

# **Trump and Foreign Autocrats**

*This is a list of autocratic world leaders - most current, some former - represented during the 10/30/24 event in Washington, DC, "Autocrat Fair". Autocrats were chosen because of their history with Donald Trump, and their ability to make use of him for their own purposes.*

*Together their stories portray a shocking picture of corruption, blindness to human rights abuses, and in some cases acts of war, swirling around the former president's campaigns and time in office. It is not intended to list all autocrats, nor all autocrats with whom Trump or other US leaders have dealt.*

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## **Mullah Hibatullah Akhundzada**

Hibatullah Akhundzada is Supreme Leader of the Afghan Taliban. In February 2020, the Trump administration carried out secret negotiations with the Taliban that excluded Afghanistan's government, and in which the US agreed to withdraw forces from the country by May 2021. Taliban agents leveraged the agreement to secure stand-down arrangements with local political leaders and military officials throughout Afghanistan. That in turn paved the way for the unexpectedly rapid collapse of Afghanistan's government after the US withdrawal began.

## **Mohammed bin Zayed, United Arab Emirates**

In June 2017, the United Emirates under Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed (MBZ), with Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Egypt imposed a blockade on the country of Qatar. The Trump administration, initially reported to be divided about the matter, decided to support the blockade, departing from long-running US policy toward Qatar, a military and economic ally of the US.

The blockade followed an [April meeting](#) between the Kushner family business and Qatar's Minister of Finance, in which Qatar declined to provide financing that the family of Trump son-in-law Jared Kushner needed to rescue their property, the struggling 666 5th Avenue office building in New York.

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The UAE under MBZ, who is now president, has grown increasingly authoritarian, showing increased hostility toward criticism and placing restrictions on digital freedoms. British PhD student Matthew Hedges was detained for six months over accusations of spying, much of the time in solitary confinement and suffering other bad living conditions.

Trump has pursued business opportunities in the UAE since 2005, and a private real estate conglomerate in 2013 made a deal to build a \$6 billion Trump-branded golf club. The UAE was exempted from the Trump administration's infamous travel ban targeting most Muslim countries.

## Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Turkey

In 2019, Trump abruptly ordered US troops to withdraw from Syria's border with Turkey, paving the way an [invasion by Turkish troops](#). The move altered years of US policy, and blindsided US defense officials. Turkey's subsequent invasion and bombing displaced 200,000 Kurds. Kurdish forces fought for the US in Iraq, and were reliant on US protection.

In 2017, Erdoğan bodyguards in Washington, DC [beat Kurdish protesters](#) in Sheridan Circle near the Turkish Embassy. The US government waited a month before taking legal action, then charging only two of Erdoğan's guards, and those only after the House of Representatives passed a resolution that called for charges. The charges against those two guards were then dropped a short time later, in advance of a high-level meeting between Erdoğan and then-Secretary of State Rex Tillerson.

Trump's decision to withdraw US troops is [reported](#) to have been made "instinctively" following a phone call with Erdoğan. There are two adjoining Trump Towers in the Şişli district of Istanbul, one business and one residential.

## Vladimir Putin, Russia

President Putin's manipulations of Donald Trump are numerous. The authoritarian leader destroyed Russia's fledgling democracy, has assassinated critics and other opponents, and controls Russian media.

Trump ignored or denied intelligence findings that Russia paid bounties to the Taliban for killing US soldiers in Afghanistan, and stayed quiet about the poisoning of Russian dissident Alexei Navalny, despite other parts of his administration condemning the poisoning.

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In May 2017, Trump leaked classified information on ISIS, which had been provided by Israeli intelligence, to Russian Ambassador Sergei Lavrov. The source of the information is believed to have also been useful for intelligence on Iran's Revolutionary Guard and Hezbollah, and to have been compromised and possibly endangered by the leak to Russia, an Iranian ally.

In February 2024, Trump implicitly encouraged Vladimir Putin to invade more countries beyond Ukraine, including NATO allies, by stating at a rally that the US would not protect NATO member countries if they didn't "pay [their] bills." The claim that NATO member countries don't pay is one of five false claims about NATO the former president has made repeatedly.



## Abdel Fattah al-Sisi

As president, Donald Trump hosted Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi at the White House two times, despite [accusations by human rights groups](#) that his government had engaged in torture of political prisoners, silencing of dissidents, and use of the death penalty for score settling.

In 2024, reports emerged of a \$10 million withdrawal made in 2016 from an Egyptian government account, days before then-candidate Trump injected the same amount of funds into his presidential campaign. According to a [Washington Post](#) report, Justice Department officials began to investigate the withdrawal as a possible illegal foreign campaign contribution, but the investigation was quashed by then-Attorney General William Barr.

