

Happy

New Year!

January

Cedar Chips

Best things to do in the snow!

- Build a snowman
- Snowball fight!
- Build a snow fort
- Make snow ice cream.
- Go for a walk.

Worst things about snow

- Dirty snow after a few days
- Slipping on snow (and ice)
- Yellow snow



Let's go, Panthers!

Cedar Chips Staff

Patrick L.
Melanie T.
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Special guest:
Mr. Rzepka

Adviser
Ms. Blakemore

FCPS gets Four Snow Days to start 2025!

2025 brought us a fun start to the year. After several years of only a scattered snow day or two, our dreams were fulfilled as we got an extra four days added on to our winter break and a few two hour delays to put the cherry on top!

How did you spend this bonus time? Did you burrow under the covers with a good book? Scroll TikTok as the minutes to the shutdown crept closer, or get outside and enjoy the snow?

Most students today were too young or not alive to remember the great Snowmageddon of 2010. That year, Fairfax recorded their highest snowfall ever on February 6 of 25.5 inches! More snow fell on February 7 to accumulate a grand total of 33.5 inches, which is the all-time record for Fairfax County.

FCPS was out for about a week and a half that year, and we had to make up days later by adding 30" to every school day after Spring Break until the end of the year. These days, we have 10 snow days built into the calendar, although the two hour delays do count hours toward that. Basically, we have about five freebies left this year!

Bring on the snow!

Yearbooks are now on sale!

\$35 for 72 pages of full color fun!

Order your copy today.

Cash and checks made out to Cedar Lane are also accepted.

A New Dawn in Syria (Completed)

By Patrick L.

Disclaimer

I already wrote the beginning of this article in December, but due to various reasons I was not able to complete it in time. This article is a completed version of this article with more up-to-date information.

Intro

On 8 December, 2024, the city of Damascus, capital of Syria and one of the oldest cities in the world, was taken by Syrian opposition forces as the Baathist government fell and President Bashar Al-Assad fled the city.

Factions

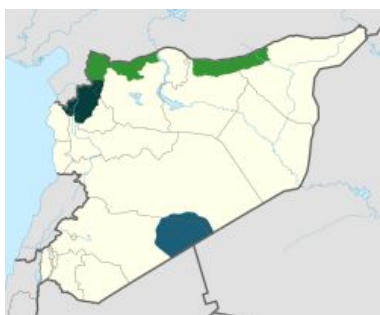
-- Baathists/Syrian Arab Army (Syrian Arab Republic)

Since March of 1963, Syria has been under the rule of the Syrian branch of the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party. The Ba'ath Party followed the ideology of Baathism, an Arab nationalist and Vanguard Socialist ideology promoting the creation of a unified Arab state under a revolutionary vanguard party that was initially formulated by Syrian intellectuals Michel Aflaq, Zaki al-Arsuzi, and Salah al-Din al-Bitar. Baathism has also historically been strong in Iraq, where a more conservative-nationalist variant was the ruling ideology until the toppling of Saddam Hussein's government in 2003. Since Hafez al-Assad took power in 1970, the government of Syria has been considered Neo-Ba'athist due to its strong deviation from Aflaq, Arsuzi, and Bitar's ideas. Assad transformed Syria into a personalistic dictatorship, defending his regime with authoritarian methods. When Hafez died in 2000, he was succeeded by his son Bashar al-Assad, who continued his father's authoritarian policies and moved the country into the spheres of influence of Russia and Khomeinist Iran.



-- Syrian opposition (various)

The Syrian opposition is led by various factions, the most prominent being the Syrian National Coalition and Tahrir al-Sham. The Syrian National Coalition (SNC) is a union of various democratic, secular, and moderate-Islamist groups, while Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (commonly shortened to Tahrir al-Sham or HTS) is a Sunni Islamist and formerly Salafi jihadist militant group advocating for the establishment of an Islamic state (a state based on Islamic law, not to be confused with *the* Islamic State). Both groups are backed by Turkey.

