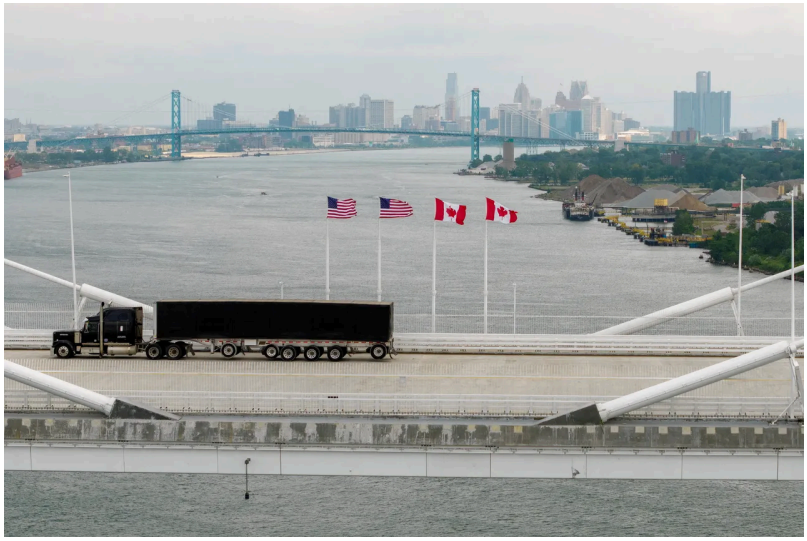
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REPORT

Windsor and Detroit have always had a close bond, but since Trump, Canadians no longer want to cross the river.



The Gordie Howe International Bridge connects Windsor in Canada with Detroit in the US. The bridge was opened in July of this year. — PHOTO CARLOS OSORIO/REUTERS

US-Canada President Trump picked a fight with neighboring Canada again this week, calling it "one of the worst countries in the world." In the Canadian border city of Windsor, which is deeply intertwined economically and culturally with Detroit, residents are fed up with his aggression. "You ask yourself: how can this happen?"



Frank Kuin from Windsor, Ontario

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Standing by a towering flagpole with an enormous Canadian flag, Stephanie Groves gazes at the view from a promenade along the Detroit River in her hometown of Windsor. Across the river, the skyscrapers of Detroit glitter in the late summer sun. You can see cars driving through the American metropolis, and sirens are audible.

Groves points to the colossal Renaissance Center, the most recognizable complex in the Detroit skyline. She worked there for 24 years before her retirement, she says. She commuted daily through the tunnel connecting downtown Windsor with Detroit. She also enjoyed shopping across the border or taking advantage of the entertainment Detroit has to offer, from theaters and museums to sporting events and concerts.

But nowadays she rarely crosses over, Groves says. "Still for family visits, but not for shopping or other things." That has to do with Donald Trump, she says. "He doesn't treat Canada respectfully. It is insulting and idiotic. That is why many Canadians don't want to go there."

Groves articulates a widely shared sentiment among Canadians: since the US president started a trade war against their country and says it must become a '51st state' of the US, millions of Canadians have been avoiding American products and shunning travel destinations in the US.

“Canadians are pissed off,” says Chris Edwards, a historian from Windsor who grew up in the shadow of Detroit. With his partner Elaine Weeks, also a historian, he wrote * *A River Runs Between Us** , a richly illustrated book about the close bond between the two cities—one of the most intertwined relationships between two places on the 8,891-kilometer-long US-Canada border. “Windsor and Detroit are like one big family,” he says. “But now it is as if someone has married into the family who is causing a lot of chaos and actually wants to divorce everyone.”

Windsor lies south of Detroit





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Two bridges and a tunnel connect the two cities.



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Windsor (400,000 inhabitants) is like a suburb of the Detroit metropolis (4.5 million people). The Canadian city is sometimes even called 'South Detroit', a term from the classic '*Don't Stop Believin'*' by rock band Journey. On the Canadian side, however, faith in the close relationship is

wavering, Edwards observes. "People in Windsor are incredibly angry. They are trying to strike back against what is going on."

