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EXPLAINER

# Why Trump's attacks and threats to Iran's Kharg Island are a big deal

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UPDATED APRIL 7, 2026, 12:01 PM ET



Saige Miller

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Iranian tanker docking at the platform of the oil facility in the Kharg Island, on the shore of the Persian Gulf. The island is responsible for 90% of Iran's oil exports, making it a lifeline for its economy.

Atta Kenare/AFP via Getty Images

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The U.S. has targeted Kharg Island, Iran's oil export hub on the Persian Gulf, more than once during the ongoing war with Iran. While President Trump said the oil

assets on the island remain untouched, he has also threatened that that could change.

The latest attacks come hours ahead of a deadline that Trump set for Iran to open the Strait of Hormuz and allow shipping tankers to move through. He has threatened, "A whole civilization will die tonight" if the 8 p.m. ET deadline is not met. "I don't want that to happen, but it probably will," Trump wrote on his social media platform.

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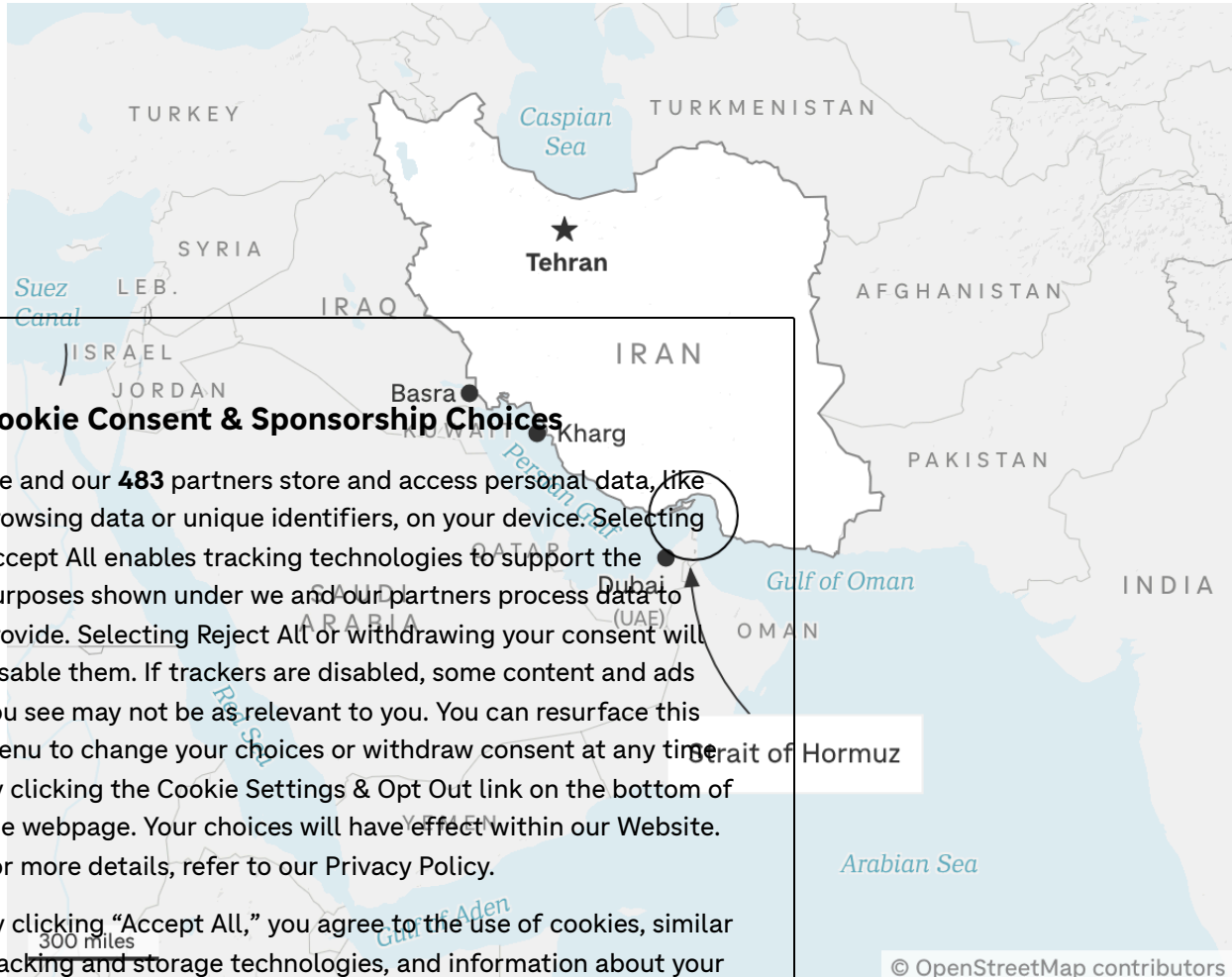
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On Kharg Island, located at the north end of the Persian Gulf about 15 miles from Iran's coast, damage to the oil infrastructure would cause major disruption to Iran's economy and serve as another blow to the world's oil supply at a time when gas prices are already spiking.

