

TRUMP'S MILITARY DOG JD VANCE

In just six weeks, JD Vance has become one of the most influential politicians in the United States, redefining the role of vice president. He has even been called Trump's successor or "Trump's war dog."

Forty-year-old US Vice President JD Vance has been making headlines lately. He's either berating European leaders at the Munich Security Conference or arguing with Zelensky, provoking him into conflict. But before the 2016 election, Vance was a staunch opponent of Trump, describing his rhetoric as "cultural heroin." Vance even said that Trump would become "American Hitler." Political scientist and author of the Telegram channel "The Devil's Leg Will Break," Sergey Zhdanov discusses Vance's remarkable transformation and how he has redefined the role of vice president.

Vance was a Democrat in his youth. His views changed after working as a war correspondent in Iraq. **Then he met Peter Thiel.**

James David Vance's childhood and adolescence are mythologized in his autobiography, which was later made into a film. He grew up in a poor family, raised by his grandparents because his mother was a drug addict. At the age of 19, Vance joined the United States Marine Corps, where he served as a war correspondent, including six months in a war zone in Iraq.

"I went to Iraq in 2005 as a young idealist passionate about spreading democracy and liberalism in less developed countries. I returned in 2006 already skeptical of the war and the ideology that underpinned it," Vance recalled in 2020.

At 23, he left the army and, using military benefits, enrolled at Ohio State University. After graduating with a degree in political science, Vance went to law school at Yale University, one of America's most prestigious universities. There, he says, he "felt out of place" until he met his future wife, Usha Chilukuri, the daughter of Indian immigrants and also a law student.

Vance considers a 2011 lecture by Silicon Valley tech millionaire Peter Thiel to be the culmination of his time at Yale. It inspired him to become a Catholic and infected him with a belief in technocapitalism. After the lecture, Thiel invited everyone

interested people to write to him if they needed career advice, and Vance did just that. A connection was formed between them, and Thiel hired Vance at one of his venture capital firms, Mythril Capital.

Shortly thereafter, Vance launched his own venture capital firm, Narya Capital. Following Thiel's lead, who named his business after Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Vance named the fund after Narya, one of the three elven rings of power that are said to help its bearer resist tyranny and despair.

Vance raised most of the foundation's funds from Peter Thiel. Having built up connections in Silicon Valley for several years, Vance was able to attract investment from two other tech billionaires: venture capitalist Marc Andreessen, who served on Facebook's board of directors with Thiel, and former Google CEO Eric Schmidt. Despite its flashy name, Narya has invested in relatively simple projects in medicine, agriculture, and artificial intelligence.

Musk, Bezos, Zuckerberg and other tech billionaires are often called "oligarch brothers."

What does this term mean and why does business readily pledge allegiance to Trump?

SILICON VALLEY'S "RIGHT TURN" EXPLORATION

Upon entering politics, Vance immediately became friends with Trump. He also created the conservative equivalent of YouTube. Despite a successful venture capitalist career, Vance wanted to go into politics. In 2022, he began preparing for the congressional elections, where he hoped to become a senator from his home state of Ohio. The campaign was sponsored by Peter Thiel, who also brought Vance to visit Donald Trump in 2021. The meeting began on a tense note, as Vance had previously spoken very negatively about Trump. "Trump is a cultural heroin. He makes some people feel better for a while. But he can't fix what's wrong with them, and one day they'll figure it out," the politician wrote.

Donald Trump and Peter Thiel. 2016.

Shannon Stapleton/Reuters/Scanpix/LETA

Everything Vance had ever said negatively about Trump was now neatly stacked on his desk. Vance was forced to defend himself. However, according to witnesses to the meeting, Vance assured Trump of his loyalty and promised to protect the former president from attacks by journalists.

JD Vance has always been active on social media, which has contributed to his popularity. Additionally, in May 2021, his venture capital fund Narya Capital invested in right-wing YouTube platform Rumble. Rumble gained popularity during the 2020 presidential election, when Republican opinion leaders moved there, claiming that YouTube was deliberately undermining their reach.

After Trump was banned from Facebook and Twitter, he began posting videos on Rumble, making the social network an even more important symbol of digital conservative resistance. In late 2021, Trump launched his own social network, Truth Social, and partnered with Rumble.

