### 2AC – Turn

#### Congressional oversight structurally can’t inhibit Trump. Letting him win in midterms and do what he wants until 2029 prevents lashout.

Ed Kilgore 25 – “Trump Bets He Can Have His Extremism — and the Midterms, Too,” 9/14, https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/opinion/trump-bets-he-can-have-his-extremism-and-the-midterms-too/ar-AA1McsIe

This was a particularly fraught decision for Trump because his idea of “policy accomplishments” involved a vast expansion of presidential power, an inevitably controversial mass-deportation program, a return to protectionist economic strategies, and relentless threats of Mafia-style retribution against his enemies and critics. Given his incredibly high regard for his own uniqueness and his history of disdain for the Republican Party, it would have been the most natural thing in the world for Trump to write off the midterms and plan to leave the White House in 2029 after infuriating and betraying as many allies and voters as possible.

Within moments of his second inauguration, Trump pursued a course of unprecedented extremism that suggested he would be fine with vast midterm losses, deliberately alienating voting blocs (Latinos, younger voters, inflation-sensitive voters) that had moved in the GOP’s direction in 2024 and exhibiting indifference to public opinion generally (a bit disguised by his habit of asserting vast popularity absent, or even against, any evidence).

But then something surprising began happening: Trump started showing considerable personal interest in his party’s midterm prospects, interfering in Republican primaries to promote the most electable options (notably by shoving Marjorie Taylor Greene out of a Senate race) and making sure the White House is as focused on 2026 as he is.

The standard take on Trump’s motivation for this sudden decision to care about his party’s fate is that it’s actually all about himself: He’s worried about being investigated or even impeached by a Democratic House. But given the absence of any evidence that past Democratic House investigations or impeachments inhibited him even a bit, there’s a more lurid possibility: He’s convinced a rabid pursuit of a maximalist agenda is compatible with a successful midterm win and long-term Republican success.

This is consistent with Trump’s longtime belief in a base-first political strategy. If the GOP base wasn’t already completely under Trump’s thrall coming out of the 2024 elections, he’s probably heat-seared his bond with them by the audacity and thrilling hatefulness of his conduct since returning to the White House. You can debate all day long whether the second Trump administration bears the characteristic marks of an authoritarian regime. But without any question, the 47th president’s relationship with his supporters is ducelike. His biggest power grabs please them most, as is evidenced by the rapturous GOP rank-and-file reaction to the idea of sending troops into major U.S. cities to combat a nonexistent crime wave.

But even Trump seems to understand that this might not be enough to reverse the historic pattern of the White House party losing House seats in midterms. And that is why a big part of his own “pivot to the midterms” has been an effort to skew the results with a national gerrymandering effort that effectively increases the GOP House majority from a few seats to perhaps a dozen. To be very clear, this is something that would not have happened without Trump’s personal intervention; in some cases, he’s had to drag state-level Republicans kicking and screaming into this effort, and there will be collateral damage among Republican U.S. House members (especially in California, where Gavin Newsom’s retaliatory gerrymander could extinguish five GOP incumbents) who are sacrificing their own careers to the Leader’s cause.

If changing the geographical landscape isn’t enough to maintain the Republican trifecta, Trump is clearly planning to shift the issue landscape as well by doing everything possible to keep the public focus on topics he believes favor him and his party, including immigration, crime, and national security (or rather “war-fighting”). This last topic remains quite literally an unfired bullet in his chamber. A Wag the Dog scenario of preelection wars or rumors of wars is an ever-present possibility.

Trump has resolved the second-term president’s dilemma by refusing to choose at all between chewing up political capital to get things done and trying to win the midterms. He’s riding two horses past a fork in the road he refuses to acknowledge. After violating almost every existing political (and legal) norm since his reelection, he’s now seeking to extend the wild MAGA party for at least two more years by revving up his base to a state of great excitement, cheating as much as he can, and lying about conditions in the country in order to give himself additional opportunities to keep the opposition (and the courts) off balance.

