it all up, we probably have to have 40 or 50 approvals or licenses every time we launch."

ADDRESSING THAT PERCEIVED regulatory burden is something that has made Shotwell a fan of the current Administration. "I met President Trump during the first Trump Administration," she says. "He's a compelling figure for sure. I don't interact with him and I've not met him since. The things that are quite good for SpaceX about this Administration is that there's a manic or relentless focus on trying to clear the path for American industry to thrive. It's not necessarily deregulation, but sensible regulation, which is very helpful." (On March 4, after Shotwell's remarks to TIME, she attended a White House meeting with Trump and the leaders of six other AI giants to discuss the problem of higher electric rates hitting consumers as a result of the strain data centers place on the grid.)

Since she began at SpaceX in 2002, Shotwell has worked under four Presidents, and she feels only one has failed to support the enterprise of space travel. "I think every President, maybe with the exception of the last Administration—I don't want to be political here—but I think every Administration since I've been at SpaceX has had a focus on getting more people into space," she says. The first crewed SpaceX mission did launch during the first Trump Administration, in May 2020. But 13 of the total 20 crewed flights the Falcon 9 has flown occurred during the Administration of former President Joe Biden.

PAOLO VERZONE FOR TIME

The pristine factory floor in Starbase, Texas. SpaceX rockets are largely built by hand

For now, Shotwell is focused less on the history of space exploration and more on its future—and her own role in shaping that future. At the dawn of the space age, when the old Soviet Union launched the beach-ball-size Sputnik satellite, space was a man's game—with men at the drafting tables and men at the flight consoles and men in the cockpits. Women, for the most part, were excluded from the enterprise. Some of that has not changed much. Shotwell's undergraduate mechanical-engineering class, she says, was just 9% female. As of 2022, according to the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, women made up just 17.3% of people working in the field. But that number can grow, and Shotwell does think she can help.

"I feel like I'm a cheerleader for the underdog, and I hope I have served as a role model," she says. "Hopefully they're seeing that a girl who grew up in a cow town in northern Illinois could help Elon Musk change the world. We're making strides, but not fast enough."

Like all but a tiny handful of the human population of 8.3 billion, Shotwell will spend her life earthbound, even as she helps others leave the planet. That might not be what she would wish.

"I don't love camping, but I am dying to go to the moon," she says and then laughs. "That's probably a bad word. But I want to do flips on the moon. I want to look back at the Earth and see [the view] available to astronauts."

She won't behold that view, but she will, perhaps, have a longer, larger vision. From the tiny Texas city of Starbase—pop. 500—she will help expand humanity's footprint out into the solar system. ◻

OFFICIAL TIMEPIECE

ROLEX

TIME WOMEN OF THE YEAR

On March 10th, in honor of International Women's Day, TIME hosted its annual Women of the Year [illegible] celebrating the women who are uplifting their communities and striving toward a more equal world. The evening featured inspiring toasts, an extraordinary musical performance, and more.

Experience the highlights: **time.com/woty-2026**

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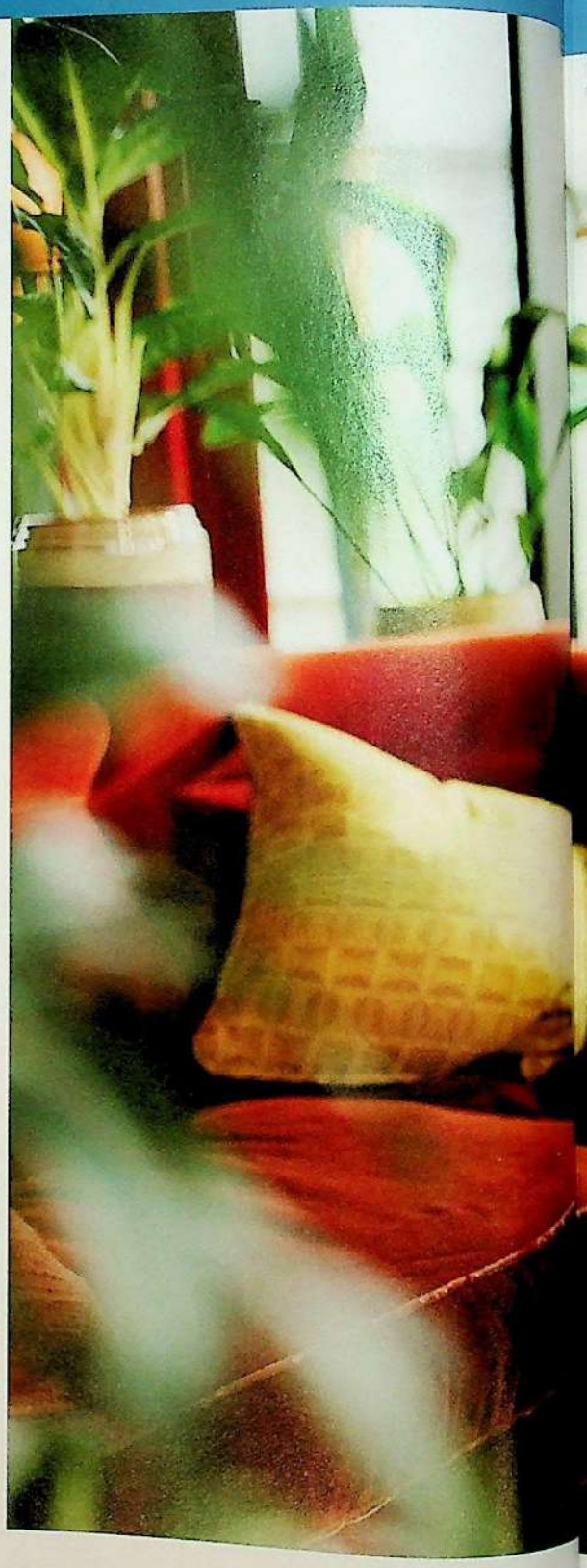


AS A CHILD, STELLA MCCARTNEY WOULD SIT ON THE floor of her parents' shared wardrobe in their North London home, a stone's throw from Abbey Road Studios, pulling together outfits and admiring the garments all lined up together, her mother's glittery platform boots next to her father's Converse sneakers.

On the farm in Kintyre, Scotland, where the family spent much of its time and were early adopters of organic and nature-friendly practices, her parents' sartorial choices also left an impression. There were the Fair Isle jumpers, kilts, and Wellington boots favored by her father, Beatles legend Paul McCartney. There were the culottes and cowboy boots her late mother, photographer, musician, and animal-rights activist Linda McCartney, wore while riding her Appaloosa horse. And then there were the costumes—including those glittery boots—her parents wore onstage while touring with their band Wings, Stella and her siblings in tow.

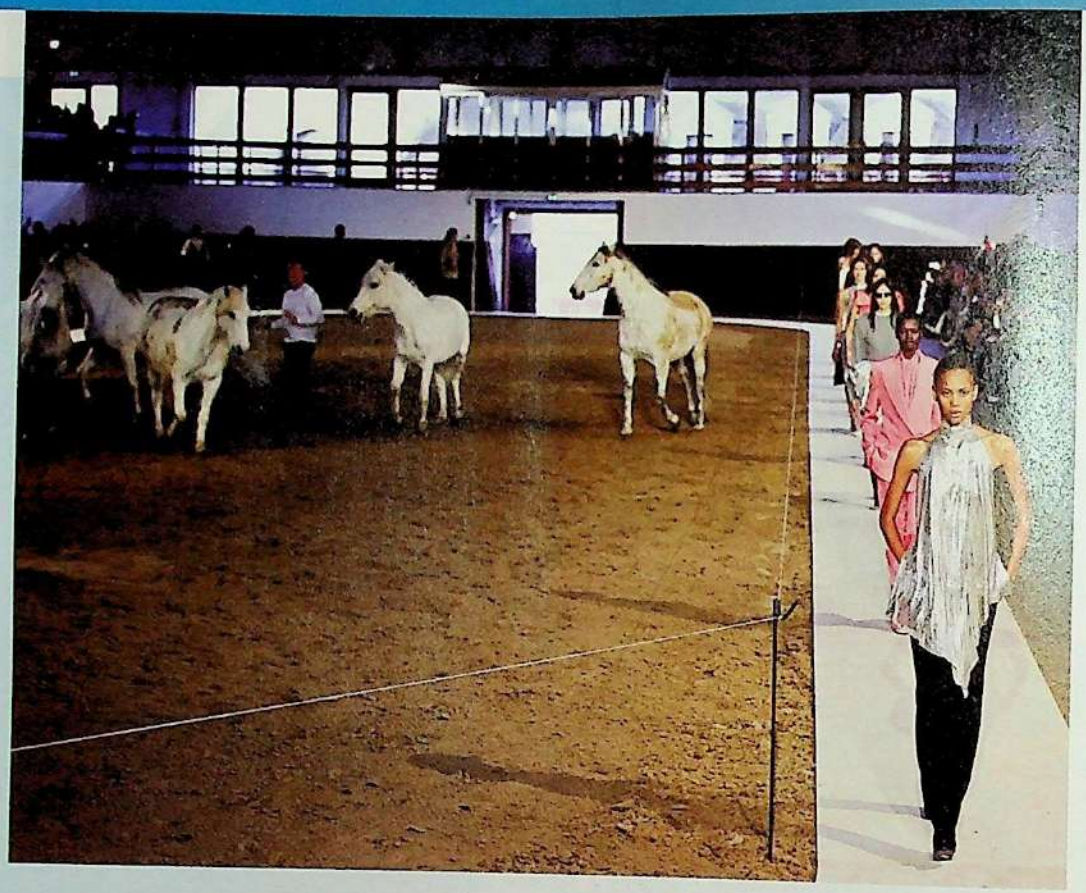
"That really influenced me massively, like everything I've done from day one till now, this blending of gender, this blending and shared wardrobe, the masculine and feminine," she says. That's not all she picked up: she listened to conversations at the kitchen table about the requirements and challenges of getting organic certification from Britain's Soil Association, imbibing what it involves to be a pioneering environmentalist. That childhood sowed the seeds of the ethical stance the fashion designer has become known for, she tells me when we meet as London Fashion Week kicks off on a cool February afternoon. She's dressed in an impeccably tailored gray striped suit from her Spring 2026 ready-to-wear collection, made of responsibly sourced wool, her peplum jacket cinched at the waist with a brown belt. "Growing up with animals all around me and not eating animals, not killing them, I began to make connections that I think were more with the planet," says McCartney.