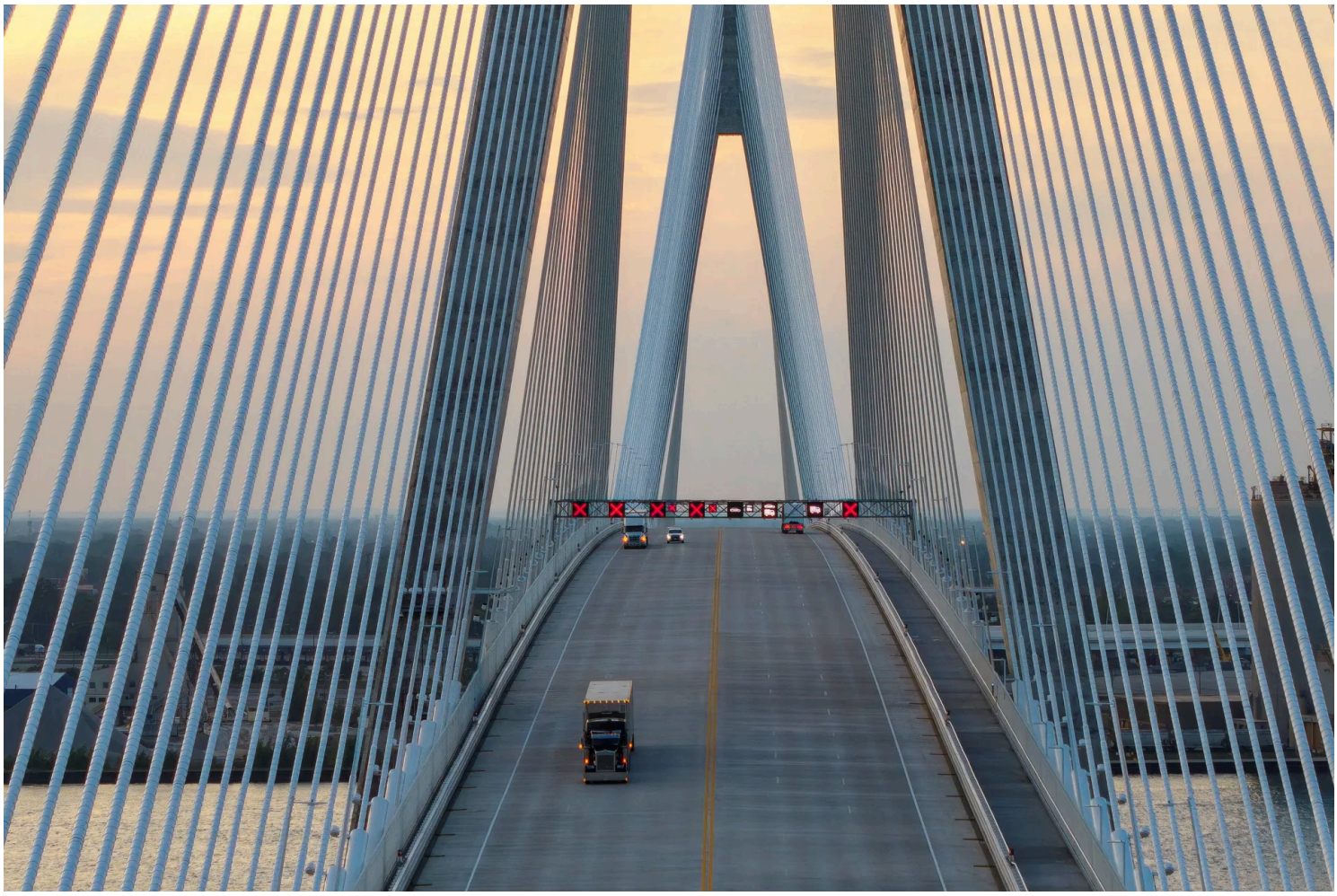
Economic coercion

What is happening is unprecedented in modern relations between neighbors. After decades of free trade and far-reaching economic integration, Trump has imposed tariffs on crucial Canadian exports such as cars, timber, steel, and aluminum – an economic blow to the country, because trade with the US is the cornerstone of the economy: approximately 70 percent of exports go to the US, worth $409 billion last year.

Because Canada dared to impose retaliatory tariffs, Trump went a step further this summer with tariffs of 50 percent on another $20 billion in exports. Those tariffs took effect in August, after Canada declined a proposed trade deal that, according to Prime Minister Mark Carney, went against Canadian interests. According to Carney, the Trump administration is confronting Canada with economic coercion – which he warned against in January during his speech at the World Economic Forum in Davos.

Trump's premise is that Canada has no choice but to obey. "They need us, we don't need them," Trump states. That is debatable: besides being a major supplier of raw materials, energy, and industrial goods, Canada is one of the largest buyers of American products, valued at $333 billion in 2025. Nevertheless, it is certain that the economic consequences of the trade war for Canada outweigh this.

Adding to this, Trump and members of his administration hurl insults at Canada and act as if it has no right to exist as an independent country. While Trump has warm words for Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un, and received President Xi Jinping in Washington last week as if China were a loyal ally, he calls Canada “one of the worst countries in the world” and Canadians “ *nasty people* ” who are “ripping off” the US.



The construction of the Gordie Howe International Bridge cost 4.5 billion dollars and was paid for by Canada. — PHOTO CARLOS OSORIO/REUTERS

Santa's Wonderland

"It's just unbelievable," says Elaine Weeks in Walkerville, a trendy neighborhood in Windsor. The proximity of the US has felt familiar her whole life, she explains. She recalls her excitement as a child when she went to 'Santa's Wonderland' at the large Hudson department store in Detroit, sitting on Santa's lap for a moment. Later, she went shopping for new clothes in Detroit when the school year started. "It was normal to cross the street and see the big city across from us."

