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Today's WorldView

Trump dominated Davos. But Canada's Carney was the star.

Carney delivered an address that squarely confronted the world wrought by Trump's presidency. Davos's attendees — including Trump — took notice.

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Column by [Ishaan Tharoor](#)

DAVOS, Switzerland — **President Donald Trump came, he saw, and p conquered.** For much of this week up in the Alps, chatter in the main room the World Economic Forum fixated on what the American president would o

Trump's days of bluster over Greenland — underscored by the threat of new t and stunts like Republican lawmakers cutting into a Greenland-shaped cake speech a marquee event, with throngs of dignitaries hoping to elbow their wa British executive who managed to grab a seat later told me he wanted to be ir because seeing Trump in the wild is like a zoological experience.”

In his meandering address at the annual meeting of political and business eli climbed down from his maximalist position on Greenland, insisting his country would not take the semiautonomous Danish island by force. Later, after meetings with NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte, Trump dropped his tariff threats and said there was a framework for some kind of agreement that would satisfy his Arctic security concerns.

Then, on Thursday, the conveners in Davos gave Trump center stage again for the splashy unveiling of his “Board of Peace,” which the White House has touted as a tool to resolve global conflicts with a scope rivaling that of the United Nations. Leaders or top officials from 19 other countries stood behind Trump for the ceremony as he signed the entity's founding charter. Trump's lieutenants, including his son-in-law Jared Kushner, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and White House spokesperson Karoline Leavitt, took turns hailing Trump's achievements.

Trump left Davos soon thereafter, taking the media frenzy with him. But for all the oxygen Trump seemed to suck up high in the mountains, he may not have had the biggest impact. That distinction belongs to Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney, whose speech Tuesday was widely viewed as the defining moment of the week and earned a rare standing ovation.

Carney, who arrived in Davos after a swing through China and Qatar, delivered an address squarely confronted the world wrought by Trump's presidency. He urged his Davos counterparts to "live the truth" and "stop invoking the rules-based international order as though it still functions as advertised." He described the pieties about the postwar order that many leaders in the West often invoked as a convenient "fiction" that proved "useful" even as "the strongest would exempt themselves when convenient" — a nod to the U.S.'s missteps in the past decades, including perhaps the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

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Carney urged his counterparts to move on. “Call it what it is — a system of intensifying great-power rivalry, where the most powerful pursue their interests using economic integration as coercion,” he said. The moment, punctuated at the time by Trump’s threats over Greenland, marked a “rupture,” he said, and required other countries to diversify their interests to “hedge” against uncertainty and build new coalitions and alliances.

“Middle powers must act together, because if we’re not at the table, we’re on the menu,” he said. “ ... In a world of great-power rivalry, the countries in between have a choice: compete with each other for favor or to combine to create a third path with impact.”

The chattering class at Davos hailed the substance and clarity of Carney’s stand. “We know that it reflects a change in the global order that we’ve almost all seen coming increasingly over the past years, but no major government leader was prepared to actually say it,” Ian Bremmer, president of the Eurasia Group, a geopolitical risk consultancy, told me, adding that “people are going to be thinking back on [the speech] for quite a long time.”

“It was the only one of the leader speeches that I saw that, with weight and moral earnestness, expressed the shock which many of us are feeling here,” said Adam Tooze, an economic historian and popular podcaster who moderated a difficult conversation with Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick.

Wolfgang Ischinger, a former German diplomat and doyen of the European foreign policy establishment, concurred. He described Carney’s remarks as “absolutely admirable,” and said that “there are some people who are now saying, ‘why can’t we invite Canada to be a member of the E.U.?’”

Carney, a suave former central banker, was in some ways built to star in Davos. “He gave a brilliant speech, a memorable speech, and I also think it’s a speech that someone like Donald Trump respects,” Anthony Scaramucci, a Davos regular who was briefly Trump’s White House communications director, told me. “And my recommendation to European leaders is call Mark — he’s available for executive leadership coaching.”

Trump seemed to have been briefed on Carney's speech and its enthusiastic reception. "Canada lives because of the United States — remember that, Mark, the next time you make your statements," he said somewhat darkly from the Davos podium Wednesday. And on Thursday, in a social media post addressed to Carney, Trump added that he was rescinding Canada's invitation to the Board of Peace.

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The sense of “rupture” highlighted by Carney was shared by many others in Davos. “The one thing that has come up in many sessions I’ve been at is that we are in a new reality,” said Cornell University economist Eswar Prasad. “It’s not a cycle that is going to go back to some degree of normalcy.”

But what it augurs for international cooperation and WEF-themed crises like climate change and social inequality is more uncertain. “One reason Mark Carney’s speech was important was that it reclaimed agency for countries who want to address these challenges on the basis of shared principles,” David Miliband, president and CEO of the International Rescue Committee, a humanitarian organization, told me. “The geopolitics of the moment are not just about the power of the titans. The rise of the middle powers and their collective heft is a potential route forward for issues that will bite if they are not addressed.”

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Comfort Ero, head of the International Crisis Group, a think tank, lamented that it took a threat to the sovereignty of a European country for a major Western leader to call out “what was at stake and what the rest of the world had been going through — to recognize the unevenness, the illusion, the sense that the rules-based order was there in terms of the framework,” she said, but not in real practice.

“We’re watching history unfolding, but we can choose whether we want it to become a race to the bottom, or whether we’re going to prioritize protecting what we’ve built over the last few decades, which is the multilateral trading system,” Jumoke Oduwole, Nigeria’s minister for industry, trade and investment, told me. She said Carney’s speech made her feel hopeful. “This is one of the Davoses that has made me feel like everybody’s looking at the world and how we can come together,” she said. “Everybody’s looking at each other with fresh eyes.”

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The comments overwhelmingly criticize President Donald Trump's behavior and performance at Davos, describing it as embarrassing and damaging to the United States' reputation. Many commenters praise Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney for his eloquent and inspiring speech,... [Show more](#)