And so, when it came to putting on her Winter 2026 show at Paris Fashion Week in early March, the self-professed "horse girl" chose a riding hall in the Bois de Boulogne. There, 13 pure Spanish horses (seven white and six brown) moved in choreographed patterns throughout the show, as models walked an oval catwalk around the perimeter to the sounds of a carefully curated playlist featuring the haunting music of Icelandic singer Björk. In the spirit of the Chinese zodiac this year, McCartney, 54, is "leaning into the fiery horse," she says. Seeing these majestic creatures up close is a reminder of what is at stake. "Billions and billions [of animals] are killed every year for handbags and

shoes and jackets. It's kind of ridiculous," she says. "And I'm showing there is an alternative."

As the fashion house celebrates its 25th anniversary, the collection, which the brand says is made from 93% sustainable materials, is a journey through McCartney's own life, featuring fisherman rib knits that nod to her childhood in Kintyre, while bejeweled corsets and dresses, and ultra-realistic faux-fur trimmed suits conjure 1980s Christian Lacroix and Yves Saint Laurent, where she interned as a teenager in Paris. Despite the nostalgia, McCartney's approach is decidedly futuristic: the collection includes pieces made using leather alternatives derived from wine-grape waste, algae-based

PHOTOGRAPH BY EMMA HARDY FOR TIME



MCCARTNEY INCLUDES HORSES IN HER PARIS FASHION SHOW

vegan pigments, and a vegan wool alternative made from fermented plant matter.

McCartney has established herself as a leader in sustainable, cruelty-free fashion, pioneering innovative alternatives to animal-based materials and sharing her expertise to encourage others to do the same. And this year she's getting even more prestigious recognition for her work. The day after her Paris show, she is awarded the Légion d'Honneur, France's most prestigious order of merit, by President Emmanuel Macron in celebration of her contributions to fashion, sustainability, and animal welfare. It comes just days after she is named an ambassador of King Charles III's Sustainable Markets Initiative, a private-sector-led coalition focused on accelerating the transition to a sustainable future.

AS THE DAUGHTER of a Beatle, her family's fame isn't something she can easily escape, nor is she seeking to. Lately, her social media algorithms have been showing her even more photos and videos of her early life than usual. A new documentary, *Man on the Run,* focuses on her father's life in the 1970s and her parents' band, Wings. And a four-part Beatles biopic is in the works. Having those constant reminders is "kind of surreal," but it's also her North Star if she ever questions her identity as a designer. "That's my point of difference—on my sustainability, my heritage, my Britishness, my Americanness: these are aspects that I don't share with any other fashion designer or any other fashion house." So she's leaning into it. A tank top in her latest collection bears the slogan MY DAD IS A ROCK STAR that recalls the iconic ROCK ROYALTY tops she dressed herself and Liv Tyler in for the 1999 Met Gala.

It hasn't always been easy. When she began working in the fashion industry in Paris, not long after graduating in 1995 from London's Central Saint Martin's college, she was ridiculed as an "eco weirdo" for refusing to use animal skins or feathers, she says.

"She wouldn't violate her ethics. She's compassionate, and she was going to make that shine through, sink or swim," says Ingrid Newkirk, president of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), which named McCartney Person of the Year in 2024.

McCartney says she has infiltrated from within: "I think I've changed a lot of minds and opened a lot of doors for other people that want to work that way."

By 1997 she had become creative director of French fashion house Chloé, and met the designer Tom Ford while she worked there. When Ford was looking for brands and designers to bring into what would become luxury-brand conglomerate Kering, McCartney was an obvious choice. "I was incredibly impressed with her as a designer and she was beginning to have a real influence on fashion," he says. "But she was also ahead of the rest of the fashion industry by at least a decade with her commitment to sustainability and cruelty-free fashion." In 2001 she launched the Stella McCartney fashion house under a 50-50 joint venture with the group. She bought Kering's stake back in 2018 and entered a partnership with another luxury conglomerate, LVMH, the following year.

There is still much work to be done to make the fashion

MARC PIASECKI—WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

industry "cleaner" and "less barbaric," she says. Her mother used to say that if abattoirs had glass walls, nobody would eat meat. "And I think the fashion industry is hidden and dark, and there's a lot of bad stuff going on," she says. "We're supposed to be about beauty and escape."

McCartney is now launching an initiative to bring fashion brands, suppliers, and innovators together with policymakers and other stakeholders to incentivize design that has a lower climate impact, targeting net-zero emissions by 2040. This includes mobilizing finance and working directly with suppliers to make this goal commercially achievable. "The fashion industry is one of the most harmful to the planet out of all the industries, and we don't seem to have any concrete legislation or policies that prevent us from being so dirty and harmful to the planet," she says. "So it's critical."

She also talks about the possibility of imposing limits on the number of animals killed for use in the fashion industry. According to PETA, more than a billion animals are killed for leather alone each year.

Like many in the luxury sector, her label has faced challenging market conditions, reporting a pretax loss of around $38 million in 2024, its most recently filed accounts. Yet she emphasizes that sustainability and profitability are compatible. There should be no shame in making money while prioritizing morals, she says. "I think that business people are good people, and I think they want to change," she says. "They just need to be made to change by politicians and law, because what I do is very difficult, and I've made it look easy because I've been doing it for over 30 years."

SHE ADMITS THAT MAKING garments using sustainable materials can be costly. When she became the first designer to use Fevvers, the plant-based, naturally dyed alternatives that look and behave like ostrich feathers, in her summer 2026 runway show last year, it was a proof of concept rather than a commercial endeavor. For McCartney, that sacrifice was worth it to draw attention from investors and buyers to such material innovations, which could make or break a startup like Fevvers.

"It's put us on the map in a way that we couldn't have ever imagined," says Fevvers co-founder James West. "Nearly every leading name in fashion brands has been in touch." The startup has also received accolades and wide press coverage. "That's all worth its weight in gold."

When McCartney used Radiant Matter's plant-derived, biodegradable iridescent BioSequin to embroider a jumpsuit modeled by Cara Delevingne in *Vogue* in 2023, it helped the startup show its value proposition to investors and potential partners, says Radiant Matter CEO Elissa Brunato. McCartney understands innovation cycles and the challenges these startups face, Brunato says. She has the patience to work on their timelines but also the enthusiasm to get their products out of labs, onto garments, and in front of eyes.