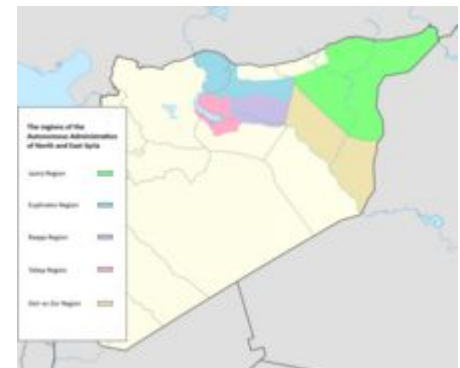


■ Syrian Salvation Government (Tahrir al-Sham)
■ Interim Government (National Army)
■ al-Tanf (Revolutionary Commando Army)

Syria, cont'd

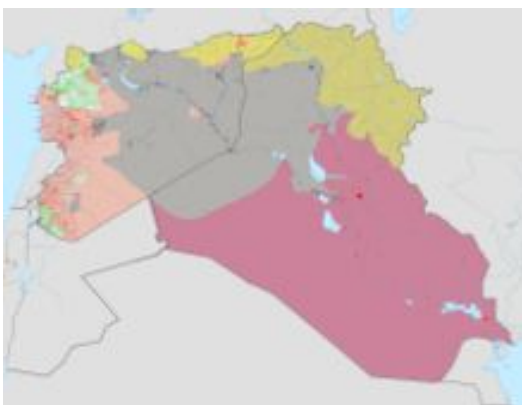
-- Syrian Democratic Forces (Northeast Syria/Rojava)

Northeastern Syria is home to various minorities, most notably a large Kurdish population, with smaller populations of Assyrians, Armenians, and Yazidis, among others. Since Syria gained independence, these groups have been subjected to forced Arabization by successive Arab nationalist governments, including the Baathist Government, which banned non-Arabic languages from public schools, compromising these groups' education. When the Syrian Civil War began in 2011, the Baathist government withdrew the military from the northeast to focus on the rebels in other parts of the country. Following this, in 2012, the People's Protection Units (YPG), a libertarian socialist Kurdish militant group, seized control of the towns of Kobani, Amuda, and Afrin, and later occupied other nearby towns. The Democratic Union Party (PYD), the political wing of the YPG, helped establish three autonomous cantons known as the Afrin, Jazira, and Kobani (now Euphrates) regions. These cantons ratified a constitution in January 2016, establishing the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), commonly known as Rojava (the Kurdish name for the region, lit. 'The West'). Under this administration, the YPG allied with other local militant groups to form the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).



-- Islamic State (ISIS)

The Islamic State (commonly known as ISIS, an abbreviation of *Islamic State of Iraq and Syria*, or by its Arabic acronym Daesh) is a transnational Salafi jihadist terrorist organization that originated in Iraqi Islamist groups in 1999, but didn't gain global prominence until 2014. When Syrian authority over the desert collapsed as the SAA moved to counter the opposition forces and SDF, ISIS militants took control over various communities in the Syrian desert, most notably the city of Deir ez-Zor, one of Syria's ten largest cities. ISIS's self-proclaimed Caliphate ruled over 45,000 km² of land and had a population of roughly 10 million at its largest extent in 2017. In this territory, ISIS persecuted minorities, heavily restricted women's rights, enshrined terror into law, and conducted a genocide of the Yazidi population resulting in 5,000 Yazidis dead. ISIS's control over this area was not permanent, however, as various operations conducted by Iraq, Syria, and Rojava left ISIS with only a few smaller holdouts by 2025.

