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Progressive Foreign Policy Debrief

Intel for Advocacy

TRUMP BROUGHT EVERYONE DOWN INTO HIS SHUTDOWN DISASTER VORTEX

If there is any one defining feature of Donald Trump and his administration, it's that it regularly has no grounding in facts or reality, and that its policy prescriptions have the opposite outcome of their publicly stated intentions.

And if there's any one event that perfectly encapsulates this phenomenon, it was the government shutdown. Donald Trump refused to allow the entirety of the U.S. government to function as intended because Congress didn't want to allocate funding for a border wall that Trump claims will enhance our security.

But in reality, a border wall will do very little to enhance U.S. security, or at least solve the problems Trump says he intends to solve (you can read [this RAND report](#) to find out how the U.S. government can actually stop drugs coming in, and limit the number of people entering the U.S. illegally -- which, by the way, is at an all-time low).

While Trump announced today an agreement with Congressional leaders to reopen the government until February 15, it's worth looking back on the myriad of ways the shutdown [damaged our national security](#).

Indeed, while most appear to believe that because the CIA and Defense Department were funded our national security had been taken care of, the truth is security isn't achieved by the military alone. Here are some of the grim details from the past month:

DIPLOMACY GUTTED

- One-quarter of the State Department's overseas direct hires and 40 percent of those working in the U.S. had been furloughed, but were called back to work for at least two weeks starting Jan. 20. Trump officials said they found money to fund them, but it was [unclear](#) when they would be paid. "Morale is terrible as we work for no pay," one diplomat had [said](#).

Ironically, the State Department this week was [forced to cancel](#) an international

WIN WITHOUT WAR



conference on border control.

IMPAIRED COUNTERTERRORISM INVESTIGATIONS

- A group representing FBI agents [earlier this month warned](#) that **the shutdown was threatening national security** as it was, for example, prolonging crucial investigations, losing informants, and failing to process security clearances.
- Morale is low at the FBI too, as much of the agency was being forced to work without pay. Many have either quit or are looking for work elsewhere. One former official said the FBI is “[hemorrhaging](#)” talent.
- Just this week, five former Homeland Security secretaries -- including Trump’s own former chief of staff John Kelly -- sent a letter to Trump saying the shutdown was “[putting national security at risk](#).” [Specifically](#), “[c]entral components of the nation’s cybersecurity infrastructure have ground to a halt.”

COASTAL INSECURITY

- Because the Coast Guard falls under the auspices of DHS, around **41,000 active duty service members were also working but not being paid**. Coast Guard commandant Adm. Karl Schultz said this week that the shutdown was causing “[anxiety and stress](#)” among his ranks. “I find it unacceptable that Coast Guard men and women have to rely on food pantries and donations to get through day-to-day life as service members,” he said.

AIR TRAVEL SECURITY THREATENED

- Associations representing air-traffic controllers, pilots, and flight attendants released a joint statement this week sounding the alarm about the dire situation the shutdown has caused. “We have a growing concern for the safety and security of our members, our airlines, and the traveling public due to the government shutdown,” they [said](#). “In our risk averse industry, **we cannot even calculate the level of risk currently at play, nor predict the point at which the entire system will break**. It is unprecedented.”
- Air traffic control towers were facing massive staffing shortages and just today, the FAA [announced](#) that all flights into and out of New York’s La Guardia airport are temporarily restricted due to a “slight increase in sick leave.” CNN reported that this fact may have been part of the reason why Trump acquiesced to reopening the government.

WIN WITHOUT WAR



- Meanwhile, TSA workers were working to secure our airports and airlines with limited or no pay, forcing many to either work second jobs on top of their full-time schedule or hand in their [resignations](#). Air marshals were also receiving no pay. One airline CEO [said](#) this week called the situation “close to a tipping point.”

ECONOMIC WOES

- The shutdown could delay tax refunds as [nearly 14,000 IRS employees didn't show up for work this week](#).
- As [many as 40 million low income Americans are at risk of losing food assistance](#).
- The White House has acknowledged that economic growth will be flat in the first quarter of this year because of the shutdown. And as the AP [reported](#), **independent economists doubt that a rebound after the shutdown is over “would be enough to offset the initial damage**. The economy is already bedeviled by slowing global growth, ongoing trade tensions and higher interest rates, which contributed to a plunge in home sales last month.”