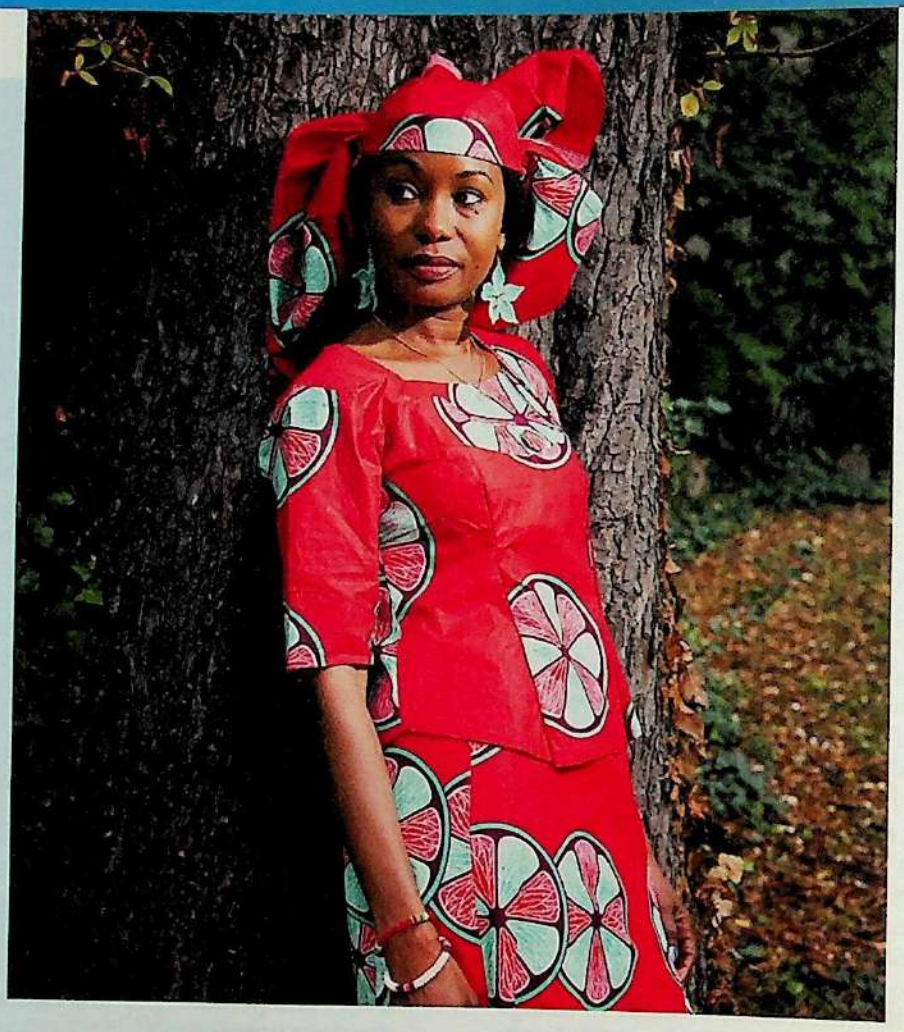
But she is also keen to innovate at the mass-market level. She's collaborating with Swedish fast-fashion retailer H&M for a second time. For her, it's a way to showcase more-sustainable options at accessible prices—even as she acknowledges fast fashion's pitfalls. According to the Global Fashion Agenda, the equivalent of a garbage truckload of clothes is burned or buried in landfill every second. But, she says, people still come up to her in the street and tell her they have held onto items they bought from her 2005 H&M collection. She hopes to repeat that success, creating garments that are kept or resold rather than tossed aside. "I know it will become an investment for people," she says. "And that is a really exciting conversation to have with fast fashion." The collection, which goes on sale in the spring, will feature certified, responsible materials, including many that are recycled. As part of the partnership, a new "Insights Board" of industry representatives will be formed, focusing on animal welfare and supporting sustainable innovations. Ann-Sofie Johansson, head of design and creative adviser at H&M, says using organic cottons and recycled materials in 2005 felt radical, but it has become "really standard practice for so much of what we do at H&M." According to its 2024 sustainability report, the company now uses 89% recycled or sustainably sourced materials, with a goal of 100% by 2030.

In 2025, McCartney repurchased LVMH's 49% minority stake in her fashion house, becoming fully independent, but remains an adviser to LVMH CEO Bernard Arnault and the group's executive team on sustainability issues. "I'm a very independent person," she says, "and it just became the right time for me."

That independence is clear in her hands-on approach, whether that's working with the suppliers of sustainable materials, styling models for the runway, or getting "very involved" in the musical choices for her shows. "My ear, I guess, is trained pretty precisely on the musical experience," she says. "I can be a nightmare, I'm sure!"

Perhaps her fastidiousness is no surprise, given the attention her brand gets. The front row at her Paris show is studded with stars including Oprah Winfrey, Anna Wintour, Edward Enninful, and her supportive father. After the show, VIPs pour into an unusual backstage area: a courtyard by the stables. The horses from the show mill around nearby as glasses of champagne are served. McCartney holds court next to an aesthetically piled stack of hay bales, graciously taking selfies with one person after another: celebrities, influencers, fashionistas, stable staff. "Eco weirdo" no more. She brings her dad out to enjoy the horses up close, posing together for photos bathed in the golden-hour light.

Reflecting on what her legacy will be, McCartney says the concept is "a heavy thought in my particular family. Do you buy into that legacy thing, or do you just go, 'F-ck that, we're all gonna die and who cares?'" She'd much rather focus on the here and now. "I would like to think that I'm trying to contribute in a positive way to my time here, and as a female-founded British brand in fashion, doing things very differently," she muses. "I hope to inspire and just let other people know that you can have a business model that works in that way … I think it's a much nicer way to work."



Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim

THE INDIGENOUS ACTIVIST ASKS: WHAT HAPPENS IF EVERYTHING GOES RIGHT FOR THE PLANET?

WHEN I WAS A CHILD GROWING UP IN CHAD, I LEARNED to read the world before I ever read a book. With my grandmother's guidance, I learned to watch the sky and understand when the rains would come. I learned to listen to the wind and recognize when the cattle needed to move to more fertile land. I learned from my elders that land is not property, it is memory. It is identity. It is responsibility.

Years later, when I began sitting in international climate negotiations, I was struck by a painful contrast. In rooms filled with experts, graphs, and projections about the future of the planet, I rarely heard the voices of the people who have safeguarded ecosystems for generations, those who never had a chance to go to university but are environmental experts. I saw maps of our territories labeled "carbon sinks." I heard discussions about "natural resources." I did not hear anyone call them sacred lands.

What would the world look like if everything finally went right? It would look like a world that understands that Indigenous Peoples were never the problem to solve.

We are part of the solution the planet has been waiting for. For decades, Indigenous communities have served as protectors of the world's remaining biodiversity. This is not accidental. It is the result of governance systems rooted in reciprocity and long-term thinking. Yet too often, we are treated as vulnerable populations rather than as leaders. If everything goes right, that imbalance shifts. I think about the women in my community, my cousins, my aunties, my nieces, my grandma, who rise before the sun to gather water, who know which plants heal and which nourish, who manage family economies with resilience and dignity. They are climate experts. But they will never call themselves that. They will simply say they are protecting life.

In the right world, they would not have to navigate impossible funding systems written in foreign languages to receive support. Climate finance would reach them directly without intermediaries. Trust would replace bureaucracy. Partnership would replace paternalism. When communities have secure land rights and the means to manage their territories, deforestation drops. Biodiversity thrives. Conflict decreases. The climate benefits. This is not ideology. It is evidence, and I have experienced it.

If everything goes right, governments would stop debating whether Indigenous Peoples' land tenure is "efficient" and instead recognize it as essential climate infrastructure. Corporations would understand that a "green transition" cannot repeat the violence of the fossil-fuel era by dispossessing communities for minerals and megaprojects. Renewable energy would not come at the cost of Indigenous Peoples' rights and lives. Today, development is often measured by extraction and expansion. But in my culture, wealth has never meant accumulation. It has meant balance. Enough pasture to regenerate. Enough water to share. Never so much your neighbor goes without. In the world I imagine, where everything goes right, the economy would learn from that principle of enough.

THIS IS NOT ROMANTICISM. It is survival. Not only for us and our culture, but for all humanity. Climate change is already reshaping the Sahel, where I come from. Seasons are unpredictable. Droughts are longer. Floods are harsher. Communities who have contributed almost nothing to global emissions are paying the highest price. Yet, in those same communities, I see extraordinary innovation from traditional knowledge combined with new tools, youth organizing across regions, women leading food security. Imagine what would be possible if that leadership were resourced at scale. If everything goes right, Indigenous Peoples' knowledge and leadership would not be an afterthought. It would shape policy from the beginning.

When thinking about the next generation, my parents taught me to think bigger: about the seven passed and the seven upcoming generations. I think about young Indigenous girls who watch global leaders on television and wonder whether they belong in those rooms. I want them to grow up in a world where they do not have to choose between their culture and their ambition. If everything goes right, those girls will inherit more than climate targets and policy frameworks. They will inherit dignity. When you plan for seven generations ahead, you cannot afford cynicism. You must think long term. You must act with responsibility.

The barrier to this future is not knowledge. It is political will. It is about how we relate to land. To one another. The future we need is not a technological miracle. It is a moral one. And if we choose that path, if we trust Indigenous Peoples' leadership, secure land rights, fund communities directly, and redefine well-being beyond profit, then the future is not something we fear. It is something we build together. When I imagine that future, I do not see something radical. I see something ancient. I see balance restored. And I know it is still within reach if we are brave enough to listen.