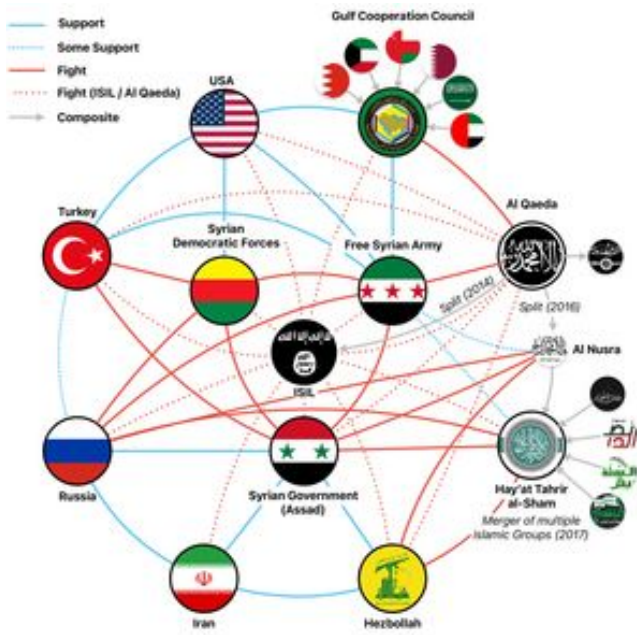


ISIS territory in gray

Syria, cont'd

Quick Overview of the Syrian Civil War

The origins of the Syrian Civil War can be found in the Arab Spring, a series of large-scale anti-government protests across the Arab world. In 2011, protests across Syria erupted against the Assadist regime and in support of democracy and civil rights. After a harsh crackdown of these protests by the Assad regime (during a wider phenomenon known as the Arab Winter), opposition forces began to form armed groups such as the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and conducted an insurgency against the Assad government. The UN attempted to negotiate a ceasefire between government and opposition forces in early 2012, but the ceasefire collapsed and by June 2012 the conflict escalated into civil war.

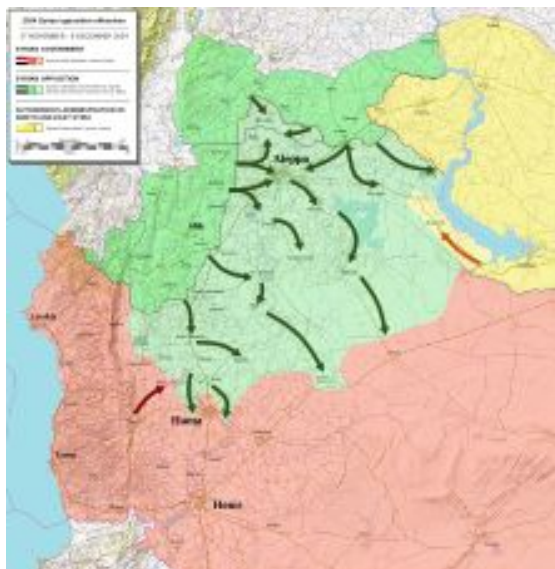
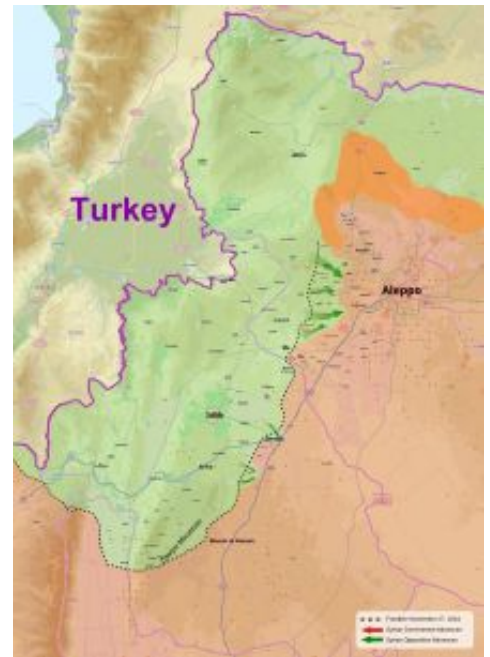