The scarier question is what Trump will do if (as still appears likely) his efforts fall short. Will he simply reject the midterms results as fraudulent, as he did in 2020? Will he seek to overturn a Democratic House victory via the courts, state-election certifiers, or mass disturbances? Or will he turn to his faithful subaltern Mike Johnson and instruct the outgoing Speaker to refuse to seat every Democrat who’s won a close race? And will the U.S. Supreme Court again look the other way? The 2026 midterms could be Trump’s wildest ride yet.

#### That causes great power World War III.

Leon E. Panetta et al. 25 – former Secretary of Defense, former Director of the CIA, former White House Chief of Staff, Director of the Office of Management and Budget, Co-Founder of the Panetta Institute for Public Policy, J.D. from the Santa Clara University School of Law, "It's Trump's Messy, Dangerous World Now," The New York Times, 01/20/2025, https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/20/opinion/trump-foreign-policy-defense.html

We live in an increasingly dangerous and threatening world. There are more flashpoints in today’s global geopolitics than we have seen in decades, presenting a generational challenge to the incoming administration of Donald Trump and all of America’s elected leadership.

At the Panetta Institute for Public Policy, I tell students that in our democracy, we govern either by leadership or by crisis. If leadership is there and willing to take the risks associated with responsibility, we can avoid, or certainly contain, crisis. But if leadership is absent, we will inevitably govern by crisis. The same is true when it comes to foreign policy.

As President-elect Trump is about to be inaugurated for his second term, a fundamental question being asked around the world is whether he will repeat the unpredictable and chaotic approach to foreign policy that defined his first term or embrace the idea that he stressed repeatedly during his campaign of “peace through strength.”

President-elect Trump cannot adopt that foreign policy concept, which holds that a strong military can prevent conflict, without also embracing the definition that President Ronald Reagan so eloquently gave it in his speech marking the 40th anniversary of the Normandy invasion. “We in America have learned bitter lessons from two world wars,” said Mr. Reagan, who made the idea famous. “It is better to be here ready to protect the peace than to take blind shelter across the sea, rushing to respond only after freedom is lost.” He also made clear that “the strength of America’s allies is vital to the United States.”

The world that awaits Mr. Trump is far different from and more threatening than what he had to confront in his first four years. Autocrats that once operated in their own spheres of influence have now joined together in an axis of mutual support and aggression: Vladimir Putin of Russia is not just a temperamental bully but also a tyrant who invaded the sovereign democracy of Ukraine and continues to threaten democracies in the West; Xi Jinping of China has made clear that he is prepared for a potential Taiwan invasion and wants to compete with the United States as a leading military power; Kim Jong-un of North Korea is not just threatening democracy in South Korea but has also sent drones and thousands of troops to Russia to fight Ukrainians; Iran, weakened by Israel, continues to enrich uranium and is ever closer to developing a nuclear weapon; and ISIS has once again raised its ugly head by inspiring a lone-wolf attack in New Orleans.

Mr. Trump has always prided himself on being a dealmaker, pledging in his campaign that he would resolve such conflicts in the first few days of his presidency. But precisely because it is a more dangerous world, that’s unlikely to happen. And if he tries and fails, the United States will appear weak. There is concern that Mr. Trump may have already started off badly by threatening Greenland, the Panama Canal Zone and Canada. Those are the kind of careless and disruptive comments that only undermine American credibility when it comes to dealing with real-world crises.

This is, however, a time when “peace through strength” could actually work. It will require strong, serious and stable leadership to turn the current multipolar crisis into an opportunity for America. The incoming president can be a dealmaker, but it must be from a position of strength. And strength begins with the United States remaining the strongest military power on the face of the earth.

To ensure that, the new administration must be willing to increase military investments in recruitment, training, readiness, nuclear weapons systems, the U.S. defense industrial base and research and technology. To accomplish all of this, the defense budget cannot rely on the unpredictability of continuing resolutions. There must be a five-year budget that makes clear our defense priorities and achieves savings in duplication, procurement and bureaucracy.