Ibrahim is the president of the Indigenous Women & Peoples Association of Chad

IBRAHIM: EDOUARD MONFRAIS ALBERTINI—HANS LUCAS/REDUX; OGUNBIYI: COURTESY

Damilola Ogunbiyi

THE U.N. UNDER SECRETARY-GENERAL ON WHY THE ENERGY TRANSITION WORKS ONLY IF EVERYONE IS INCLUDED

CLIMATE CHANGE IS NO LONGER A DISTANT RISK; IT IS A daily reality reshaping economies, ecosystems, and lives. Last year was one of the three warmest years on record, and researchers have indicated that global average surface temperatures in 2025 were 1.44°C above preindustrial levels.

This simply means that if we do not urgently tackle climate change, the world will go beyond the feared precipice of 1.5°C and a warmer planet will significantly intensify the severity and frequency of extreme weather events, such as heat waves, floods, and droughts, with devastating consequences on human life and ecosystems across every region. Yet climate change is not only an environmental crisis. It is fundamentally an energy crisis, and how we choose to address energy access, affordability, and sustainability will determine whether we succeed or fail.

What the world needs now is a rapid, just, and inclusive energy transition, one that avoids the environmental and social harms that have been witnessed in the past.

There is reason for hope. In 2024 alone, the world added a record 585 gigawatts of renewable-energy capacity, with renewables accounting for more than 90% of new power-generation capacity, driven largely by solar and wind. To put this in context, 585 gigawatts is roughly half the installed capacity of the U.S. In 2025, total investment in clean energy reached $2.2 trillion compared with $286 billion in 2015, reflecting growing confidence in renewables as the backbone of modern economies.

But progress remains dangerously uneven. To keep the global commitment to triple renewable-energy capacity by 2030, each year 1,122 gigawatts of new capacity must be

added. Meanwhile, the countries with the greatest energy-access gaps and least historical responsibility for emissions continue to face the highest costs and the weakest energy infrastructure. Today, only about 20% of global clean-energy investment reaches emerging and developing economies. This imbalance is not just unfair, it is self-defeating.

What the world needs now is leadership and courage to pursue shared goals through multilateralism and its principles of shared rules, institutions, and collective action to solve common problems.

Climate change knows no boundaries and will affect us all. We must therefore think of the global good in the long run as opposed to what a single country or region can gain in the short term. We must act boldly, together, before the window of opportunity closes. Climate ambition without energy equity will fail. Energy access without sustainability will lock in future emissions, and the path forward demands both.

Across the world we have seen that when energy poverty persists, development follows the most available and affordable paths, and often it is the most carbon-intensive ones. Without access to modern, reliable, and clean energy, countries are locked into inefficient fuels, fragile grids, and stopgap solutions that raise emissions and deepen vulnerability. It is worth pointing out that the Global South will account for nearly all future growth in population, cities, and energy demand. Ignoring these realities does not reduce emissions, it simply shifts them. If clean energy is not deployed at scale where demand is growing fastest, global emissions trajectories will overshoot every target, no matter how rapidly the Global North decarbonizes its own economies.

Global climate ambition is not credible without the tools and assistance poorer countries require. Asking them to leapfrog to low-carbon pathways while denying them finance, technology, and infrastructure undermines trust and fractures global cooperation—the very cooperation climate action depends on.

What the world needs now is scaling up concessional finance, de-risking investments, and deploying innovative financial solutions that will see clean-energy capital flowing to where it is needed most. Greater capital flows with strong policies and political will for the energy transition will create decent jobs and economic opportunity, and usher in a new age of green growth while ensuring that everyone everywhere has enough power to live a dignified life.

The energy transition is not a trade-off, it is a multiplier, and this moment calls for urgency without exclusion, ambition without delay, and cooperation across borders and sectors. Governments, the private sector, development banks, philanthropies, civil society, and citizens must align around a shared goal: ensuring energy for all.

What the world needs now is to stand up for what science tells us, that clean energy is no longer a choice, it is the pathway to a secure and economically resilient future. As a global community we must face this moment ready to deploy solutions, at speed and at scale.

Ogunbiyi is the CEO and Special Representative of the U.N. Secretary-General for Sustainable Energy for All, and co-chair of U.N.-Energy

Jesper Brodin

FORMER CEO OF INGKA GROUP

BY JUSTIN WORLAND

AL GORE'S STRIKING CLIMATE SLIDESHOW OUTLINing how rising temperatures would wreak havoc on society inspired a generation of activists. Jesper Brodin's striking climate presentation outlining how a company can grow profit while cutting its carbon emissions has helped inspire a generation of CEOs.

Before stepping down last fall, the former CEO of Ingka Group, the primary operator of Ikea stores, took the presentation on the road to make the case to executives that addressing climate change doesn't require sacrificing growth. From 2016 to 2024, the Ingka Group says, its revenue grew nearly 24% while its emissions declined by 30%. This achievement was placed prominently in his slideshow displayed at the 2025 World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting. At the core of the pitch made to attendees: being climate smart can save your company money.

"If you're smart with resources," he says, "you're essentially being smart with money."

Brodin began his career at Ikea three decades ago, starting as a purchase manager in the company's Pakistan operations before moving around the world—and up the corporate ladder. When he took over as CEO in 2017, he was immediately confronted with an urgent threat: the growth of online competition and the need to rethink Ikea for the digital era.

Even in the face of this core business challenge, he made climate and sustainability a priority. Over his tenure, two key pieces sat at the center of his vision: advancing renewable energy and moving to a circular business model that relied less on constantly selling new products and instead on incorporating repair and reuse.

The results are mixed. The renewable-energy push was a runaway success. Not only has the company invested more than $5 billion in dozens of wind farms and solar parks, making it a decarbonization leader, it's also proved a business case for using renewables. Despite long payback periods at first, costs have come down over time, providing a bulwark against volatile power prices. "At Ikea, the renewable-energy transition has more or less happened," he says. "Ikea has become a medium-sized utility company today."

By Brodin's admission, implementing a circular business model has been much harder. There have been some wins. Take a recycling program that

breaks down mattresses to components: the initiative took three years for the investment to pay back; today, it provides the company a welcome alternative to virgin materials as some commodity prices have soared.

Still, growing similar approaches across all parts of the business has proved difficult. Effective recycling requires infrastructure. And infrastructure often requires government support. "When it comes to full circularity, it still needs to happen," he says of the business. "It's a bit of a systematic approach."

IT'S IN PART that refreshing honesty that has made him a notable voice advocating for climate action among his peers on the global stage. CEOs tend to tread carefully. A few years ago, the C-suite at global companies worried they might be called out for not doing enough or for "greenwashing"—talking a big sustainability game but not living up to their commitments. Today, they worry that their sustainability efforts might put a target on their back from the Trump Administration. "I'm more afraid of silence than greenwashing," says Brodin.

And he has been anything but silent. Brodin can be spotted onstage making the case for private-sector climate action—and behind closed doors he's pitching his colleagues.

A key part of that effort was his tenure chairing the WEF's Alliance of CEO Climate Leaders from 2020 to 2025. He was skeptical of the alliance when he was first became CEO. The group's goals were too ambiguous, he says now, and the system of measurement was too weak. After hearing his complaints, the WEF asked him to chair the council and help the group chart a more legitimate course. While much work remains to be done, those companies have delivered. In the past three years, the 130-plus member companies have collectively grown revenue by around 20% while their emissions have fallen by 10%. "The business case tends to improve as you step into transformation," he says.

And yet Brodin realizes that these are challenging times for CEOs who have to navigate different markets moving in different directions at different speeds. Now, a few months out of Ikea, he's working solo to advise CEOs on how they can continue to put climate at the center of their business. His advice? Focus on where the economy is going next. "One of the most dangerous things you can do is be left on the station when others are on the train ride," he says. "Even if it's bumpy."