## Viktor Orbán, Hungary

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán is broadly condemned as having eviscerated Hungary's democracy, by destroying the country's free press and through attacks on civil society and academia. Trump has praised Orbán on multiple occasions, and in 2019 [invited him to the White House](#), breaking with a long US practice of ostracizing him.

Orbán, with Vladimir Putin worked to [undermine the Ukrainian government's standing with Trump](#). Orbán's efforts to paint the government as corrupt coincided with Trump's own attempts to pressure Ukraine into manufacturing legal controversies involving the Biden family.

## Rodrigo Duterte, The Philippines

President Rodrigo Duterte campaigned on the promise to kill hundreds of thousands of drug law violators. A massive extrajudicial killing campaign commenced immediately on his taking office in 2016, with human rights organizations estimating the number of victims as at least 30,000. His term has also been marked by attacks on media outlets and contrived legal cases against opposition leaders.

Shortly after being elected, Duterte called President Barack Obama a "son of a whore," following Obama's criticism of Duterte's drug war killings, prompting the White House to cancel a planned meeting between the leaders. In 2017 Trump [met with Duterte at the ASEAN Summit](#), appearing hand-in-hand with him at the summit's opening.

Trump publicly praised Duterte's drug war [two times](#), and expressed a desire to host him in the White House. The Manila Trump Tower [figured prominently](#) in the recent New York Times story on Trump's taxes, and Duterte appointed the businessman who made the Trump Tower deal a special envoy to the US.

## Kim Jong-un, North Korea

North Korean Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un leads a cult-of-personality regime that is one of the world's most repressive. His time in office has been marked by purges, assassinations of family members and other potential rivals, and expansion of the poverty-stricken nation's nuclear weapons program.

Trump touted a "good relationship" with Kim, and hoped Kim would end the North Korean nuclear weapons program because of that relationship. He held two direct meetings with Kim, both criticized by the foreign policy establishment as lacking preparation or strategy.

Domestically these meetings were propaganda coups for the Kim government, whose state-owned media outlets ran the footage for days. Kim however, failed to provide meaningful concessions, only closing a facility that was already past its useful lifespan.

## Mohammed bin Salman, Saudi Arabia

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, known as "MBS," drew international condemnation in 2018 following the murder of Saudi-born US resident and Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi, in the Saudi Embassy in Istanbul. In an interview with Bob Woodward for the book *Rage*, Trump bragged about protecting bin Salman from Congressional scrutiny. Trump told Woodward he didn't believe MBS had ordered the assassination of Khashoggi, despite conclusions by US and foreign intelligence agencies that he had.

MBS cultivated a relationship with Trump son-in-law and adviser Jared Kushner, and bragged that he had Kushner "in his pocket." Staffers at the US Embassy in Riyadh raised concerns over being kept in the dark about details of Kushner's meetings with members of the Saudi royal court. The Saudi government has paid money to Trump hotels since he took office.

## Jair Bolsonaro, Brazil

Former President Jair Bolsonaro advocated torture and praised the days of Brazil's military dictatorship. After he gutted the environmental enforcement budget, deforestation of the Amazon went up more than 80%. Extrajudicial killings also rose in frequency. Trump invited Bolsonaro to the White House in 2019, where he [praised Bolsonaro effusively](#).

The former Brazilian president has [subsequently faced](#) investigations, prosecutions and legal findings that he engaged in vaccination fraud, illegal jewelry smuggling, pandemic sabotage, digitally spreading defamatory fake news and threats against Supreme Court justices, a January 6<sup>th</sup> style attack on the Supreme Court and presidential palace, and misuse of government communication channels in an attempt to persuade foreign diplomats that the country's electronic voting system was rigged (leading to his being barred from seeking office until 2030).

## Narendra Modi, India

During a visit to India in February 2020, Trump praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi for "working very hard on religious freedom," despite Modi's Hindu nationalist political strategy. At the time of Trump's visit, violence had broken out following the passage of a citizenship law viewed as discriminatory against Muslims, with reports suggesting police did not intervene in cases of Hindus attacks on Muslims. There were also reports of widespread violence against Christians.

## Nicolás Maduro

According to former White House Advisor Olivia Troye, Trump privately praised Venezuelan dictator Nicolás Maduro, calling him "strong," despite publicly criticizing Maduro and calling for freedom for Venezuela.

In September 2024 Trump claimed Caracas was safer than the US, days after the State Department warned Americans about traveling there, citing "wrongful detentions, terrorism, kidnapping, the arbitrary enforcement of local laws, crime, civil unrest and poor health infrastructure."



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