On Ukraine, it is becoming clear that Ukraine and Mr. Putin must find a way to a negotiated settlement to the war. Mr. Trump must make clear that the United States will continue to work with NATO to support Ukraine and that Mr. Putin will not be allowed to succeed. If that message is clear to Mr. Putin and if Ukraine can gain traction against Russia, President Volodymyr Zelensky will have the leverage to negotiate a settlement that provides for Ukraine’s sovereignty and security, allows Russia to remain in Crimea and other limited areas and achieves an end to the war. That would be peace through strength.

Mr. Trump should tell China that it will help Taiwan defend itself, that the South China Sea will remain open pursuant to international law and that the United States will support a strong alliance of Japan, South Korea, Australia, India and other Asian countries to protect the freedom of the seas and commerce in the Pacific. From a position of greater military strength, the United States would have leverage for a more productive dialogue with China on trade, cybersecurity, fentanyl, satellites and other economic issues. To simply expand tariffs on China and start a trade war will result in an economic backlash among unhappy consumers in the United States. Retribution is not dealmaking.

Iran is yet another opportunity. Tehran has been weakened by Israel both militarily and economically; it could very well be open to negotiations on limiting nuclear enrichment and stopping support for proxies in exchange for relief from economic sanctions. Since the previous Trump administration was critical to the establishment of the Abraham Accords, Mr. Trump could work with Israel to bring Saudi Arabia into the deal, along with other moderate Arab nations. Building a Middle East alliance would be important to dealing with Iran and terrorism, and establishing an approach to peace in the Middle East.

The president, as commander in chief, has the power and responsibility to determine America’s future security. If he is careless with that awesome power, the United States could very well find itself in another world war. But if the president understands his power, as Mr. Reagan did, he can provide strong leadership and build alliances that steer the world out of war. The key to peace is strength, and the key to strength is leadership.

### 1AR – Trump Outweighs

**Turn outweighs on time frame – he’ll destroy the world in the lame-duck.**

Satoshi **Machidori 25**, Professor of Political Science at Kyoto University's Graduate School of Law, specializing in Comparative Political Studies, "American democracy will weather the Trumpist storm," Institute of Geoeconomics, 3/4/25, https://instituteofgeoeconomics.org/en/research/2025030404/

The key is that Trump’s presidency is constitutionally limited to four years. If it enters a lame-duck phase after the midterms, as is likely, the administration might prioritize cementing its legacy by embarking on disruptive international and security-related policies, potentially undermining global trust in U.S. democracy and stability.

### 1AR – Courts Check

1. **Courts and executive officials minimize the worst damage. It’s comparatively far more effective than impeachment, which does nothing.**

Jack **Goldsmith 24** – interviewing Kate Shaw & David French, ‘It Will Be a More Robust Check on Trump Than the G.O.P. Congress’: Three Legal Experts on Trump 2.0,” 12/21, https://www.aei.org/op-eds/it-will-be-a-more-robust-check-on-trump-than-the-g-o-p-congress-three-legal-experts-on-trump-2-0/

David French: We can’t underestimate the collapse of impeachment as a deterrent against presidential misbehavior. The combination of the loss of impeachment as a meaningful check on presidential power and the Supreme Court’s immunity decision now means that presidents enjoy remarkable freedom from both political and legal accountability.

Shaw: So with the elimination of both impeachment (and perhaps congressional oversight generally) and postpresidency prosecutions as meaningful checks on presidential misconduct or overreach, where do you both see the checks on the incoming Trump administration coming from?

Goldsmith: I would not exaggerate how much impeachment (which I agree has been diminished) and the threat of postpresidency prosecution were ever meaningful checks on the president. One important check is that subordinate executive branch officials through whom the president must almost always act should remain subject to criminal law checks — that has always been a powerful force in checking the president (and was in Trump 1.0). The main and very important check beyond that will come from courts, although courts cannot consider every form of abuse. Before Trump 1.0, executive branch norms did a lot of work, but they, too, are much diminished now.

Shaw: Do you also disagree with at least some of Trump’s advisers — like Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy, at least by the evidence of their recent opinion essay in The Wall Street Journal — who think that the Supreme Court will be a reliable ally in a second term?

Goldsmith: I do not think the court will be a reliable ally of the Trump administration. There were many cases in the first term — the DACA case, the census citizenship case, more — where the Supreme Court stood up to Trump. Ultimately it depends on the issue.