OLIVER BERG—PICTURE ALLIANCE/DPA/AP IMAGES

TIME100 HEALTH

On February 19, TIME recognized leaders from the 2026 TIME100 Health list whose work is creating tangible, credible change toward a healthier popu[illegible]

Experience more: time.com/time100health-2026

DR. KIRAN MUSUNURU [illegible] KERRY BURNIGHT [illegible] JESSE EISENBERG [illegible]

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FINDING THE HEARTBEAT

BY STEPHANIE ZACHAREK

Michelle Pfeiffer is the emotional core of two layered and wildly different new TV shows

INSIDE

THE COMEBACK HOLDS A MIRROR TO HOLLYWOOD

A MURDER MYSTERY WE'VE SEEN BEFORE

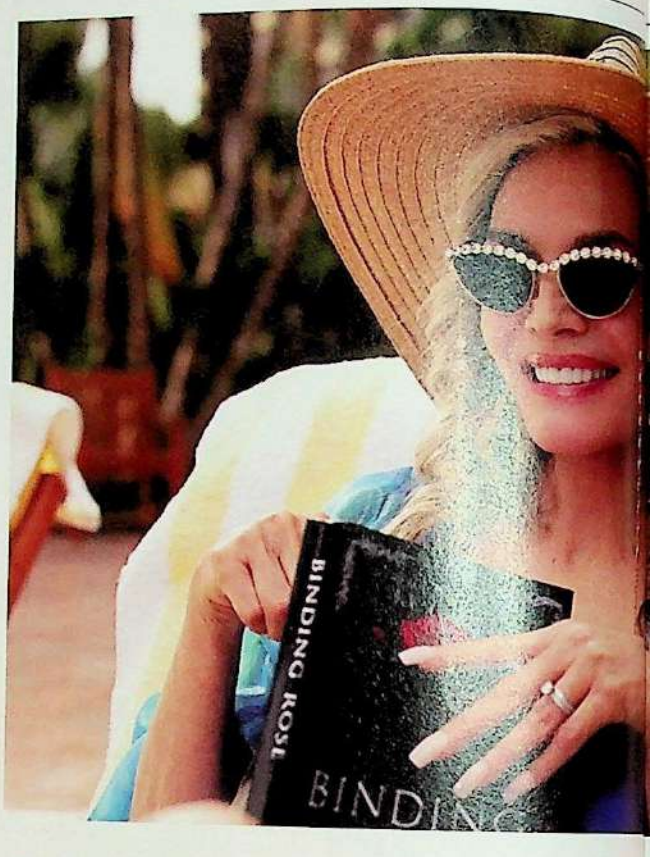
PHOTOGRAPH BY OLIVIA MALONE

MICHELLE PFEIFFER IS ONE OF OUR MOST fearless actors, but she doesn't think of herself that way. Admittedly, fearlessness is hard to define, more a you-know-it-when-you-see-it quality than a goal you can shoot for. But Pfeiffer doesn't believe she was ever fearless, especially in the early days. "One thing I didn't like about my work is that I would watch other actors who took all of these risks, and I always felt like I was playing a little safe," she says over tea in New York City. In fact, in one of her earliest big movies—opposite Al Pacino in the 1983 *Scarface*—she felt panicky the whole time. "I was really young, and I was working alongside so many seasoned actors. I was terrified every second."

But anyone who has been watching carefully, through a career spanning more than 45 years, can see that Pfeiffer has always been a quiet risk taker, a performer more intent on rooting out the truth of a character than courting easy likability. This was as true in her early roles—as the disillusioned but self-determined Mafia housewife Angela de Marco in *Married to the Mob,* or the grimly funny cokehead ice princess Elvira in *Scarface*—as it is in the roles she chooses today, two of which are now landing almost simultaneously. In Taylor Sheridan's six-part Paramount+ drama *The Madison,* Pfeiffer plays Stacy Clyburn, a hardcore (and very wealthy) New Yorker drawn to the mountains of Montana as she grieves for her husband, Kurt Russell's Preston, whose spirit lives on for her in that landscape. And in Apple TV's *Margo's Got Money Troubles,* produced by Pfeiffer's husband David E. Kelley, she plays Shayanne Millet, a woman who has struggled to raise a child by herself, Elle Fanning's Margo, and now sees her daughter headed for similar hardship.

Pfeiffer's early performances could have been given only by someone who doesn't know how much power she has, a special gift of certain great actors. And now, at 67, she's finding that there are good roles for women her age that hadn't presented themselves before. So when Kelley gave her the Rufi Thorpe novel on which *Margo's Got Money Troubles* is based, she was intrigued. "David handed me the book and very casually said, 'There's a part in here, and everybody thinks you should play it.'"

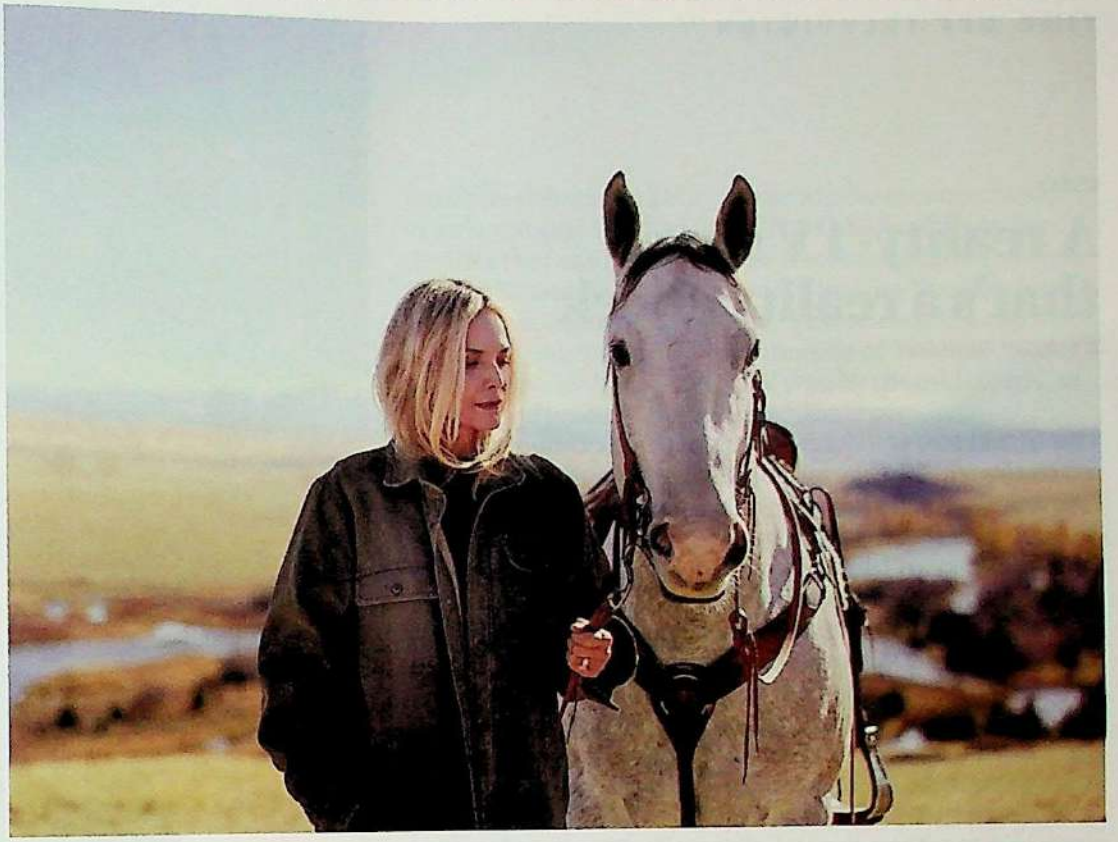
Shayanne says what she thinks and wears what she wants, essentially a wardrobe of spike-heeled boots and tiny leather jackets in a rainbow of hues. She used to be a Hooters waitress. Now she works at a Bloomingdale's in Fullerton, Calif., and her daughter Margo is building her own life as a grownup. A student at the local community college, Margo is a good writer and a star pupil, such that she attracts the not exactly wholesome attentions of one of her professors (Michael Angarano). He and Margo have an affair; when she becomes pregnant, he wants nothing to do with the baby. Margo weighs her options and decides to keep the child, only to realize she can't make enough money to support herself and the baby. Her solution? Becoming an OnlyFans creator, a secret she tries, but ultimately fails, to keep from her mother. Their relationship is the series' heartbeat: Shayanne doesn't want her daughter to make the same mistakes she did, though both need to reframe their ideas of what a mistake really is.



Margo's Got Money Troubles *and* The Madison: *Pfeiffer gives her all in two distinctive roles*

Pfeiffer loved Shayanne from the start. "I know Fullerton," she says. "I grew up in Orange County. I know this woman. In some ways, I've been longing to play this part." She also saw the story's authenticity; its characters' predicaments feel lived in. Margo and Shayanne's lives become more complicated when Shayanne's semiestranged old flame, and Margo's father, retired wrestler Jinx (Nick Offerman), re-enters the picture—just as Shayanne becomes engaged to a reliable, straitlaced guy (Greg Kinnear). "Even though each of these characters is eccentric in a different way, I feel like they're all grounded. We've all met these people here and there. I just loved it."

IN PERSON, PFEIFFER is both mildly intimidating and a little goofy. She's wearing a black silk blouse and dark, elegant trousers, plus a pair of enormous yet delicate gold hoop earrings: they have presence, as she does, but they're also somehow discreet and understated, as she is. Her carriage is both casual and regal. She's also the kind of person who, once the recorder is off and the notebook is closed, will ask to see pictures of your pets. She has a dog and a cat herself.