STALLING ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

- The shutdown was not only preventing the gathering of climate data, like temperature changes, but [perhaps more importantly](#), **“the interruption of key scientific research [was] a much bigger problem that will have longer lasting repercussions.”** Moreover, the “chilling effect the government shutdown is having on early-career researchers” was also a big issue.

THE TRUTH BEHIND TRUMP'S CORE SHUTDOWN ISSUE

A core principle of [progressive foreign policy](#) is that **human security is not divisible and our own fears of insecurity do not justify policies that make others less safe**. While the Wall -- whether it be constructed of steel slats or poured of concrete -- will [not](#) make Americans safe, it will undermine the safety and humanity of those seeking refuge and opportunity at our borders. Firing tear gas, separating families, and caging children are also real threats to human security, not migrants and asylum seekers.

Moreover, the U.S.'s long-standing violent and exploitative policies towards Latin America have only [fueled](#) insecurity for decades. From neoliberal economic policies that entrenched vast inequality, to [waging](#) dirty wars that killed thousands of people, to fueling corruption, human rights abuses, and impunity, U.S. foreign policy has helped create the conditions that make

WIN WITHOUT WAR



struggling democracies in Latin America home to some of the world's gravest humanitarian crises and sites of deadly violence. Mexico had more violent civilian deaths [between](#) 2007 and 2014 than Iraq and Afghanistan. In 2015, more people [died](#) violently in Brazil than Syria. About [3 million people](#) have fled the economic and political crisis in Venezuela -- the world's most violent country -- since 2015.

Undoubtedly, there are legitimate challenges south of the U.S. border that the U.S. helped to create. **Yet erecting a [monument](#) to bigotry and white supremacy -- and holding the government hostage to fund it -- will not address them.**

Instead, the brutal legacy of decades of U.S intervention in Latin America must remind us of our responsibility to help the people fleeing its effects. U.S. foreign policy should safeguard opportunities for justice and the rights and security of the people in Latin America, not undermine them. This principle extends to U.S. policy towards current developments in Venezuela, where the Trump administration has [recognized](#) opposition leader Juan Guaido as the interim president. As the situation unfolds, it's time to listen to and uplift the voices of Venezuelans, to call upon Venezuelan security forces to refrain from any violence towards the people, and vehemently oppose any notion that U.S. military intervention is a legitimate option on the table. Trump's claim to stand with Venezuelans rings hollow when he demonizes the very people fleeing the current crisis to justify his wall.

BURIED LEDES

New York Times columnist Michelle Alexander issued a powerful [call](#) ahead of Martin Luther King, Jr. day to **“break the silence on Palestine”**: “I aim to speak with greater courage and conviction about injustices beyond our borders, particularly those that are funded by our government, and stand in solidarity with struggles for democracy and freedom. My conscience leaves me no other choice.”

HAPPY FRIDAY: The Trump administration is reportedly negotiating a deal with the Taliban that [was on the table](#) more than two decades ago -- before 9/11. And the U.S. Army recently [concluded](#) that **“Iran appears to be the only victor” of the Iraq war.**

YAY US: “Greenland's enormous ice sheet is melting at [such an accelerated rate](#) that it may have reached a ‘tipping point’ and **could become a major factor in sea-level rise around the world within two decades.**”

PASS THE BOURBON: **Citing climate change and the threat of nuclear war in the Trump era**, the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists' “Doomsday Clock” is still, like last year, [set at two minutes](#)

WIN WITHOUT WAR



[to midnight](#), or “as close to the symbolic point of annihilation that the iconic Clock has been since 1953 at the height of the Cold War.”

The Washington Office on Latin American has a [good explainer](#) of **what we know so far about the crisis in Venezuela**.

Check out the Intercept’s brief [review](#) of U.S. policy in Latin America, particularly Honduras, and **its role in creating the humanitarian crisis today**.

[Read](#) about how life under gang rule in El Salvador that illustrates why so many migrants and asylum seekers **are forced to make the dangerous journey to the United States**.

We should [be aware](#) that **there are Ahmed Chalabi imitators still out there trying to pressure America into war with Iran**, a prospect that’s becoming [increasingly likely](#).

And finally, **that’s not how mutual defense treaties work**. When asked if the U.S. would defend a NATO ally if needed, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo [replied](#): “I’m not going to get into hypotheticals...”