Here's what you need to know about the island as the war continues.

Showing a low-resolution version of the map. Make sure your browser supports WebGL to see the full version.



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Six weeks into the war, the U.S. has struck more military targets on the island, a U.S. official who is not authorized to speak publicly on the matter confirmed to NPR on April 7. The official, who spoke under the condition of anonymity, said the attacks were "restrikes" on targets the U.S. has previously hit. So far, the U.S. hasn't taken any military action against oil infrastructure on the island.

The U.S. initially hit the island on March 13. Trump announced in a post on Truth Social that the U.S. Central Command completed "one of the most powerful bombing raids in History of the Middle East" when it "totally obliterated" military targets on Iran's Kharg Island. Even though he says the U.S. military left the oil

assets alone, he threatened to strike those, too, if Iran continued to block the safe passage of ships and large oil tankers through the Strait of Hormuz.

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**"We can do that on five minutes' notice. It'll be over. But for purposes of someday rebuilding that country, I guess we did the right thing, but it may not stay that way." Trump told reporters on March 16. "Just one simple word, and the pipes will be gone too, but it'll take a long time to rebuild that."**

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The strait is a critical oil transport zone. In 2024, an average of 20 million barrels a day traveled through the strait, equaling about 20% of global petroleum liquids consumption.

Iran has threatened to strike any ship that travels through the strait that isn't carrying Iranian oil, with some limited exceptions. The Trump administration has offered to escort ships through the strait and has encouraged other NATO allies to join the effort. So far, other countries have declined and the U.S. hasn't escorted any ships through the strait since the war began.

## The importance of Kharg Island

Kharg Island is Iran's economic lifeline. Iran is one of the world's largest oil producers and oil and gas exports is how the Middle Eastern country makes the majority of its revenue. Before the war, the small island was responsible for 90% of Iran's oil exports.

It's a small but mighty island, as the waters that surround it are deep enough for massive oil tankers to dock at, making it a perfect place to ship oil off from. Much of the Persian Gulf coastline is too shallow to support large tankers.

If the oil infrastructure on the island were to be wiped out, Executive Vice President of the Quincy Institute Trita Parsi said it would escalate the war and have catastrophic impacts on the global oil supply chain.

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"Almost all 90% of Iran's oil is going to be taken off the market. That's going to have an impact on an already tense market," Parsi said. "On top of that, if the Iranians retaliate, — which there is absolutely no reason to believe that they wouldn't — then we're talking about the fact that almost no oil will be transiting through the Persian Gulf for some time, and that will have a devastating impact on oil prices."

But Parsi noted that it wouldn't be the first time Iran has dealt with devastating oil infrastructure attacks on Kharg Island. Iran's regularly hit the island during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s. The Iranians persevered by finding workarounds to continue exporting oil. While strikes from the U.S. would gravely impact Iran's economy, the likely retaliation strikes would ensure that Iran wouldn't suffer alone.

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Parsi added Asian countries are currently "far more vulnerable" to the oil impacts of Iranian retaliation. China is the largest buyer of Iranian oil. But the Iranian attacks, Parsi said, would likely target all the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, which includes Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, and their "economic capabilities and all the depots and all the terminals" that handle oil.

GCC Secretary General Jaseem Mohamed Alabdulw has already condemned attacks on member countries, including one on March 16 that he said killed a civilian in Abu Dhabi. He said Iran's actions are a "flagrant violation of the principles of good neighborhood and international law and norms."

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The GCC holds more than 32% of the world's proven crude oil reserves. In the event Iran bombs their oil infrastructure and oil transit routes, Parsi said it results in even higher prices at the gas pump and beyond in the U.S.

"We're talking about oil prices going above \$150 [a barrel], which may mean gas prices getting up to \$5 or \$6 a gallon," he said. "That will then have other trickle effects because oil is not just being produced to turn into gasoline. They're also using it for fertilizers, which is very important for agriculture. So suddenly food prices will dramatically increase as well."

