



Trump's Puffery

If you listen to American presidential announcements and accept them at face value, you would get the impression that many great things are being done. But it doesn't take much digging to discover that the grand plans are all works of fiction. And if you look really hard for an area of endeavor in which the United States is still the best in the world it turns out to be just this: suspension of disbelief.

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In January of 2025 Donald Trump proposed building a large fleet of icebreakers — around 40 to 48 of them — specifically mentioning "about 40 big icebreakers." In March 2025 he was quoted as saying that he is "in the process of ordering 48 icebreakers," to counter Russian and Chinese influence in the Arctic. To this end, some discussions were held with Finland, where this fleet would be built. But the

Finns have no competence in building such vessels. In fact, the Russians are the only ones who have the technology for such ships. The Russians are unlikely to share this technology with the United States. Nevertheless, \$8.6 billion has been allocated to this task.

Well, never mind that, then. It's water under the bridge. In May of this year, Donald Trump proposed a "Golden Dome" missile defense system. It would be, of course, the best, most futuristic and generally excellent missile defense system known to man, woman, child or small furry animal. It would be much better than the Israeli "Iron Dome" which allowed through some significant number of Iranian ballistic missiles. Israel is tiny and the US is huge. If the problem of missile defense is yet to be solved for tiny Israel, it seems premature to consider it solvable for the whole of the United States. An initial token sum of \$25 billion was earmarked for this purpose, while the eventual cost could easily be 20 times that. The system has a problem: the technology on which it would have to be based does not exist in a form accessible to the United States. The Russians are the only ones with sufficiently advanced missile shield technology, and they won't share it with the Americans.

Well, never mind that "Golden Dome", then. Moving on. Most recently, Trump announced building a fleet of "Trump class" battleships that would feature nuclear and hypersonic missiles and, of course, lasers and rail guns. To do this, the US shipbuilding industry would have to catch up with at least, say, Poland. The US currently has around 0.2% of the world's shipbuilding capacity while China, South Korea, and Japan together own over 90% of the market. America's most recent forays into building nuclear submarines and aircraft carriers have not been successful. At this stage, the US is simply no longer a nation capable of carrying out major shipbuilding initiatives. There are also some details; for instance, the US still has zero hypersonic missiles that are anything more than research projects (the elusive "Dark Eagle" is the only one that comes to mind).

What do these three projects have in common? They are all media campaigns rather than real projects. Yes, some considerable funds may be allocated and disposed of in various interesting ways (conferences, reports, 3D renders, PowerPoint presentations, catered luncheons, flights and hotel stays in exotic locations). But there will never be any icebreakers, golden domes or Trump battleships built. Producing actual, physical, real world effects is not the purpose of Trump's announcements.

I have said it before, but I believe that it bears repeating: Trump is not a results-oriented person. He doesn't care about technical or organizational details. He cares about how he looks on television, which he loves to watch. He also needs to constantly draw attention away from his failures. The Ukraine proxy war is going until the Ukraine runs out of cash and members of the Kiev regime run away. The Venezuela confrontation has gone nowhere. All of the wars Trump claims to have put out are actually still smoldering.

Trump knows that most of the voters in the US are even more shallow than he is and have the memory capacity of small tropical fish. Trump's proposals are not statements of fact; they are not even statements of intent; they are mere puffery. Puffery is exaggerated, subjective praise or hype in advertising that no reasonable person would accept as factual. It is used as a defense against charges of false advertising or fraud by arguing that it cannot be construed as a concrete, credible, provable statement of fact. Puffery is part of Trump's core competence.

He relies on puffery because it works with his target audience: American TV viewers/voters. Roughly half of the voters believe that Trump can make America great again; the rest believe that America is great as it is. Both halves appear to be quite wrong in their assessment of America's abiding greatness. The leaders of great nations do not rely on puffery; they achieve great things.

International news outlets lap up Trump's puffery. They have airtime to fill and "the President of the United States" is still an item that seems worthy of consideration for many people around the world in spite of this institution having devolved into a sinister clown show a long time ago. Trump provides some residual entertainment value for idle, bored web surfers around the world. And I have blog posts to write. Trump provides me with some amusing fodder. Enjoy the show while it lasts. In all likelihood, the next US president won't be nearly as colorful and entertaining.

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