Despite some Republicans in Trump's inner circle disliking Vance, the former president nonetheless endorsed him in the election. Trump admired Vance's convincing performance in debates with other Republican senatorial candidates and how at home he looked on television with his "beautiful blue eyes" after becoming a regular on Tucker Carlson's Fox News show.

Vance won the Senate election from Ohio in November 2022. Almost immediately, Donald Trump announced his candidacy for president in 2024. The new senator's first major political move was to endorse Trump, which he published in an opinion column in The Wall Street Journal.

In the opinion column, Vance also criticized Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, who he said was trying to drag the United States into a war against Russia. He considered Trump's main achievement of his first term to be that he did not start new wars, as his predecessors did. Vance praised Trump for putting pressure on Europe, which he believes should have taken greater responsibility for its own defense.

With this article, Vance not only supported Trump, but also expressed the foreign policy line of the right-wing tech billionaires who financed his career.

Vance later became one of the main individuals responsible for implementing these ideas.

"I don't see Trump as the architect of the new order, but he could be the final nail in the coffin of the old one." US foreign policy scholar Stephen Wertheim on why Trump wants trade wars and why he is at war with Ukraine.

A year ago, Vance had an almost constant negative rating. And yet Trump chose him as his vice president.

On July 13, during a rally, Trump was assassinated. Immediately afterward, Elon Musk first endorsed Trump, and two days later, Trump chose JD Vance, who was also supported by Musk, as his vice presidential running mate.

So, the vice presidential election was won by the new Republican tech elite, led by right-wing Silicon Valley figures Peter Thiel and Elon Musk, their friend and business partner David Sachs, the current White House AI and cryptocurrency czar, and President Trump's son Donald Jr. Their candidate was JD Vance.

The old media establishment, led by Republican media mogul Rupert Murdoch, who owns Fox News and the Wall Street Journal, lost. They strongly opposed Vance and insisted that Marco Rubio (later Secretary of State) or Doug Burgum (now Secretary of the Interior) become vice president.

During the presidential campaign, Vance played a key role in swaying Silicon Valley to Trump's favor, including elites who had previously voted exclusively for Democratic candidates and considered Trump's first election a disaster. Specifically, Vance helped David Sachs, whom he had previously called "one of the most trusted people in politics," host a dinner for tech elites to support Trump and raise \$15 million for the campaign.

Throughout almost the entire race, from the moment he was announced as the vice presidential nominee, Vance's approval ratings remained negative. At the start of the race, his approval rating was -3% (meaning 26% of voters liked Vance and 29% disliked him), and it had fallen even further to -12% a month before the election. He was

called the worst vice presidential pick in decades, and even Trump supporters considered replacing him with another candidate at the last minute.

Vance has been repeatedly reminded of his 2021 remarks about America being run by "childless cat ladies" and accused of misogyny and disrespect for people without children. He has been accused of inconsistency and lack of principles for his sudden shift in stance on Trump.

The vice presidential debate helped boost his approval ratings; Vance faced off against Democrat and Minnesota Governor Tim Walz. During the debate, Vance proved to be a calm and articulate speaker, successfully highlighting the weaknesses in his opponent's rhetoric. Vance also made several funny faces that later became the basis for positive memes about him. The politician's popularity ratings initially rose positively, but soon fell sharply.

JD VANCE AND TIM WALZ IN A DEBATE.

OCTOBER 2024

Al Drago/Bloomberg/Getty Images

While Vance was a compelling speaker and held his own in debates, a few videos (one of him interacting with coffee shop workers, for example) were enough to show his clumsiness in everyday life to cement his status as a "freak." This "freak" was successfully exploited by the Democrats. Vance has no power to directly influence decision-making, but he does so anyway (and enjoys memes about himself).

After Trump's victory in the November election and until his inauguration on January 20, 2025, Vance disappeared from the public eye. Technology oligarch Elon Musk took over Trump's ranks: he settled next to the president-elect and participated in the selection of candidates for key positions in the new administration.

Rumors began to circulate that Vance was just a figurehead with no significant role in the incoming administration, and that Musk was the real number one (maybe even number one). However, the billionaire soon took over

position in the Department of Government Efficiency, and Vice President Vance is gaining more influence in the new administration with each passing week.