Between 2012 and 2020, the Syrian government, opposition forces, the SDF, and ISIS fought in a four-sided war. Outside of ISIS, each side received foreign support; The Assad regime was backed by Iran and Russia, opposition forces were backed by Turkey (who also invaded parts of northern Syria in response to establishment to the creation of the AANES) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and the SDF was backed by a US-led coalition of NATO and allied forces (though mainly against ISIS and not the Syrian government or opposition). By 2018, the Assad government, with Russian/Iranian support, was able to push back rebel forces to the Idlib Region, and Assadist, SDF, US, and opposition offensives territorially defeated ISIS by 2017. Since the civil war began, the Assadist government has used chemical weapons in more than 300 attacks, receiving widespread condemnation from the international community. In March 2020, following clashes between Opposition and Turkish forces and the Assad government, a ceasefire was negotiated by Turkey and Russia that largely froze the conflict until 2024, though there were various clashes between belligerents from 2022 onwards.



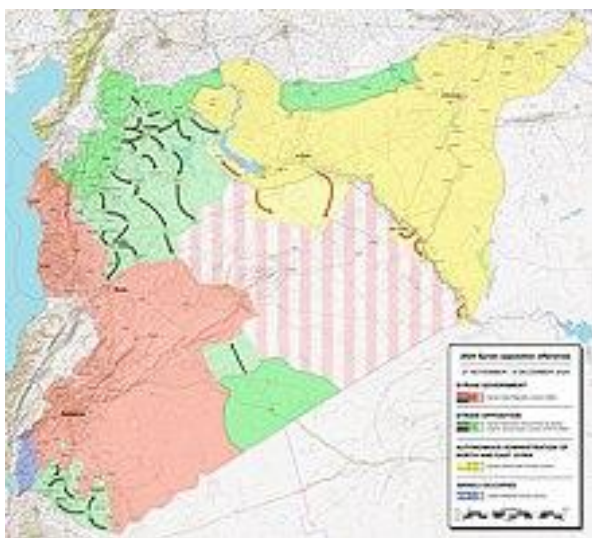
Opposition Offensives

After the 2020 ceasefire, large-scale fighting ceased between pro- and anti-government forces, though anti-government forces began preparing for a resumption of hostilities. Beginning in late 2022, HTS forces launched sniper and infiltration attacks against Assadist forces in the Aleppo region, which has been occupied by the Baathists since 2016. In response, Syrian and Russian forces shelled the rebel-controlled Idlib region. HTS prepared for up to a year for an offensive against Assadist forces in Northwest Syria. In October 2024, HTS and Syrian government forces mobilized for conflict in the Aleppo countryside, and this was followed by Syrian shelling of an opposition-controlled town in November, which caused 16 civilian casualties. On 27 November 2024, HTS announced the beginning of a military operation named “Deterrence of Aggression” against government forces in the Aleppo Region.



Within 10 hours of the beginning of the offensive, HTS captured 20 towns from government forces. On 29 November, HTS captured Aleppo, the second most populous city in Syria, as government forces retreated. Throughout the following days, Assadist control over Northwest Syria essentially collapsed. The Syrian government wasn't HTS's only target though, as on 30 November, they launched Operation 'Dawn of Freedom' against SDF forces in the northwest. As December began, HTS forces occupied much of the Hama governorate. Government and Russian forces defended the city of Hama itself, though it was ultimately unsuccessful as HTS captured the city on 5 December. After taking Hama, HTS began advancing towards Damascus, the capital city of Syria and one of the oldest cities in the world.