French: I strongly disagree with the Supreme Court’s immunity ruling, but as Jack said, a broader view of the current court’s jurisprudence shows that it’s hardly a rubber stamp for Trump and MAGA legal arguments. For example, in addition to the cases Jack mentioned, it turned back several of Trump’s efforts to steal the 2020 election, rejected Republican arguments about the Voting Rights Act and rejected the core of the Trumpist independent state legislature doctrine. It will be a more robust check on Trump than the G.O.P. Congress, and it’s not close.

### 2AR – Midterm Loss Causes War

**Midterm loss causes war – multiple hotspots. Empirics are aff.**

Carl **Gibson 25** – “Trump Knows He's Failing — and He's Hoping a New War Will Bail Him Out,” 6/26, https://www.occupy.com/article/trump-knows-he-s-failing-and-he-s-hoping-new-war-will-bail-him-out

President Donald Trump has a new shiny object he’s hoping will distract the media from his catastrophic second term: A new war in the Middle East.

In the 1997 film “Wag the Dog,” Robert De Niro plays Conrad Brean — a professional distraction artist — who is hired by the president of the United States to divert the media’s attention away from a sex scandal with an underage girl just weeks before the election. Brean ends up teaming up with a Hollywood producer played by Dustin Hoffman to fabricate a war in Albania, which successfully pushes the sex scandal to the back pages of the newspaper before it disappears entirely from the news cycle, resulting in the president’s reelection.

Trump is very familiar with the art of distraction, and even as a private citizen he knew the power a war has over the media’s fickle attention span. On October 9, 2012, Trump tweeted: “Now that Obama’s poll numbers are in tailspin — watch for him to launch a strike in Libya or Iran. He is desperate.”

While it’s true that Iran obtaining nuclear weapons would present a danger to Israel, and while Israel is a sovereign country with its own military free to do what it feels necessary to protect itself, it’s also true that what happens between Iran and Israel should be of no concern to Americans, beyond macroeconomic reverberations (like the pending increase in oil prices due to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz). Secretary of State and National Security Advisor Marco Rubio made that clear in a statement he issued following Israel’s first strikes in Iran in mid-June, telling the world that Israel “took unilateral action against Iran,” that the United States was “not involved with strikes against Iran,” and that the US’ only position was that it aimed to protect “American forces in the region.”

However, after the United States conducted a series of strikes with its B-2 bombers on Iranian nuclear sites, the US is officially involved in Israel’s conflict with Iran. The coming weeks will be critical to see if the media is still capable of walking and chewing gum at the same time, as editors and journalists will have to choose between allowing its gaze to be diverted by the latest shiny object or continuing to cover the ongoing collapse of both Trump’s popular support, the first major domestic policy push of his second term, a debilitating trade war wreaking havoc on American businesses and consumers, and the increasing size and frequency of nationwide protests against his administration.

Presidents have relied on war in the past to distract from failures

To be clear, Trump would be far from the first US president to use war as a means of keeping the American public distracted from unflattering developments at home. In the fall of 2006, the Republican Party suffered a shellacking in the midterm elections and lost control of both chambers of Congress, with Democrats gaining a net total of 31 House seats, five Senate seats, and six governorships. It marked the first time since the Republican Party’s founding in 1854 that not a single Republican flipped a House, Senate, or gubernatorial seat previously held by a Democrat. On January 10, 2007 – just a week after the new Democratic-controlled Congress was sworn in – President George W. Bush announced a major troop surge in Iraq.

Democratic presidents have also carried out questionably timed military operations when they themselves were going through periods of unpopularity. In December of 1998, President Bill Clinton carried out a series of strikes on Iraq that the administration said were intended to “degrade” Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein’s ability to manufacture weapons of mass destruction. Then-Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott (R-Mississippi) called the timing of the operation “suspect” and “cursory,” given that Republicans were in the midst of impeachment proceedings against Clinton in response to the Monica Lewinsky sex scandal. Just two days after the strikes, the Republican-controlled House of Representatives impeached Clinton (he was later acquitted by the Senate).