MARGO'S GOT MONEY TROUBLES: APPLE TV+; THE MADISON: EMERSON MILLER—PARAMOUNT+

Her demeanor is so generally affable that it's easy to forget how many genuinely fantastic performances she's given. She's been great in movies nearly everyone has heard of *(Scarface, Batman Returns, Dangerous Liaisons)*, but also in pictures that don't show up in the average Letterboxd account *(The Russia House, Love Field, Natica Jackson, I Could Never Be Your Woman)*. You could program a complete film retrospective with "forgotten" Pfeiffer performances alone.

While it's impossible to identify a single explanation for her longevity, the ease with which she shifts between comedy and drama—and sometimes blurs the lines between them—hasn't hurt. Pfeiffer is circumspect about her gifts as a comic actor. "I don't really understand it," she says. "But I remember [film producer] Marty Bregman saying to me, 'You know, you have a funny *bone*.' Which I guess is different. I sort of understood what he meant." Yet her knack for comedy—even the kind that isn't ha-ha funny—is key to her sly, effervescent portrayal of Shayanne, a woman who both yearns for security and wants to have fun. She's engaged to Kinnear's upstanding churchgoer, yet she goes to great lengths to pretend she doesn't love to drink and gamble: when she does let loose, her sailor-on-shore-leave joy is something to behold. And the way Shayanne literally holds her infant grandson at arm's length—as if she could somehow erase Margo's "mistake" by refusing to cradle him close—is both piercing and funny.

One of the joys of *Margo's Got Money Troubles* is the way it allows its characters to recontextualize their own life choices, an idea that's not lost on Pfeiffer. "Disappointments often lead you down the path you're supposed to be on," she says. One of the things she loves about *Margo* is that "it's so much like real life. All of these characters are really grappling with who they thought they would become, vs. who they are and where they find themselves."

Pfeiffer's role as grieving widow Stacy Clyburn in *The Madison* is more somber—though again, it's easy to see how an actor at home with the breeziness of comedy can also bring intense human emotions to life onscreen without turning them into leaden, lifeless things. Stacy isn't just mourning her late husband; she's forging new connections with her spoiled—but not irredeemable—daughters, played by Beau Garrett and Elle Chapman, as well as her two young granddaughters (Amiah Miller and Alaina Pollack).

'I know this woman. In some ways, I've been longing to play this part.'

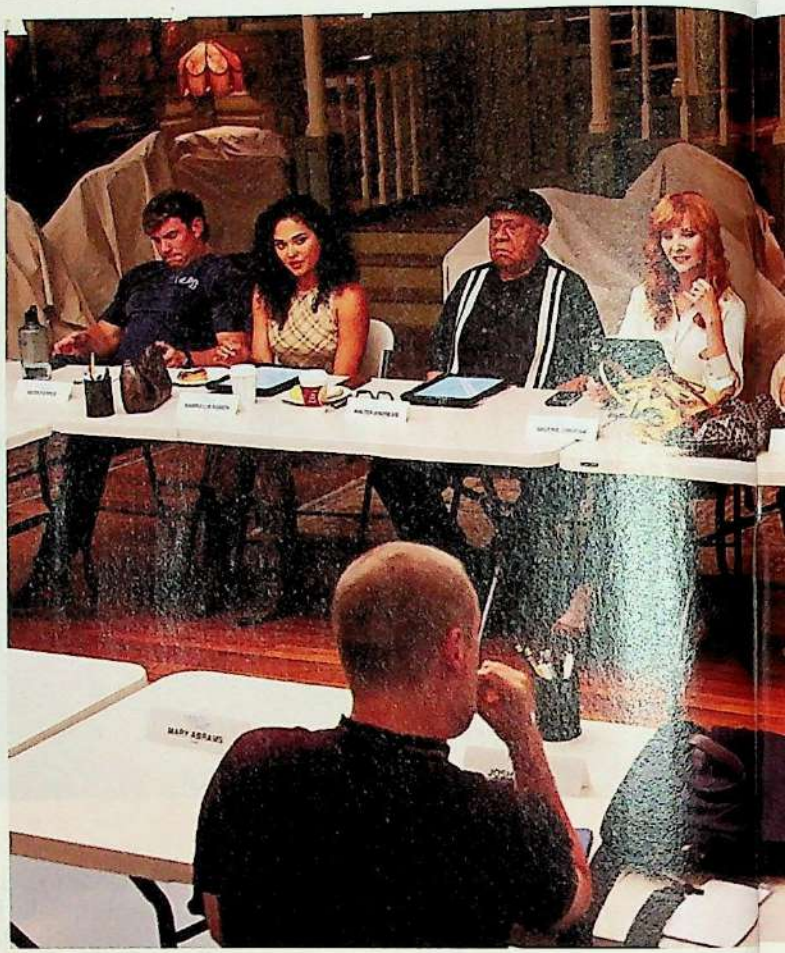
MICHELLE PFEIFFER, ON THE ROLE OF SHAYANNE IN *MARGO'S GOT MONEY TROUBLES*

"One of the themes in *The Madison* is that it's very hard to find that line of allowing your kids to stumble, allowing them to fall, to build character, build self-esteem," Pfeiffer says. "When do you need to come in and swoop them up, give them support?" Sometimes, in real life as in *The Madison*, it's the grandparents who step in with a little tough love. Pfeiffer recalls how her own grandmother, whom she adored, would sometimes intervene. "I had a certain kind of reverence for her, and I was a little afraid of her. She felt somehow more powerful than my mother. Maybe that just comes with getting older," Pfeiffer says. "And I think, is it possible that she saw me sassing my mother, and that was her way of defending her daughter from me?" This is one example of how the people we used to be inform the people we grow up to be, something to which the best actors are attuned. Pfeiffer puts it all to use, seemingly without overthinking any of it. Come to think of it, that right there may be the definition of *fearlessness*. □

ESSAY

A reality-TV spoof that's a reality check

BY JUDY BERMAN



Finally a producer, Valerie Cherish (Kudrow, center), presides over a table read

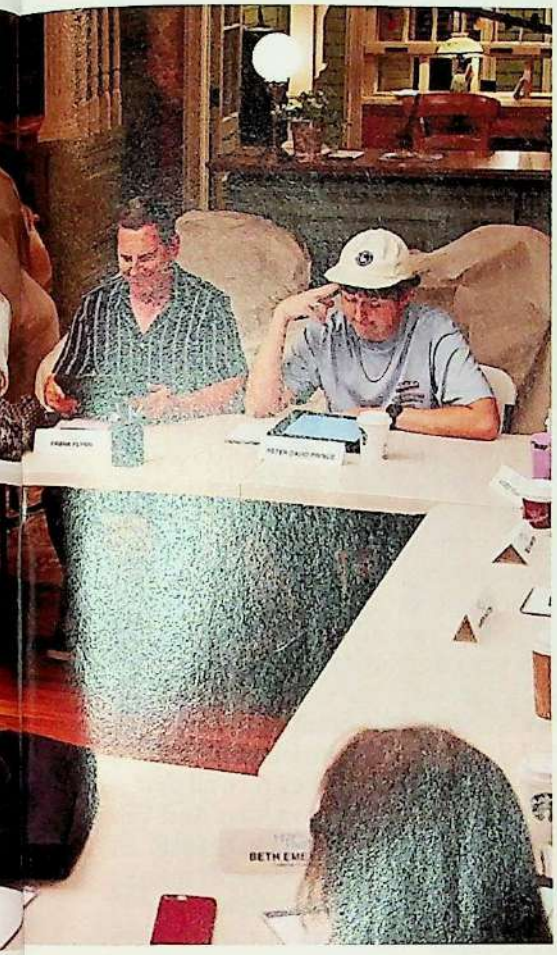
THE QUESTION SCREAMS OUT FROM THE COVER OF *Entertainment Weekly,* in yellow letters superimposed over a tan, fit man and woman dressed as a sexy doctor and nurse, her stethoscope pressed to a staticky TV set: IS REALITY TV DYING? Before we see the words, the camera follows Valerie Cherish's gaze as she spots the magazine at a newsstand. She deflates. Of course she does; Valerie, the floundering '90s sitcom star played by the beloved '90s sitcom star Lisa Kudrow in HBO's showbiz comedy *The Comeback,* is right at that moment shooting a reality show. "What are we doing?" she asks her producer. She's talking about the shoot, but the inquiry is also existential.

More than two decades have passed since this scene aired, in 2005. Now, the idea that reality TV might have been a fad, approaching its expiration date just five years after *Survivor* changed prime time and one year after *The Apprentice* changed the course of American history, is inconceivable. In retrospect, even if it hadn't minted a two-term President, its low production costs and soapy addictiveness were always going to cement its place in pop culture—outlasting, among other entertainment-industry institutions, *EW*'s run as a weekly print magazine. Reality TV neither died nor, as cable and then streaming expanded the number of shows that got made in every genre, crowded out scripted programming and the unionized screenwriters and actors who make it. In the mid-aughts, however, both outcomes seemed possible. The people whose livelihoods relied on one small-screen format or the other panicked accordingly.