Vance is responsible for the president's relations with the Senate, where Republicans currently hold a majority. Most notably, he played a key role in the Senate confirmation process when Trump nominated the top positions in the new administration: Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and Health Secretary Robert Kennedy Jr.

"He's always available," says Senator Thomas Tillis, whom Vance convinced to vote for Defense Secretary Hegseth. "If I text him, he responds quickly, maybe even immediately." Fellow Senator Markwayne Mullin says that when Vance comes to the Senate, "he doesn't act like the vice president. He acts like he's among friends — and we really like that."

Vance also plays a key role in the relationship between the US government and the tech industry, and is responsible for the sale of the Chinese social media platform TikTok to American owners. He is the one who must find buyers or TikTok will be banned in the US.

TikTok will soon be banned in the US. Unless (as rumored) it is bought by Elon Musk (yes, here he is again), users are fleeing en masse to other Chinese social networks in the meantime.

But Vance's main statement over the past six weeks has been his statements on US foreign policy. Vance's first appearance in Europe was at the Artificial Intelligence Action Summit in Paris. The US vice president's speech began with a critique of Europe's approach to technology. Vance said Europeans should follow Trump's example and view advanced technologies like artificial intelligence "with optimism, not anxiety."

He also stated that **Europe should stop "tightening the screws" on American tech corporations and warned against using artificial intelligence for "censorship and mind control of consumers."** Addressing a room full of French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, the politician demanded that European lawmakers stop "blocking adult men and women from accessing opinions that the government considers disinformation."

Three days later, Vance gave an even more aggressive speech at the Munich Security Conference. He stated that Europe is in danger because it is too far removed from the values it shares with America. He accused European governments of suppressing freedom of speech and political dissent, persecuting religious believers, and forcibly imposing values on citizens.

European officials who met with Vance said he was less politicized and more professional in person. But on stage at the Munich Security Conference, he delivered a harsh critique that Europeans were not prepared for. The 40-year-old vice president, less than a month into his term, had become a harbinger of change in the post-World War II international order in an hour.

Two weeks after the Munich speech, Vance found himself back at the epicenter of international politics, embroiled in a public dispute between President Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. In a departure from the norms of neutral vice presidential behavior, Vance berated and criticized another country's president on camera.

Vance later went on to make sweeping statements, saying that Ukraine's security guarantees were worthless if they came from "some random country that hasn't been at war for 30 or 40 years," referring to Britain and France. Vance later denied having meant those countries, but no one else mentioned anything like that at the time he said it.

After these attacks, journalists began calling Vance Trump's "war dog." The vice president himself seems to be enjoying the wave of memes about his appearance that have flooded social media following his attacks on the media, even posting his own memes.

Yes, Vance does not have a direct influence on politics, but he actively uses social networks. And not only by issuing statements, like, for example, Trump, but also by actively participating in debates and discussions. Of course, he chooses the issues that suit him best.

Elon Musk, along with other oligarchs, is already naming Vance as the next president. When asked by a reporter if Trump sees JD Vance as his successor and the Republican presidential nominee in 2028, Trump replied: "No, but he's very talented. We have a lot of talented people here. He's doing a fantastic job so far. But it's too early to judge; we're just getting started."

Donald Trump is most likely to delay choosing a political successor until the last minute, in part to avoid damaging relations with other young members of his team, such as Secretary of State Rubio.

Whether Trump will choose him remains unknown, but it is already clear that Vance has changed the concept of the US vice president. In the past, vice presidents were typically overshadowed by their superiors and generally had little influence on decision-making (with rare exceptions such as Dick Cheney, the eminence grise of the George W. Bush administration).

"My wise country has devised for me the most insignificant office ever devised or imagined," wrote John Adams, George Washington's vice president, in 1793. JD Vance would hardly agree.*

"WE ARE PUTIN'S USEFUL IDIOTS."

Nate Vance, 47, the cousin of US Vice President JD Vance, served in the Ukrainian armed forces for two and a half years. He fought in the Da Vinci Wolves Battalion, according to the French newspaper Le Figaro, which published a lengthy article about Nate Vance on March 9.

Nate Vance and JD Vance share the same grandparents. Nate's father, James, is the brother of JD's mother, Beverly. Nate Vance served in the Marine Corps from the ages of 18 to 22. From 2001 to 2022, he lived in San Antonio, Texas, where he worked for an oil company. As Le Figaro notes, Nate Vance describes himself on social media as "a man with strong Republican beliefs who loves hunting and shooting sports."

