

At the UN, Trump tests pressure against cooperation

A speech on Iran, Greenland and AI showed a U.S. strategy built on leverage—and the worries it raises for global rules.



An empty global assembly hall with a spotlighted podium and unmarked flags in the background.

President Trump brought his America First foreign policy to the United Nations General Assembly this week, using a speech to defend the war with Iran and warn Iran's leaders that they faced overwhelming U.S. force if they did not make a deal, according to reporting by PBS NewsHour. The same report described a wider message from the president: the United States would use military, economic and diplomatic **pressure** to get what it wanted, from the Middle East to the Arctic to artificial intelligence.

The setting mattered. The United Nations General Assembly is the large yearly meeting where member countries address one another, often with speeches about war, peace, trade, climate and human rights. The United Nations **Charter**, the organization's founding agreement, generally bars countries from threatening military force except in self-defense. So a U.S. president defending a war and making new threats from that stage was not just another political speech. It was a test of how much the world's most powerful countries still feel bound by shared rules.

On Iran, Trump said the United States had ended Iran's role as a regional bully and suggested that a deal could come after the midterm elections, the

congressional elections held halfway through a president's term. But he also framed the alternative in extreme military terms, saying Iran's government could be destroyed quickly if it did not change course. That is the central tension in the story: threats can be meant to create **leverage**, or bargaining power, but they can also make **diplomacy** harder by convincing the other side that talks are unsafe or humiliating.

Iran's president, Masoud Pezeshkian, said his government did not trust another negotiation. He argued that Iran had been at the table before and that agreements had been trampled. At the same time, PBS reported that Iran's foreign minister met that day with U.S. negotiators Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner. That combination is important. Governments can publicly reject trust while still privately or officially looking for an exit from **conflict**. Diplomacy often continues even when leaders speak as if compromise is impossible.

The speech also came as the United States, Denmark and Greenland announced a new Arctic **security** agreement. Greenland is part of the Kingdom of Denmark, and sovereignty means the legal right of a people or government to control its own **territory**. Trump had previously pushed for U.S. owner-

ship of Greenland, an idea Denmark and Greenland rejected. The new deal does not give the United States ownership. Instead, it allows two new U.S. bases, increases NATO's presence in the Arctic, and permanently bans Chinese and Russian investment in Greenland. NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, is a military **alliance** whose members promise to help defend one another.

That agreement shows a second version of the same trade-off. Supporters can argue that the result strengthens security without formally taking territory from anyone. Denmark and Greenland described the deal as beneficial to all sides and emphasized that Greenland was part of the agreement, not just the subject of it. Critics could still ask whether earlier U.S. threats helped produce a deal or damaged trust among allies. If a powerful country pressures a smaller partner and later signs a negotiated agreement, the outcome may look cooperative, but the process can still leave questions about fairness.

PBS also reported that Middle Eastern allies were watching the conflict with Iran spread through the region. The report described strikes by the Iranian-backed Houthis in Yemen and concerns that the group's campaign could give Iran more leverage near major waterways, including the Bab al-Mandab **Strait** and the Strait of Hormuz. A strait is a narrow passage of water connecting larger bodies of water, and these routes matter because ships carrying energy and goods pass through

them. For countries affected by attacks, food shortages or higher energy prices, the question is not abstract: military decisions can quickly become economic problems.

The contrast with outgoing U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres was sharp. A secretary-general is the United Nations' top administrator and public diplomat. Guterres warned that global divisions were deepening, saying, "The fault lines in our world are widening." He argued that challenges such as climate change and artificial intelligence require cooperation among rivals, not a free-for-all. Trump took the opposite tone on AI, saying his administration would encourage it rather than rein it in. Artificial intelligence means computer systems that can perform tasks that usually require human thinking, such as recognizing patterns, generating text or making predictions.

That disagreement may be the clearest classroom question inside the news. One side says strong countries should act decisively, use pressure, and avoid letting international bodies slow them down. The other says the biggest problems now cross borders, so even powerful countries need rules, trust and channels for cooperation. The hard part is that both concerns are real. Rules can be too slow when danger is immediate. Raw power can solve one problem while creating others. This week's U.N. speech put that argument in public, with Iran, Greenland and AI as the examples.

Written from reporting by PBS NewsHour.

THINK IT THROUGH

1. When, if ever, should a country use military threats as a bargaining tool if those threats may also weaken international rules?

A strong answer: A strong answer should weigh security needs, legal norms, credibility, and the risk that threats can either prevent or widen conflict.

2. Does the Greenland agreement show that hard pressure can lead to useful cooperation, or that powerful countries can make smaller partners negotiate under unfair conditions?

A strong answer: A strong answer should consider both the announced security benefits and the importance of sovereignty, consent, and trust among allies.

3. On artificial intelligence, should governments prioritize speed and innovation or international guardrails, and what evidence would you need to decide?

A strong answer: A strong answer should identify concrete benefits and risks of AI and explain what information is missing before choosing a policy approach.