Created by Kudrow and *Sex and the City* franchise mainstay Michael Patrick King, *The Comeback* mirrored those anxieties throughout its first season, which followed Valerie as she returned to the sitcom soundstage in dual roles: one, as the star of said sitcom, and the other as herself in an unscripted series about the making of the sitcom. Each of the show's three seasons—but especially the current and final one, airing Sundays on HBO—has been a perceptive snapshot of Hollywood's discontents at a given moment as well as a hilarious work of cringe comedy. Taken together, its 21-year arc captures the intertwined evolution of scripted television and its vulgar doppelgänger reality TV, the former undergoing monumental shifts as the latter was helping to reshape society. *The Comeback* has always squinted into the camera and wondered: "What are we doing?" If ever there was a time to pause for reflection on that point, it's the present.

VALERIE WOULD BE a great A-lister. She's kind to her shows' crews and brings the writers cookies on late nights. She supports younger women in the industry. And she's a pretty good sport. If a scene requires her to do pratfalls in a cupcake costume or simulate oral sex on Seth Rogen or writhe around tied up in the trunk of a hot car with a live snake crawling all over her, she's game. If she were Cate Blanchett or Viola Davis, this would qualify as magnanimity. But since she's Valerie Cherish, whose biggest claim to fame is starring in an instantly dated sitcom called *I'm It!* that flamed out after casting a monkey, her noblesse doesn't exactly feel oblige. What makes the character so funny—and occasionally poignant, and above all ideal for reality TV—is her failure to understand how she's perceived.

That lack of self-awareness makes her the perfect grist for Hollywood's eternally grinding mill. Short on charisma but hungry for positive reinforcement, Valerie is always desperately chasing work. The more she tries to project the image of a savvy insider, dropping names and mangling showbiz jargon, the more she reveals her naiveté. So she falls for—or, as she might see it, adapts to—every trend and gimmick. It's



ERIN SIMKIN—HBO

The Comeback has always asked Hollywood: What are we doing?

implied that she lands her "comeback" role, as tracksuit-clad spinster Aunt Sassy on the horny sitcom *Room and Bored,* whose real stars are hot 20-somethings, because other actors refused to be surveilled by a reality crew. They must feel good about that choice by the end of the HBO show's first season, when the unscripted series also titled *The Comeback* premieres and Valerie is edited to look like a monster. Mid-2000s reality TV was, after all, notoriously misogynistic. Makeover pageant *The Swan* sliced up "ugly ducklings," while *Joe Millionaire* laid a dating-show trap for alleged gold diggers. Val might've guessed what she was in for when her network promoted her show alongside one called *America's Next Great Porn Star* and another where newlyweds beat each other with lead pipes.

When the second season opened, in 2014, Valerie was hamming it up in student horror flicks and hawking hair dye made from "a special cantaloupe in France." Its predecessor's show-within-the-show had been prescient about reality's middle-aged-rich-lady gold rush; Bravo's *Real Housewives* franchise debuted in 2006, attracting the same audience of girls and gays that had made *The Comeback* a cult classic after the Season 1 finale drew less than a million viewers and HBO canceled it. Val faces off with Lisa Vanderpump, one of many reality-star cameos in the season, in a clip that shows her quitting an early incarnation of *The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills.* Reality TV was, by the mid-2010s, an entrenched genre whose most bankable personalities, like Vanderpump, wielded power behind the camera. And with production going lo-fi for platforms like YouTube and Instagram, Val hires a crew of incompetent college kids to record a self-funded video series whose editing she plans to control.

Then the obnoxious writer who antagonized her on *Room and Bored,* Paulie G. (Lance Barber), persuades her to play a twisted version of herself in the edgy HBO dramedy he's basing on their relationship. Premium cable, with its grit and cursing and nudity, is not the natural habitat of an actor who thrives on the chuckles of studio audiences. Val endures scenes replete with violence and sexual degradation because she longs for the prestige of a network that was then at its most relevant with *Game of Thrones* in its prime, *Girls* driving the cultural conversation, and leeway to make difficult masterpieces like *The Leftovers.* (Alas, #MeToo and its influx of intimacy coordinators were still a few years off.) The unthinkable happens: for her suffering, Valerie Cherish wins an Emmy.

Yet she isn't at the ceremony to accept her award. In the Season 2 finale, she ducks out on what would have been the proudest moment of her life to be at the hospital bedside of her loyal, cancer-stricken hairstylist, Mickey (Robert Michael Morris). She may be vain, silly, myopic, grasping, deluded. She is probably what Bill Murray purportedly called Chevy Chase: a medium talent. But she's not a bad or mean person. There's a limit to her self-centeredness, and in reaching it at the Emmys, she snaps out of the career mania that has started to drive away her indulgent, non-Hollywood husband Mark (Damian Young). It doesn't just save their marriage; it makes us care what happens to Valerie. And it sets her up to be a hero of sorts in Season 3.

THE 12-YEAR INTERVAL since we last checked in with Valerie has felt like a lifetime, as the pace of political conflict and climate change and technological advancement all accelerated at dizzying rates. The TV landscape has shifted just as rapidly. Netflix's mid-2010s foray into original content yielded an era known as Peak TV, with its unprecedented abundance of new platforms and series, followed by a still unfolding corrective period marked by contraction, consolidation, and conservatism. Meanwhile, social media in the video-driven age of TikTok has entirely collapsed boundaries between reality TV and reality. For so many of us, famous and not, performing a persona into a camera for consumption by strangers is simply living life.

So it's fitting that our first glimpse of Val in Season 3 is filtered through multiple lenses. In a flashback to 2023, the Writers Guild strike is on, and our compulsively industrious protagonist is using the time to make her Broadway debut, in the same *Chicago* role that has welcomed

reality-TV veterans like Ariana Madix and Erika Jayne. Laura Silverman's Jane, a producer of the *Comeback* reality show turned high-minded documentarian whose chronic financial woes keep her tied to Val, is shooting behind-the-scenes footage—and jostling for space with a Gen Z social media attaché, Patience (Ella Stiller), whose smartphone camera is always on. When the divine Miss C proves incompetent at song and dance, the show hurtles toward the present, in a premiere overstuffed with timely references (COVID) and fan-pleasing guest stars (Fran Drescher). *The Comeback* nods to Peak TV with callbacks to a cozy mystery series called *Mrs. Hatt;* Val played the title role, but no one watched or even knew it existed because it aired on Epix. She endorses brands on social media just to show she's "open to collabs." Like everyone else with a list of "Self" credits on IMDb, she has a podcast; Patience records the video version.

The season soon finds its focus in that final boss of contemporary workplace crises: AI. Val's stalwart manager, Billy (Kudrow's producing partner Dan Bucatinsky), approaches her with a dream project. Now that everything old is new again, from broad multicam sitcoms to ad-supported free TV, she's being offered the lead role in *How's That?!,* a retro comedy set at a bed-and-breakfast. She will even be an executive producer. The catch is that the show will, secretly at first but openly if it succeeds, be scripted primarily by an artificial intelligence, a.k.a. "Al."

The title of Valerie's Emmy-winning dramedy Seeing Red *references her ginger curls*

Having posed for selfies with Drescher on the SAG-AFTRA picket line, Val has concerns about a project that would cut out her Writers Guild comrades. But the executive behind *How's That?!* (Andrew Scott's Brandon) assures her the WGA signed off. There are even human showrunners, a bickering husband-and-wife team played by John Early and Abbi Jacobson. "Al is really extraordinary," Brandon enthuses to Val. "After all, it picked you."

So begins a deeply bizarre shoot, which Jane is eager to document. Unlike Val, she instantly comprehends the profound implications of an AI-written sitcom. The showrunners are checked out. If a joke doesn't land, dozens of alternate punch lines are generated within seconds—but who has the time to sift through all that derivative content? Video-game characters inexplicably pop up in scripts. The cast is told that Al is a human working remotely but can tell something's off. As the only producer who's on set on a daily basis, Val suddenly has problems she can't fix by giving everyone a thoughtfully selected aromatherapy candle.

She turns to old colleagues, industry veterans whom she trusts to do good work. James Burrows, the legendary sitcom creator and director *(The Mary Tyler Moore Show, Cheers, Friends)* who has appeared as himself on *The Comeback* since its first season, agrees to direct the pilot. In doing Val that favor, he realizes that a show written by AI might turn out fine, but it will never be great, because scripts reconstituted (some might say plagiarized) from the annals of pop culture can't be surprising. "Surprising only comes from a group of writers huddled in a corner, beating themselves up to beat out a better joke," he says. "It's the chubby guy who's a secret alcoholic. It's the gay guy who, despite all the work he's done, still hates himself a little. Or the funny woman who's been invisible for way too long. They turn all that pain into a joke. And Val, those broken, beautiful souls are what make something great."

