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[www.afgazad.com](http://www.afgazad.com)

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MEL GOODMAN

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## Trump's First 100 Days: Meaner, More Mendacious, More Unstable



Photograph Source: Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies – Public Domain

While the mainstream media was copiously tracing the physical and mental decline of President Joe Biden during the presidential campaign of 2024, Donald Trump's decline was largely ignored or downplayed. The media seemed obliged to track Biden's every move and stumble. Conversely, the media seemed obliged to ignore the worst of Trump's faltering executive decision-making, but—even worse—believed it was their duty to make Trump's irrational utterances appear to be rational.

There are already obvious political differences between the first term Trump and the second term Trump, but the cognitive decline of the Donald cannot be explained solely by the fact

that there were a few rational advisers in the White House the first time around, and simply no competent advisors or leaders on hand for the second term. Economic advisers, such as Gary Cohn and Secretary of the Treasury Steve Mnuchin, played a very important moderating role in the first term. The three and four-star generals in the first term were a particular surprise, doing their best to calm the roiled waters of the White House and the roiled behavior of the president himself.

In the second term, such economic players as Secretary of Commerce Howard Lutnick and Peter Navarro, are making things worse and making decision making more capricious and random. It's safe to say that there isn't one competent player in Trump's inner circle, and falsely-labeled moderates such as Secretary of State Marco Rubio will find their reputations soiled by their experiences in toadying to the president. The moderate generals of the first term (Generals Kelley, Milley, and McMasters) have been replaced by an incompetent and unqualified secretary of defense who has conducted a quiet purge of the senior ranks and the Judge Advocate Generals that the media has played down.

An ironic example of the huge differences between Trump I and Trump II is the different handling of deportation cases that dominated Trump's first term and the early weeks of his second term. Seven years ago, for example, an Iraqi immigrant who had been living in the United States for nearly 25 years, was mistakenly swept up by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and deported to Iraq in violation of a court order. The Trump administration soon realized that a serious error had been made, and that led to a month-long odyssey to track down and retrieve a man who never should have been deported in the first place.

The case of Kilmar Armando Abrego Garcia has followed a far different pattern. Trump and Attorney General Pam Bondi falsely refer to Abrego Garcia as being a member of the violent MS-13 gang, although he has never been charged with being in a gang and a government lawyer even acknowledged his deportation was an error. The lawyer was fired because of his honesty.

But the total unwillingness to work to bring Abrego Garcia back to the United States differs from efforts of the leaders of Trump's first term, when ICE immediately and affirmatively went to the court to acknowledge that it had violated the Court's orders. There was coordination between the U.S. Embassy in Iraq and the Iraqi government. The government itself conceded that the Iraqi immigrant had been removed to Iraq despite the court order. Several months later, the Iraqi immigrant was tracked down and returned to the United States.

In the current confrontation, Trump and his closest aides (Miller, Bondi, Homan) are ignoring the decisions of the federal and district courts, even the Supreme Court, to ensure that Abrego Garcia remains in notorious prisons in El Salvador, where he faces indefinite lockup. They are playing a game with the Supreme Court, focusing on the Court's use of the word "facilitate" to say that they can't do that because he's out of U.S. control.

In any event, the intransigence of the Trump administration ignored the courts demands for "facilitating" the return of Abrego Garcia; providing "regular updates" on the steps that have been taken; and halting the deportation proceedings. The administration is challenging the constitution's demands for due process, and the checks and balances that accompany the separation of powers.

Trump has called Senator Chris Van Hollen a "fool" and a "grandstander" for meeting with Abrego Garcia last week in El Salvador. El Salvador President Nayib Bukele, who has received \$6 million from the Trump administration to keep the deportees in the notorious Cecot prison, also ridiculed Van Hollen's meeting with ugly postings on X to match the mendacious postings of Donald Trump. Bukele has used a two-year state of emergency to reduce crime and violence in El Salvador at the expense of democracy and civil liberties that no longer exist.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court has temporarily blocked the government's removal of an additional 30 Venezuelan men held in Texas under the Alien Enemies Act of 1798. The vote was 7-2, with Justices Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito predictably dissenting. The decision on Saturday follows an astounding array of Trump's unconstitutional actions, including the elimination of federal agencies created by statute; the refusal to spend federal funds allocated by federal law; the firing of those working in the executive branch; and the elimination of birthright citizenship.

No two events demonstrate the meanness and mendacity of the Trump presidency more than the 2025 meetings in the Oval Office between Trump and Ukrainian President Zelensky and between Trump and Bukele. Trump's deceitful condemnation of Zelensky in February for starting the war with Russia ("You should have never started it."), and the grotesque spectacle between Trump and Bukele exuding smug impunity over the illegal deportation of Abrego Garcia to the notorious Cecot mega-prison. U.S. citizens had never before witnessed such abject cruelty and heartlessness from their commander-in-chief.

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**Melvin A. Goodman** is a senior fellow at the Center for International Policy and a professor of government at Johns Hopkins University. A former CIA analyst, Goodman is the author of [Failure of Intelligence: The Decline and Fall of the CIA](#), [National Insecurity: The Cost of American Militarism](#), and [Whistleblower at the CIA: An Insider's Account of the Politics of Intelligence](#). His forthcoming book is *American Carnage: Donald Trump's War on Intelligence*. Goodman is the national security columnist for [counterpunch.org](#).