Nate Vance went to Ukraine "out of curiosity and adventure." He participated in the Battle of Bakhmut.

Nate Vance told reporters that he arrived in Ukraine in March 2022, three weeks after the start of a full-scale Russian invasion. He said that when the war began, he realized that this conflict was different from all the others. "I wanted to go and see. Out of curiosity. And also for the adventure. It's hard to admit, but it's true," Nate Vance said. He said he came to Lviv to help the Ukrainians, for example with logistics or medical issues. "I saw history being written before my eyes, and I wanted to be a part of it," he said.

During his visit, Nate Vance joined a group of volunteers on the front lines. He then returned to the United States for a few weeks, before returning to Ukraine in June 2022. This time, he traveled to Donbas, where active fighting was taking place, and joined the Da Vinci Wolves battalion.

Nate Vance was much older than the other members of the battalion, one of his colleagues, Dima (whose last name was not mentioned), told Le Figaro. "On the very first day we went to the shooting range. He took a simple Kalashnikov without a [optical] sight and stood 800 meters from the target. Everyone laughed at him. When he hit the metal target five times in a row, the laughter stopped," the source said. Another colleague of Vance's recalled that when one of the officers listed what the platoon needed for future operations, the Da Vinci Wolves commander replied: "All I need is Nate and his Kalashnikov." According to Nate Vance, he was assigned to the Honor Company, which was made up of Ukrainian nationalists who had been fighting since 2014. Among his colleagues were lawyers, teachers and engineers. "They dropped everything to defend their country," says Vance. Few people in his unit spoke English, and he struggled at first until he met a nuclear engineer with the call sign "Alf," who spoke fluent English.

Speaking of the war in Ukraine, Vance says: "I have to admit that it was completely unlike my missions with the Marines in Europe." Vance fought in battles near Kupiansk, Bakhmut, Avdiivka and Pokrovsk. In an interview with Le Figaro, he admitted to killing people in the war. "You can't deny that. But there's not much to say. You keep your thoughts separate. You don't think about it," he said.

The current commander of the Da Vinci Wolves, Sergei Filimonov, who also led the Honor Company, called Nate Vance "a great fighter with amazing composure." He said that during the war he thought more than once that he would die with Vance. "Fifteen times we had to die. Fifteen times we managed to escape," Filimonov said. For example, in 2023, he and Vance spent several hours in the trenches near Bakhmut, under constant Russian artillery fire. "Then we said goodbye," he recalls.

Nate Vance left the battlefield and left Ukraine in January 2025, just days before his cousin was inaugurated as vice president of the United States. "It became difficult to stay. I couldn't risk getting caught," he said.

Nate condemned JD Vance for his disagreements with Zelensky. He also said that while he was still in Ukraine, he tried to tell his brother about the war, but was unable to reach him.

When Nate Vance saw his cousin arguing with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in the Oval Office of the White House in late February, he was disappointed, Le Figaro reports. "JD is a good, smart guy. When he criticized [American] aid to Ukraine, I thought he was doing it because he needed to please voters, and that it was part of a political game. But what they did to Zelensky was unfair," Nate Vance said.

"Just because I'm from your family doesn't mean I'm going to stand by and watch you kill my comrades," Nate added. He was also angered by JD Vance citing some of the "reports" during his argument with Zelensky, even though he could have spoken to his cousin who was on the front lines.

"I was able to tell him the truth without pretense, without personal interest. He never tried to find out more," says Nate Vance. He says he tried to contact JD Vance several times while in Ukraine. "It's not easy to contact a senator from Ukraine. But I left messages in his office. I never got a response," he said.

"Donald Trump and my cousin obviously think they can defeat Vladimir Putin. They are wrong. The Russians will not forget our support for Ukraine. We are Vladimir Putin's useful idiots," Vance said.

After returning to the United States from Ukraine, Nate Vance, a lifelong Republican, faced misunderstandings from people he had always agreed with. Even his mother, Donna, wrote on Facebook that Zelensky was a "pretentious little shit."

Nate Vance is currently driving across the western United States, looking for a publisher to publish his war memoir. "I hope to continue to defend Ukraine in a different way, because they need it," he says.

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THERE WILL BE MORE.