Bloomberg reports that Goldman Sachs projects if the war stretches on five or six more weeks it will lead to a 14% contraction of the GDP of Qatar and some of the other GCC countries. That, Parsi said, would have a domino effect with the global economy, adding the only available impact comparison is the state of the global economy during the COVID-19 pandemic.

# Trump has had his eye on the island for years

Decades before Trump was president, he thought about what he would do to Kharg Island if he was ever commander in chief.

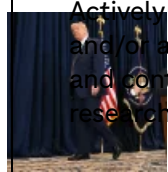
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"I'd be harsh on Iran, he told *The Guardian* in 1988. "They've been beating us psychologically, making us look [like] a bunch of fools. One bullet shot at one of our men or ships and I'd do a number on Kharg Island. I'd go in and take it."

Now, in 2026, Trump is faced with the opportunity. But when asked if he would go in and take Kharg Island during a March 18 interview with Brian Kilmeade on Fox News Radio, Trump deflected. He told the host, "Who would ask a question like that? And what fool would answer it, OK?"

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On Tuesday, during a meeting with the prime minister of Ireland, Trump acknowledged his comments made in 1988, highlighting that he talked about how Iran was "a big threat to this country, to this world of ours."

"I was right. In fact, uh, I said you have to attack Kharg – Kharg Island. You have to attack them, years ago when they were acting up," Trump said.