Given recent history, Trump suddenly using US military resources to attack Iran despite campaigning on pulling the US out of foreign conflicts naturally provokes questions about why he’s suddenly flip-flopping on his “America First” approach to foreign policy. The Associated Press recounted Trump calling former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley (who served in his first administration) a “warmonger” during his 2024 campaign. During a campaign rally in New Hampshire, Trump described his rival’s ideology as “let’s kill people all over the place and let’s make a lot of money for those people that make the messes.” He also frequently boasted that he was the only US president “in generations” who didn’t start a war.

Trump also railed against foreign wars during his first bid for the presidency. During a 2016 Republican presidential debate, Trump called the Iraq War a “big fat mistake.” And in a CNN interview, he also called the US’ invasion of Afghanistan a “terrible mistake” that cost trillions of dollars and thousands of lives.

However, just five months into his second term, Trump has reversed all of those prior positions by getting the US involved in a war with one of the two leading superpowers of the Middle East (the other being Israel). Unlike Iraq, which is a country of 168,754 square miles that had a population of 26.8 million in 2003 prior to Bush’s invasion, Iran spans 636,372 square miles and has a population of 90.61 million. According to the United Nations, Iran is the 17th most populous country in the world.

Even the most diehard members of Trump’s base are starting to turn on him over his bombing of Iran. Former Rep. Matt Gaetz (R-Florida) — who Trump initially tapped to be his second-term attorney general before Gaetz withdrew his nomination roughly a week later — said during a recent episode of his show on the far-right One America News Network that the bombing was “not about Iran’s nuclear program.” He pointed out that North Korea’s nuclear program was a “far greater threat to the United States than Iran’s,” and that he had firsthand knowledge of North Korea’s capabilities as a former member of the House Armed Services Committee for eight years.

“Iran has neither the bomb, the delivery system, nor the re-entry vehicle that you would need for any intercontinental ballistic missile to launch and reenter orbit,” Gaetz said. “North Korea has all three! North Korea could launch a nuclear weapon at [the] mainland United States today. We’ve probably got the ability to knock it out of the sky, but Iran can’t even get their bird in the air.”

Steve Bannon, who was Trump’s first-term White House chief strategist, lamented that Trump may have ended up embroiling the United States in another “forever war” if Iran retaliates and the US strikes back in response to the Iranian regime. Far-right Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Georgia) has accused the “uniparty” of attempting to “politically destroy” her for “opposing regime change in Iran.” And Rep. Thomas Massie (R-Kentucky), who voted in line with Trump’s positions 71% of the time in his first term, told CNN’s Manu Raju that Trump’s offensive against Iran could mean Republicans “lose the majority” after the 2026 midterms.

“I think this was a bad move politically, but it’s also just a bad move legally and Constitutionally and policy wise,” Massie said, adding that Trump “absolutely” broke his campaign promise to not involve the US in any new foreign wars.

As a nation whose military is already stretched thin attempting to keep Russia from conquering Ukraine, and trying to keep China from taking over Taiwan, the US can hardly afford another long-term commitment in the Middle East. So what’s the real reason for Trump’s sudden about-face?

Trump is hoping a new war in the Middle East will bail him out

Just before the June strikes on Iran, Trump experienced a slew of negative poll results showing that most Americans have soured on his second term. And it isn’t just Democrats and independents with a negative opinion of the current administration — a growing number of Republicans are also less enthusiastic in their support of Trump since his second term began in January:

Trump had a job approval rating of just 38% according to a Quinnipiac University poll in mid-June. The renowned polling institution specifically found that HR 1 (his “One Big Beautiful Bill Act”) has an underwater approval rating, with 53% of respondents saying they opposed the legislation while just 27% support it (20% had no opinion). Only 67% of respondents who identified as Republican said they backed the legislation.

An NBC News/SurveyMonkey poll from June found that 55% of Americans aged 18 and up disapprove of Trump’s performance five months into his second term. While that number remains unchanged from an April survey, pollsters found that Republicans in June were 5% less likely to say that they “strongly support” the administration. And while 46% of respondents who identified with Trump’s MAGA movement told NBC in April that they were “thrilled” with Trump’s policies, that number dropped to 37% in June.

