

Why Trump Loves Cheats.. and is Losing in Iran

-Tina Brown, Jul 22, 2026

It's clear by now that Trump can't bear to hear anyone clapping and not want to shove his melting face into the mix. (How did they keep him out of Taylor Swift's wedding?) America is still cringing from the sight of the lumbering dufus POTUS refusing to get out of Team Spain's World Cup trophy photo, a bridge too far even for fawning FIFA president Gianni Infantino (he who ginned up a FIFA Peace Prize for the needy U.S. president), to whom it fell to hustle Trump off the pitch as he lurked around doing his lame YMCA moves.



Sometimes, it's the most obvious things that reveal character in the raw and penetrate the torpid public psyche. We've had nearly ten years of the Trump clown show, but rarely displayed in front of a global television audience of 1.5 billion people. The WTF photo-op embarrassment followed the red card phone call when Trump asked Infantino to reverse the penalty against star U.S. footballer Folarin Balogun. That shameful incident was the perfect Trump character tell: there is no rule he doesn't think he can bend.

Pardon Me?

We have a president who loves cheats. They are his tribe, his confreres, his soulmates. In his second term, he has pardoned them with abandon. Among those he has proudly exonerated are crypto king Changpeng Zhao (currently worth \$108 billion) whose Binance platform was an open house for money laundering by Hamas, Houthis, Russian oligarchs, take your pick. Clemency was also showered upon pornography payment mogul Jason Galanis, sentenced for swindling the Oglala Sioux Nation and other investors out of \$60 million; former reality TV stars Todd and Julie Chrisley, convicted of scamming banks for over \$30 million in fraudulent loans;; Julio Herrera Velutini, the Italian-Venezuelan billionaire banker accused of bribing Puerto Rico's then-governor, and whose daughter donated a total of \$3.5 million to MAGA Inc.; and South Florida health care fraudster Paul Walczak, who pled guilty to multi-million dollar tax fraud, and whose pardon was bestowed three weeks after his mother Elizabeth Fago attended a \$1 million-a-head Mar-a-Lago fundraiser.

Bafflingly, these travesties of justice never seem to penetrate the American consciousness with more than a shrug. MAGA devotees may still cheer, but there is a new loser mood swirling around Trump, a boredom with his bloated act. His prime time address to the nation on "election integrity" last week sank like a stone. Three networks – ABC, NBC, and CNN – declined to air it. Why should networks take his stale reruns when they have plenty of stale reruns of their own? The morning after, even the faithful *Fox & Friends* couldn't face the ennui of pretending the Chinese may be to blame for Trump's 2020 election loss and gave his speech a hard pass. According to [a poll](#) released today, 67% of registered voters disapprove of how Trump is handling his job. And as the pocketbook economy refuses to respond to his hype with the same enthusiasm as Wall Street, something new and dark is taking hold. Casualties from the Iran war, previously a bang-bang video game rampant with explosive special effects, are now fallen, relatable individuals.



U.S. Army Private Isabella Gonzales 2007-2026

The photo of the sweet-faced, 19-year-old Private Isabella Gonzales from Texas, just a year out of high school, who was killed in last Friday's Iranian strike on a U.S. military base in Jordan, hurt my heart. She died for incompetence. She was sacrificed for Trump's hubris. She was one of the four slain soldiers whose remains were returned today in the dignified transfer at Dover Air Force Base in Delaware. The mere presence of Trump, alas, deprives any sacred occasion of dignity – his theatrical salute, his fake gravitas. On Tuesday, he listed on Truth Social the number of Americans killed in Afghanistan, Iraq, Vietnam, and Korea, then wrote "Iran Military Conflict: 4 months, 18 DEAD," an obscene boast as hollow as it is misleading. Iran is continuing to best Trump and Americans know it. His bellicose act is falling flat with an enemy whose long game stretches to the next life. At a rally in Georgia Wednesday, Trump's latest preposterous spin was "we don't need the Hormuz Strait." If there was one takeaway message from Spain's

World Cup victory, it was the triumph of strategic coherence and assiduous attention to the lessons of experience, both absent from Trump's chaotic Iran adventure. Today, the president digitally bellowed at Iran that he'll "take out a bridge or a power plant for every ship attacked in the strait," the 15th such threat – and 8 blown deadlines – he's made against Tehran since last year.

T Test

At yesterday's Senate hearings to approve an additional \$87 billion in war spending, Secretary of War Pete Hegseth, who left the military as a National Guard major, blasted the "stale thinking" of his predecessor General Lloyd Austin, the only defense secretary, btw, to have held combat commands in the U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq at the one, two, three, and four star levels. "I don't know what Lloyd Austin did for four years," fulminated Hegseth. Maybe that's because restraint and absence of braggadocio were Austin's defining traits.



Hegseth goes rodent-faced at Congressional hearing where he denounced his predecessor, former Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin

In Bob Woodward's 2024 book *War*, he describes how then-Defense Secretary Austin shut down Russia without firing a single missile, after U.S. intelligence discovered Moscow was seriously considering using a tactical nuclear weapon in Ukraine. "If you did this," Austin told Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu, "all the restraints that we have been operating under in Ukraine would be reconsidered." Shoygu replied, "I don't take kindly to being threatened," to

which Austin responded, “Mr. Minister, I am the leader of the most powerful military in the history of the world. I don’t make threats.”

His powers of intimidation were not the kind that required testosterone shots.