It's an uncharacteristically earnest, sentimental moment for a show that usually makes its points about Hollywood's failings through awkwardness and absurdity. This shift in tone might put off viewers looking forward to another eight episodes of Val humiliating herself. Yet of all the many TV series that have taken on AI, from *Black Mirror* to *Westworld* to *Mrs. Davis,* it's the new season of *The Comeback* that most trenchantly defines the stakes of letting computers take over the fundamentally human task of storytelling and disrupt the personal relationships that form between longtime collaborators. Paulie G. might have been the villain in 2005 and 2014, contorting Valerie Cherish into a caricature to appease his own demons. Reality TV, with its crude melodramas, might've been the bête noire of serious actors and writers. But we're all on the same inundated side in 2026, Team Human—cringey Vals and dark-souled Paulies, genius auteurs and reality stars with personality disorders—vs. Team Machine. In every sense that the question can be asked: *What are we doing?* Let's hope the answer surprises us. ▯

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Damar Hamlin The NFL player on life since cardiac arrest at midfield, promoting athletes' heart health, and what shrinks fear

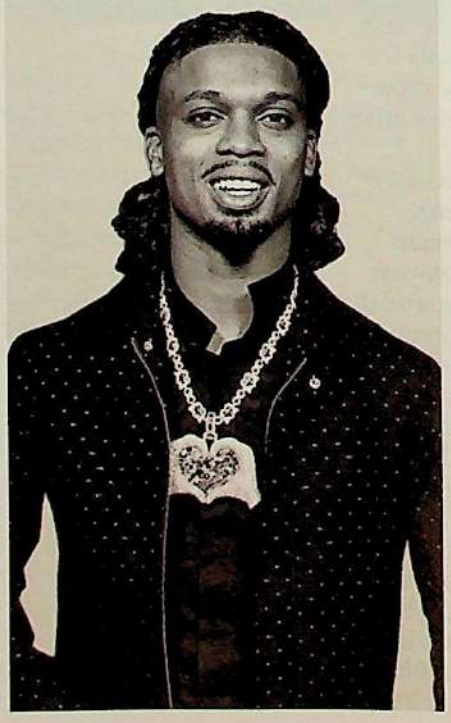
Before your sudden cardiac arrest after a tackle in 2023, how important was heart-health education to you? Ironically, my very first course ever as a college athlete was a CPR course. I vividly remember being fresh out of high school, and it was the first class for me and my classmates at the University of Pittsburgh. We were super locked in; we took it very seriously, because we understood the importance of saving someone's life. But everyone doesn't always have that perspective to take it seriously until it affects someone close to them. So that's why I've been on the mission of using my experience to lead the charge in getting everyone CPR training.

After your experience, why did you decide to advocate for educating people about heart health? Earlier on in the hospital, I was at a crossroads where I really wanted to just focus on my personal health and on enjoying the experience of still being able to live, to be able to breathe, to be a son and a big brother. But I knew I had an opportunity to use my platform to inspire others and give people who have had a heart-health experience a platform. It was a mental battle. There was a long period of time when I was traveling and training people to learn CPR, and it's traumatic just to see a CPR instruction dummy on the ground. It's triggering; it reminds me of the worst things of that moment. But I knew that I was helping to save lives and allowing people with the same experience I had to see more tomorrows.

What helped you face those fears? I really learned a lot about fear throughout this experience. One way I noticed how you can root out all fear is through love. Love truly pushes out all fear. So I just wanted to lead with love, and that made the fear shrink more and more and more.

How do you respond to parents who think football is too dangerous for their kids?

I wouldn't blame them. But I will also say that fear is a choice. There are a lot of great things that you learn through sports. I wouldn't allow the fear of something negative happening stop me from achieving all of the character-building and life lessons that come with sports.



Was there a time when you thought you might not play football again? Early on, it was assumed that I wouldn't be able to go back and play. But I knew that if given the opportunity, I still had more to offer the game of football. And I'm so glad that I got to prove it.

Have the NFL and other sports organizations prioritized heart-health education enough? The message that I preach through my Chasing M's Foundation is that we're tackling the leading cause of death in youth sports: sudden cardiac arrest. I don't want kids to shy away from playing sports like football. It's about doing it safely and making sure that the necessary things are in place if something were to happen so that we can have the best results possible, like in my situation. We're now nearing $1 million given away in automated electronic defibrillators (AEDs), the device that restarted my heart. The NFL started the Smart Hearts Coalition due to my situation; we've been trying to get AEDs into all 50 states, into all schools. And they stay proactive in trying to find ways they can show up for the things that we as players care about.

Having come so close to death, what do you now see through different eyes? I truly just appreciate life. I'm able to shift from a bad moment quickly because I have all the reasons in the world to not be in a bad mood; I'm still here with the blessing of life. It can be enough sometimes just to be able to smile and breathe and know that whatever I'm going through, I have another chance to make it right, do it better, start over, and refresh.

—ALICE PARK

CHRISTOPHER POLK—BILLBOARD/GETTY IMAGES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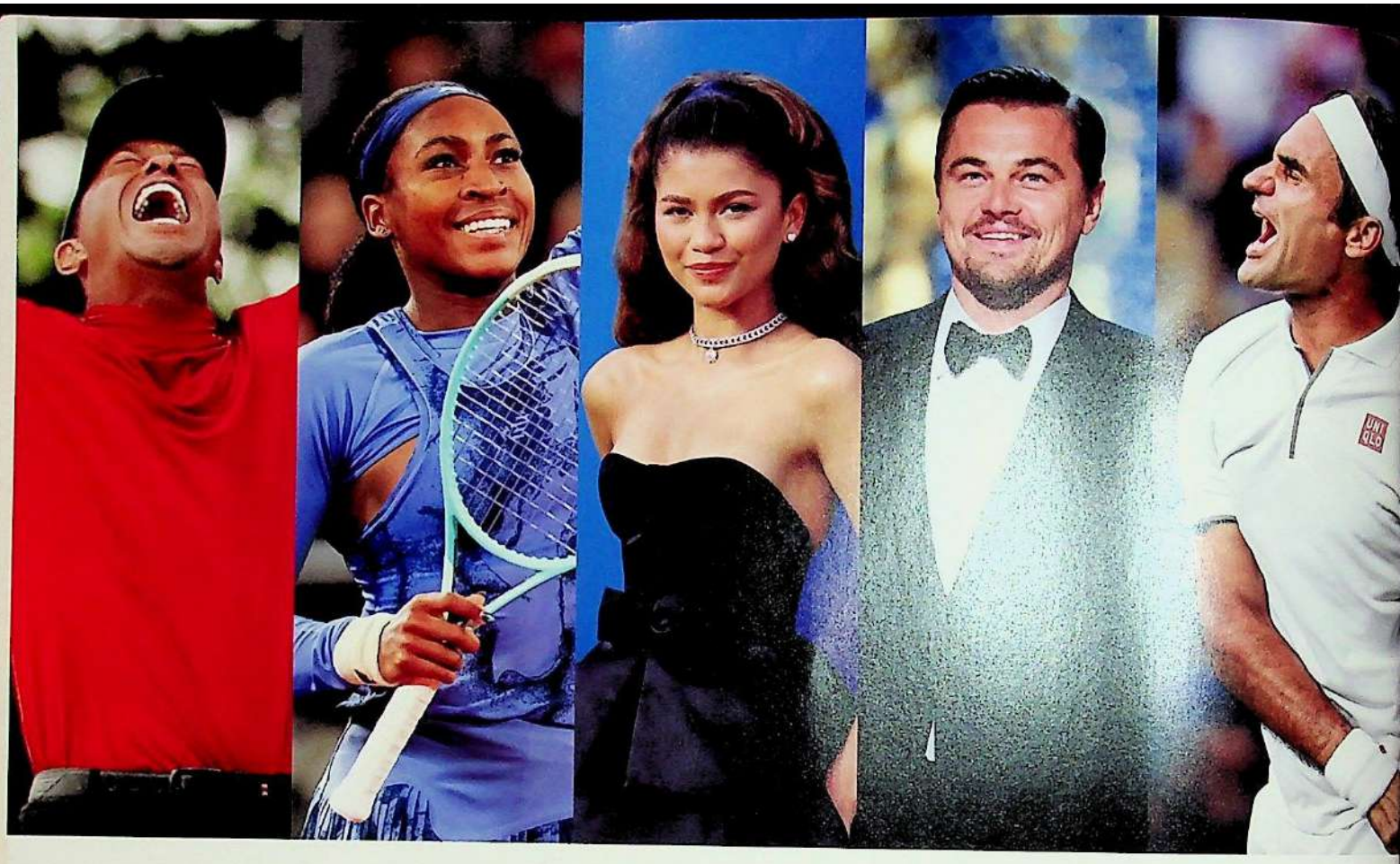

REACH FOR THE CROWN

THE DAY-DATE

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