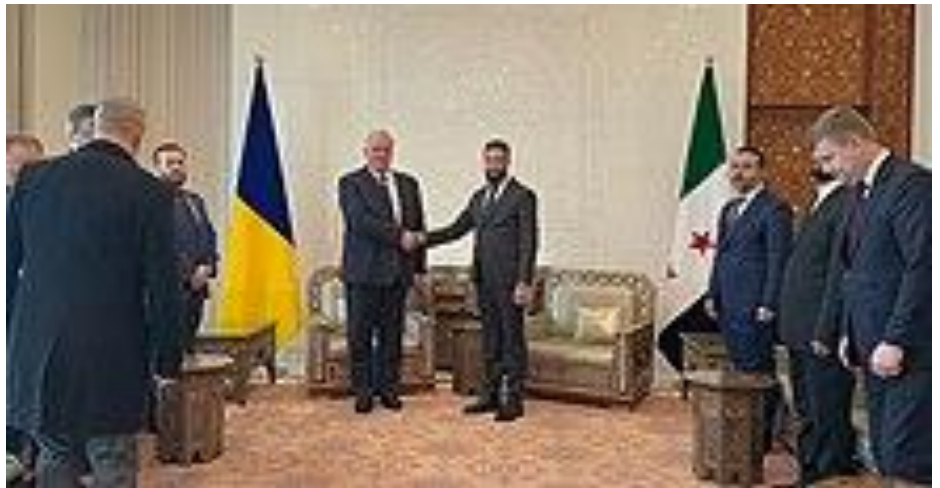
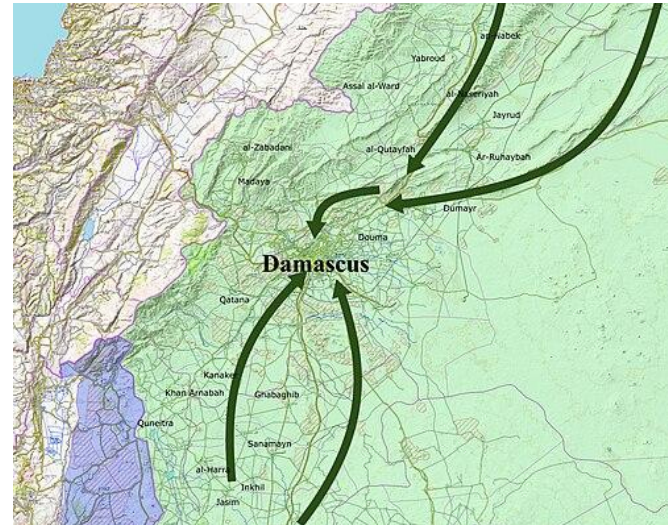
This advance prompted the Syrian government to withdraw forces from the east, allowing the SDF to capture Deir ez-Zor, the seventh largest city in Syria and the largest of Eastern Syria, by the end of 6 December. HTS and government forces clashed in the Homs governorate, with HTS ultimately coming out victorious as Iran began withdrawing its forces from Syria on 6 December. After the fall of Homs, HTS forces and the newly created Southern Operations Room of the opposition forces advanced into the Rif Dimashq governorate, where Damascus is located, and besieged the city on 7 December.



Syria, cont'd

Opposition forces surrounded Damascus, and government forces retreated from the surroundings of Damascus in order to reinforce the city. While the situation rapidly deteriorated, President Bashar al-Assad reportedly continued to work as normal, and did not try to organize a last stand or inspire the defenders.

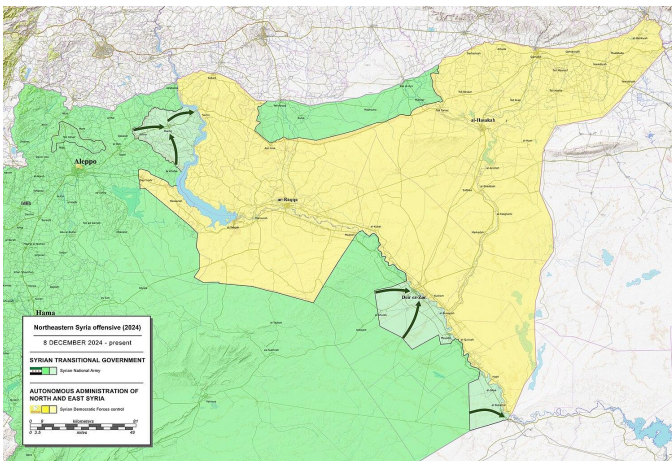
As day turned to night, Assad finally realized that the situation was unsalvageable, and left for the airport in order to flee to Russia. Prime Minister Mohammad Ghazi al-Jalali refused to leave, and instead stayed in the city to work on the transition of power to the opposition, who captured the city on 8 December.