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ALLIANCE

AUTONOMY

CHARTER

CONFLICT

DIPLOMACY

LEVERAGE

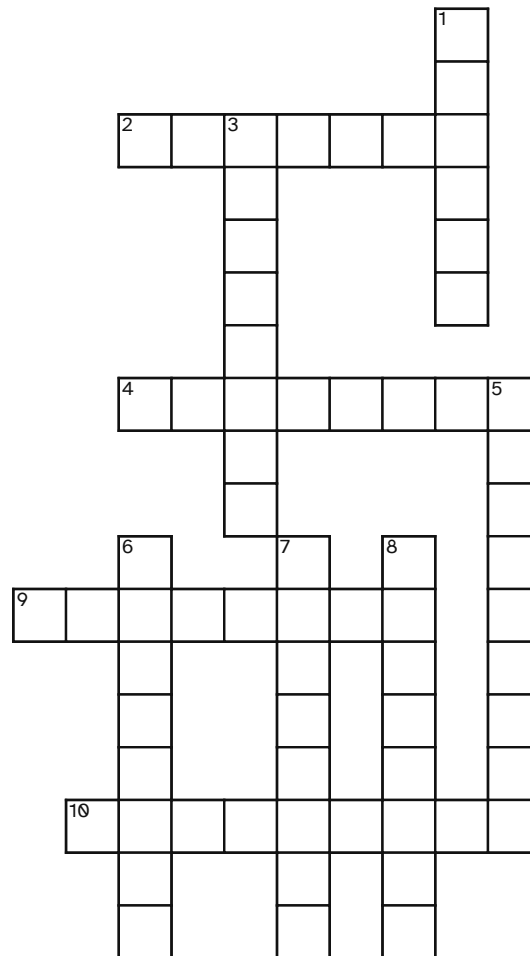
PRESSURE

SECURITY

STRAIT

TERRITORY

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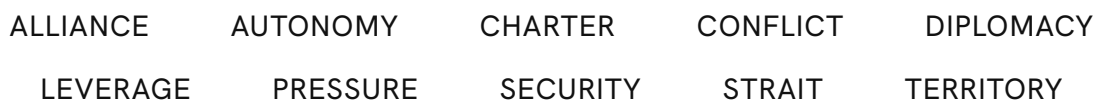
ACROSS

- 2 Founding document listing an organization's goals, rules, and powers
- 4 Serious disagreement that may involve armed fighting
- 9 Influence used to make another government act a certain way
- 10 Managing relations between governments through talks and negotiation

DOWN

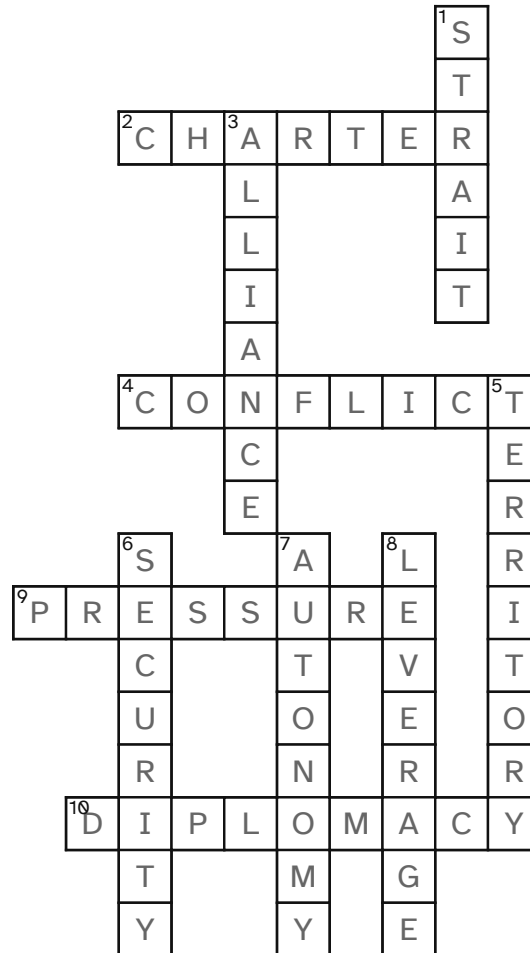
- 1 Narrow water passage connecting two larger bodies of water
- 3 Agreement among countries to support or defend one another
- 5 Land controlled or claimed by a government or people
- 6 Protection from danger, attack, or other threats
- 7 Right of a people or region to govern itself
- 8 Advantage giving one side extra power in a dispute or discussion

— answer key



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Where this came from

This article was written for 3andB from the reporting below. It is not a reprint — the wording is ours and the facts are theirs.

PBS NewsHour

“Trump defends Iran war and threatens annihilation at UN General Assembly”

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<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/trump-defends-iran-war-and-threatens-annihilation-at-un-general-assembly>

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The article with a note on each question, a word search, a crossword, and the answer key to both.

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