Even on the specific issues that helped him get reelected, like immigration and the economy, Trump’s popular support is slipping. The Economist’s polling data shows Trump underwater on kitchen-table issues like taxes and spending, inflation and prices, and jobs and the economy. Pew Research found in early June that while Americans were evenly split on Trump’s handling of immigration, a majority of respondents disapproved of specific actions, like Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids on workplaces (54% disapproval), ending Temporary Protected Status for immigrants who came to the US fleeing war and persecution in their home countries (59% disapproval), and suspension of most asylum applications (60% disapproval).

In addition to these polls, Trump has also experienced significant public protests against his administration. The June “No Kings” protests — which coincided with both Trump’s 79th birthday and his military parade honoring the 250th anniversary of the Army — brought out roughly five million people in more than 2,100 cities in the US and around the world. Data journalist G. Elliott Morris argued that the “No Kings” event was the single-largest day of protest in US history, eclipsing even the Women’s March of 2017.

And as the Quinnipiac poll touched on, Trump’s first major domestic policy bill is on life support in the Republican-controlled US Senate, after only barely passing through the majority-Republican House of Representatives by a one-vote margin. Given their 53-47 Senate majority, Republicans can only afford three defections if they hope to pass a bill back to the House with a tie-breaking vote from Vice President JD Vance. And because moderate Republicans like Sens. Susan Collins (R-Maine) and Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) have already publicly indicated a hesitancy to support the bill, Trump can only afford to have one more Republican vote no, assuming all Democrats remain opposed.

This could prove exceedingly difficult, as even reliably conservative senators like Josh Hawley (R-Missouri), Ron Johnson (R-Wisconsin) and Rand Paul (R-Kentucky) have all gone on the record sharply criticizing the bill. Hawley — whose constituency includes a large share of residents who rely on Medicaid for health insurance – has said he wouldn’t vote for a bill that significantly cuts the program. Johnson has argued the bill doesn’t go far enough to slash federal spending, and Paul has said he wouldn’t vote for a bill that raises the US’ debt limit – even though not doing so could put the US in default and jeopardize the global economy by mid-July, according to Reuters.

Even Sen. Tommy Tuberville (R-Alabama), who has been one of Trump’s most stalwart supporters in the Senate, has openly expressed his concern about one provision in the bill that forces states to share the burden of funding the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, or food stamps) for the first time in US history. The former Auburn University football coach — who is now seeking the Republican nomination in Alabama’s 2026 gubernatorial election — hasn’t said this is a line in the sand for him, though his statement suggests that the food stamps section of HR 1 may need to be revised in order to ensure his support.

Trump’s ongoing trade war with China has also continued to plague his public perception, with CNBC reporting in May that Americans are still likely to see higher prices and lighter shelves at stores despite a reprieve in the imposition of new import duties. Retailers say that the increase in tariffs has made it economically unfeasible to complete full orders. And because the typical turnaround in the China-US supply chain is three months between the ordering process and goods being shipped and stocked, this means that parents shopping for back-to-school season in August could be faced with supply shortages and higher-than-expected prices.

Following a multi-day trade summit in London, the Trump administration announced an agreed-upon framework for a trade deal with China that still keeps tariffs at higher rates than before the trade war started. The World Economic Forum reported that tariffs on Chinese imports would be at 55%. This includes the 10% universal tariff on all trade partners announced in April, along with a 20% tariff on Chinese goods and preexisting 25% tariffs that Trump put in place during his first term. Roughly 60% of Walmart’s inventory comes from China, meaning families that do their shopping at the retail giant can be expected to pay significantly higher prices for many products.

With so many issues at home dragging down his public approval rating, Trump may welcome a new war in the Middle East if only to give him a respite from the beating his administration and policy agenda have been taking in the media. Global geopolitical events are always important and should be covered, but it’s incumbent upon journalists to not take the bait and let up in their reporting on the Trump administration should the US end up getting involved in another major war. Trump’s actions in Iran should be viewed as another desperate attempt by a significantly beleaguered administration to wag the dog and divert our eyes.