The New Dawn

As the Assad regime fell, HTS formed a transitional government made up of ministers from the former HTS-led Syrian Salvation Government. Al-Jalali initially remained in power as prime minister, but was replaced by HTS leader Mohammed al-Bashir on 10 December. The new government implemented sweeping reforms to the Syrian government, paving the way for future democratization and economic liberalization.

The transitional government also restored relations with many Western-aligned governments whom the Assad government did not work with, including Ukraine, who cut ties with Syria after the Assad regime recognized the Russian-backed separatists in 2022. As for education, the transitional government has removed references to the Assad era from the curriculum, though they also removed references to evolution, the Big Bang, notable women in the country's history, and the pre-Islamic inhabitants of Syria from the curriculum.



January News Recap

By Patrick L.

1 Jan - On Public Domain Day 2025, works such as Popeye the Sailor and Tintin enter the public domain in the United States.

1 Jan - A man kills 14 people and injures 35 others by vehicle-ramming and shooting before being shot dead. The suspect had an Islamic State flag in his truck, per the FBI.

1 Jan - A Tesla Cybertruck filled with fireworks and gas canisters explodes outside Trump International Hotel Las Vegas in what the FBI is investigating as a possible terrorist attack.

1 Jan - Liechtenstein legalizes same-sex marriage.

5 Jan - The National Weather Service issues winter storm alerts to nearly 70 million people across the Great Plains and East Coast of the United States as a storm complex brings snow, freezing rain, and in some places, blizzard conditions.

6 Jan - Germany reports a significant increase in far-right crime and *Volksverhetzung* ('Incitement to hatred') amid the rise of the openly Neo-Nazi Alternative for Germany (AfD).

6 Jan - The results of the 2024 US Presidential election are certified by Vice President Kamala Harris.

7 Jan - An exceptionally strong Santa Ana wind event with hurricane-force winds ignites multiple wildfires in southern California, beginning the 2025 California wildfires.

8 January - More than 100,000 people are evacuated from the Pacific Palisades and Hollywood in Greater Los Angeles amid approaching wildfires.

9 Jan - A fourth wildfire ignites in the West Hills neighborhood of Los Angeles, triggering additional evacuation warnings for the residents of Greater LA. This fire in particular was contained on 12 Jan.

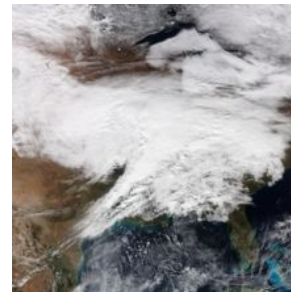
13 Jan - AccuWeather places the estimated economic loss of the wildfires at \$250-275 billion, which would make it the 2nd or 3rd costliest natural disaster in history (depending on if you account for inflation).

18 Jan - The 2025 Israel-Hamas ceasefire is ratified by the Israeli government and goes into effect the next day.

19 Jan - TikTok suspends its services in the United States in accordance with Protecting Americans from Foreign Adversary Controlled Applications Act, but is restored later that day. The app is still unavailable on the iOS and Android stores, however.