But because of Trump, America's proximity suddenly feels like a threat, Weeks says. After his swearing-in for his second term, she worried that drones would cross the river. "It's only a short distance, although fortunately Detroit is a Democratic city. But we see what is happening in Ukraine," she says. "You ask yourself: how can this happen?" Weeks hasn't been to the US since February of last year. "Some friends do go; that is their choice. I would like to go myself, but I'm not. It is a matter of principle."

Many Canadians view Trump's behavior as fraternal betrayal. The neighboring countries fought together in multiple wars, most recently in Afghanistan, where 158 Canadian soldiers died in the name of the 'war on terrorism'. On September 11, 2001, Canada allowed hundreds of planes bound for the US to land. Thousands of stranded travelers were taken in, mostly in Canadian homes. The two countries share major sports leagues such as the NHL (ice hockey), and in popular culture, Canadian stars blend seamlessly with American ones—so much so that their origins are sometimes unclear.

In few places is that intertwining more noticeable than in Windsor, which has a symbiotic relationship with Detroit. In the summer, Americans and Canadians jointly admire fireworks over the Detroit River there. Sports teams such as the Detroit Tigers (baseball), Lions (American football), and Red Wings (ice hockey) count residents of Windsor as home supporters. And the Detroit Marathon runs across the nearly hundred-year-old Ambassador Bridge between the two cities, and back through the tunnel.

Car capital

The most important economic link is the automotive industry. Together with Detroit, Windsor forms the heart of the North American automotive sector. "The car manufacturing process is seamless; there is no border," says Louis Jahn, director of Jahn Engineering, a supplier to the automotive sector that has been active for 65 years, at the company located on an industrial estate outside Windsor. Parts, semi-finished products, and finished products cross the border up to seven or eight times, he explains.

By cutting off Canadian suppliers, the Trump administration wants to bring production to the US – but that won't work, Jahn argues. "There is frustration on both sides of the border over the barriers being erected, which prevent us from cooperating as we always have."

Crucial trade artery

The Ambassador Bridge is a symbol of intensive trade. The suspension bridge over the Detroit River, dating back to 1929, is the busiest border crossing between the two countries.

Approximately 140 billion dollars worth of goods cross the bridge annually. An incessant stream *of eighteen-wheelers* steadily ascends the four-lane connection.

To facilitate the ever-growing trade, a brand-new bridge has been built in recent years: the Gordie Howe International Bridge, a dazzling suspension bridge west of the Ambassador. Almost everything about the bridge, which opened in July, is symbolic of the bonds of friendship. It is named after a legendary Canadian ice hockey player who played for the Detroit Red Wings for 25 years and won the Stanley Cup four times with that team in the 1950s. His motto ' *elbows up* ,' a stance of defense against aggression from the opponent, became a battle cry in Canada last year – and an informal slogan for Carney's election campaign.

"It is a magnificent bridge," says Keith Brown, a cyclist, halfway along the bike and pedestrian path, where flags are waving and the border is marked. "It is a symbol of how great it is to have Canadians as neighbors," says Brown, who grew up in Detroit. When he was 19, he went drinking with friends in Canada: in the US, you are not allowed to do that until you are 21. "It has always been nice to know that Canada is there."

That Trump is picking a fight with Canada "makes no sense," Brown believes. "Canadians are notorious for their friendliness. I am terribly sorry that we have caused such a stain."

Toll revenues

The stain of that also struck the monumental bridge this year, after a construction period of eight years. Under an agreement from 2012, Canada paid the bill of over 4.5 billion dollars. The intention is for it to recoup that investment through toll collection. Subsequently, those revenues would be shared with Michigan.

In February, Trump torpedoed that agreement: he wanted a share of the toll revenue for the US – or he would block the opening of the bridge. According to media reports, corruption lay behind the intervention , seen by many as blackmail: the owner of the private Ambassador Bridge had allegedly donated $1 million to a campaign fund for Trump. This billionaire, Matthew Moroun, did not want any competition and called the White House.

In July, the Canadian government accepted new agreements regarding the Gordie Howe Bridge. For the next fifteen years, Canada will share half of the net toll revenues with the US. The revision was the last of several concessions Carney made to Trump since taking office, before he declined the trade deal in August. A joint celebratory opening ceremony for the new bridge did not take place.



A truck drives from Canada to the United States across the Gordie Howe International Bridge. — PHOTO JEFF KOWALSKY/ AFP

"That wasn't fair," says Heather Glazer, a cyclist from Detroit, on the bridge. "I wasn't happy with the tricks the US pulled." She is cycling with a group of friends towards Windsor. While Canadians are normally known for saying 'sorry' often, according to Glazer, the roles are now reversed. "When I go to Canada, I constantly apologize."

Her cycling partner Joe Elliott wants to spend more money in Canada, he says. "The US and Canada have always been friends, and I think the day will come when we are close friends again. This is a small hurdle, we will get over it."

In Windsor, not everyone is sure about that. “When the situation returns to somewhat normal—if that hopefully happens—it will still be difficult for me to go back to the US,” says Elaine Weeks. “I know that not every American feels the same way as the MAGA supporters, but still, I think: how could you have let this happen?”

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