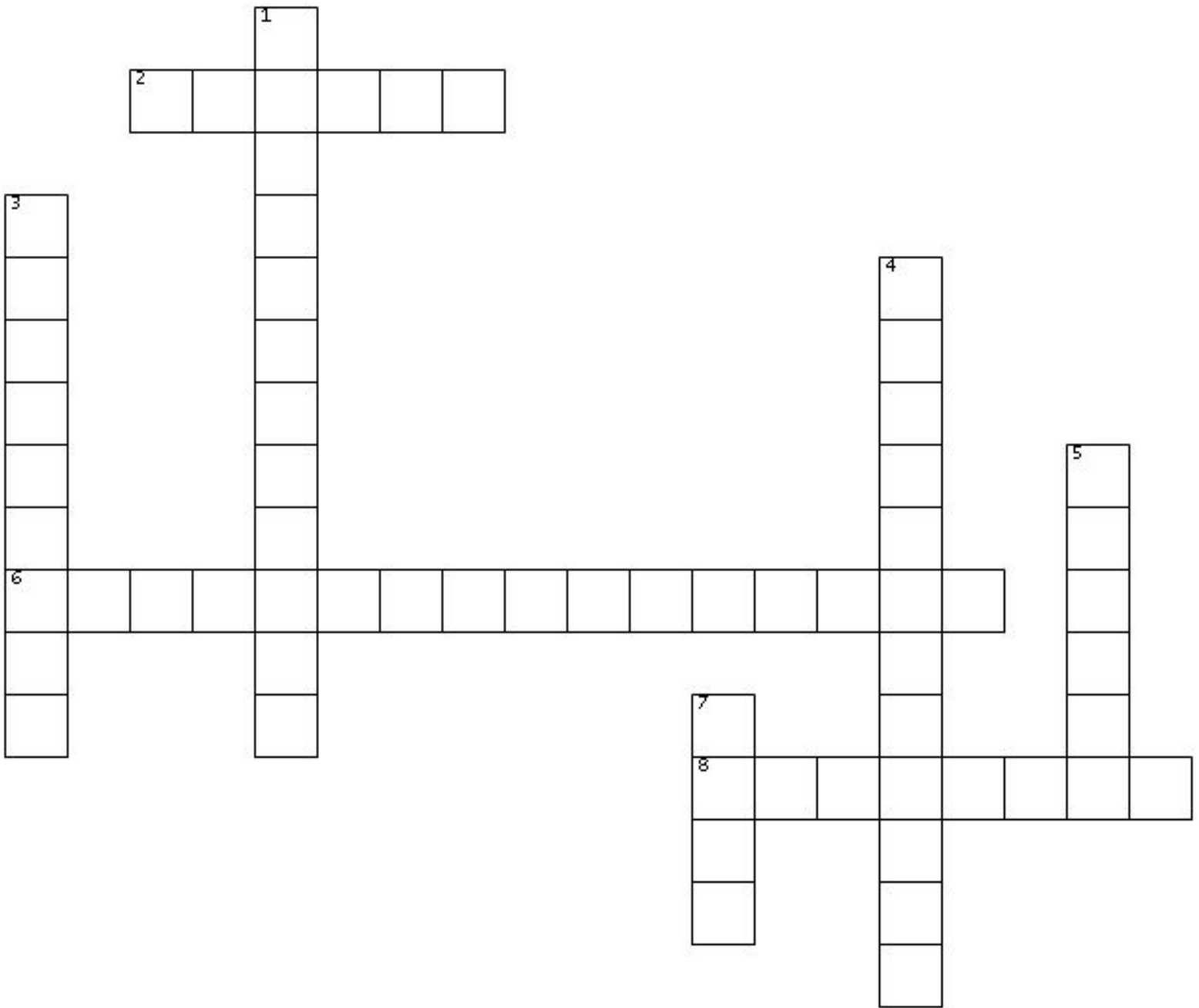
20 Jan - Donald Trump and JD Vance are inaugurated as the 47th President and 50th Vice President of the USA respectively. Over the following days, Trump issues many executive orders in accord with his Authoritarian Conservative Populist agenda.

21 Jan - The California wildfires expand as new brushfires ignite in San Diego County.



*I'd be safe and warm
If I was in LA
California Dreamin'
On such a winter's day...*

January Events Crossword



ACROSS

- 2. Pacifist anti-colonial activist who was assassinated on January 30, which is known in India as 'Martyrs Day'
- 6. African American activist celebrated on the 3rd monday of January
- 8. First day of the month

DOWN

- 1. Happens on Jan 20 every 4 years
- 3. Christian holiday celebrated by Eastern communities in January and Western communities in December
- 4. Beginning of calendars used in East Asia, among other places
- 5. Current season
- 7. a common weather occurrence this month