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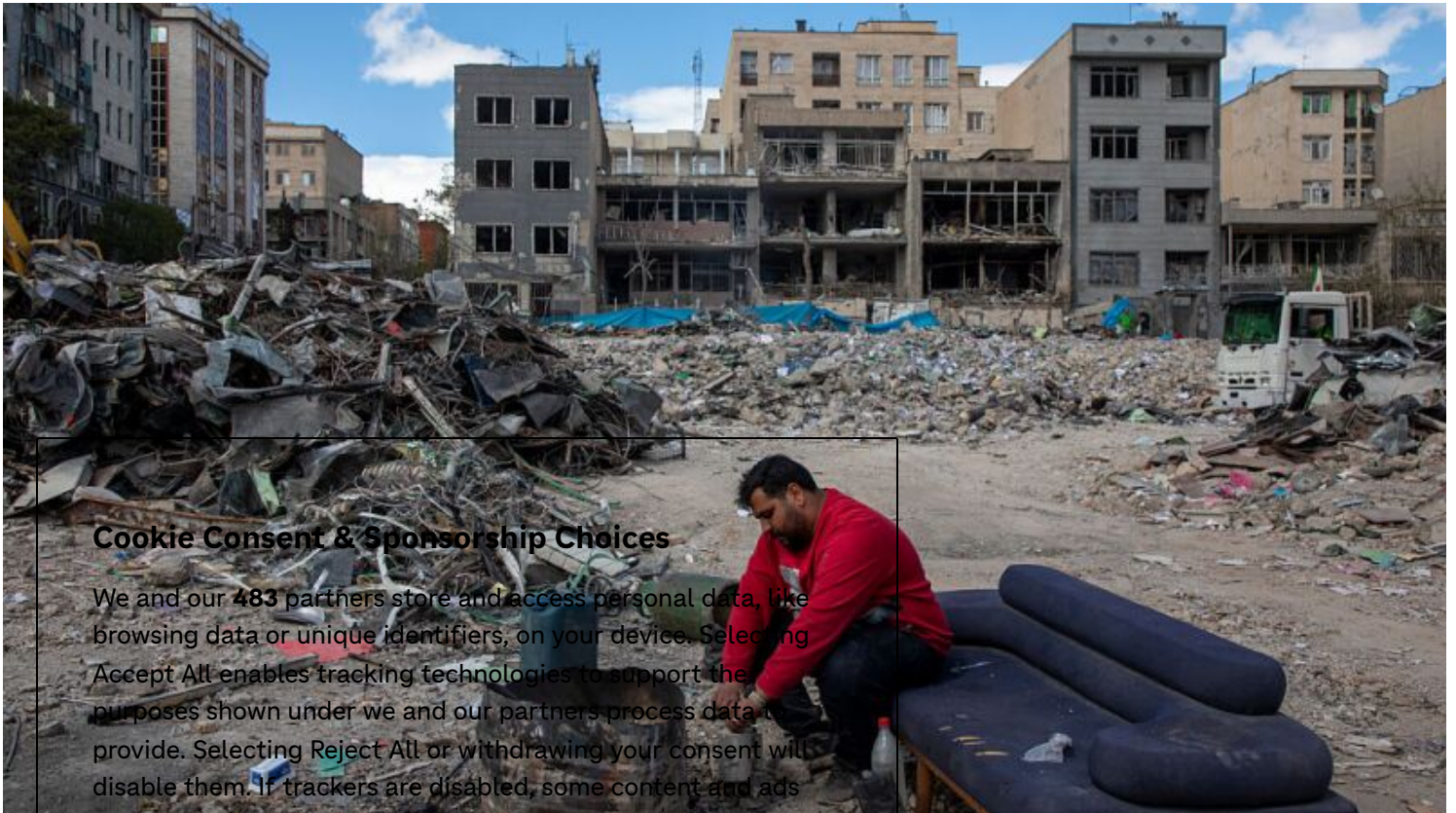
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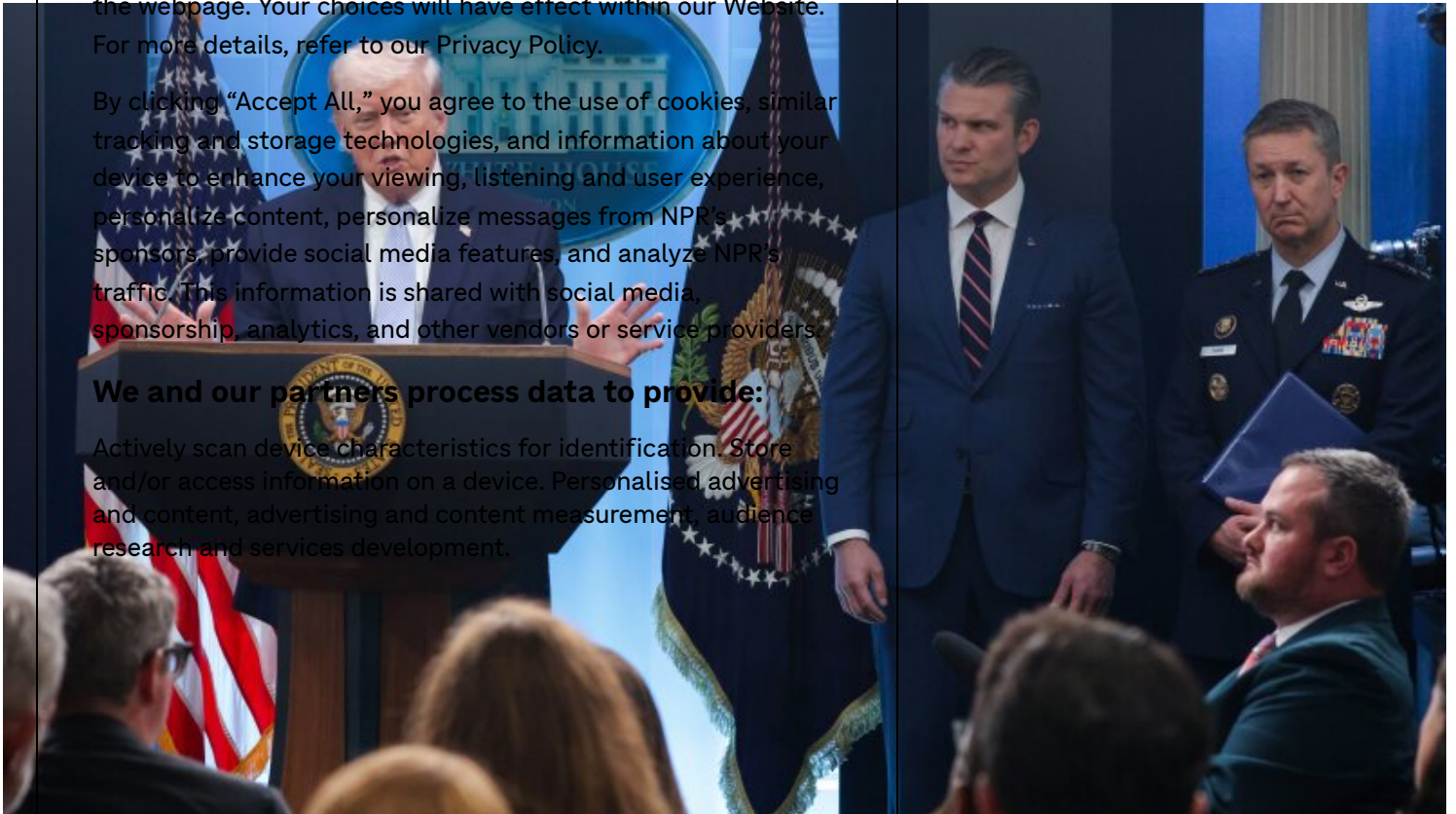
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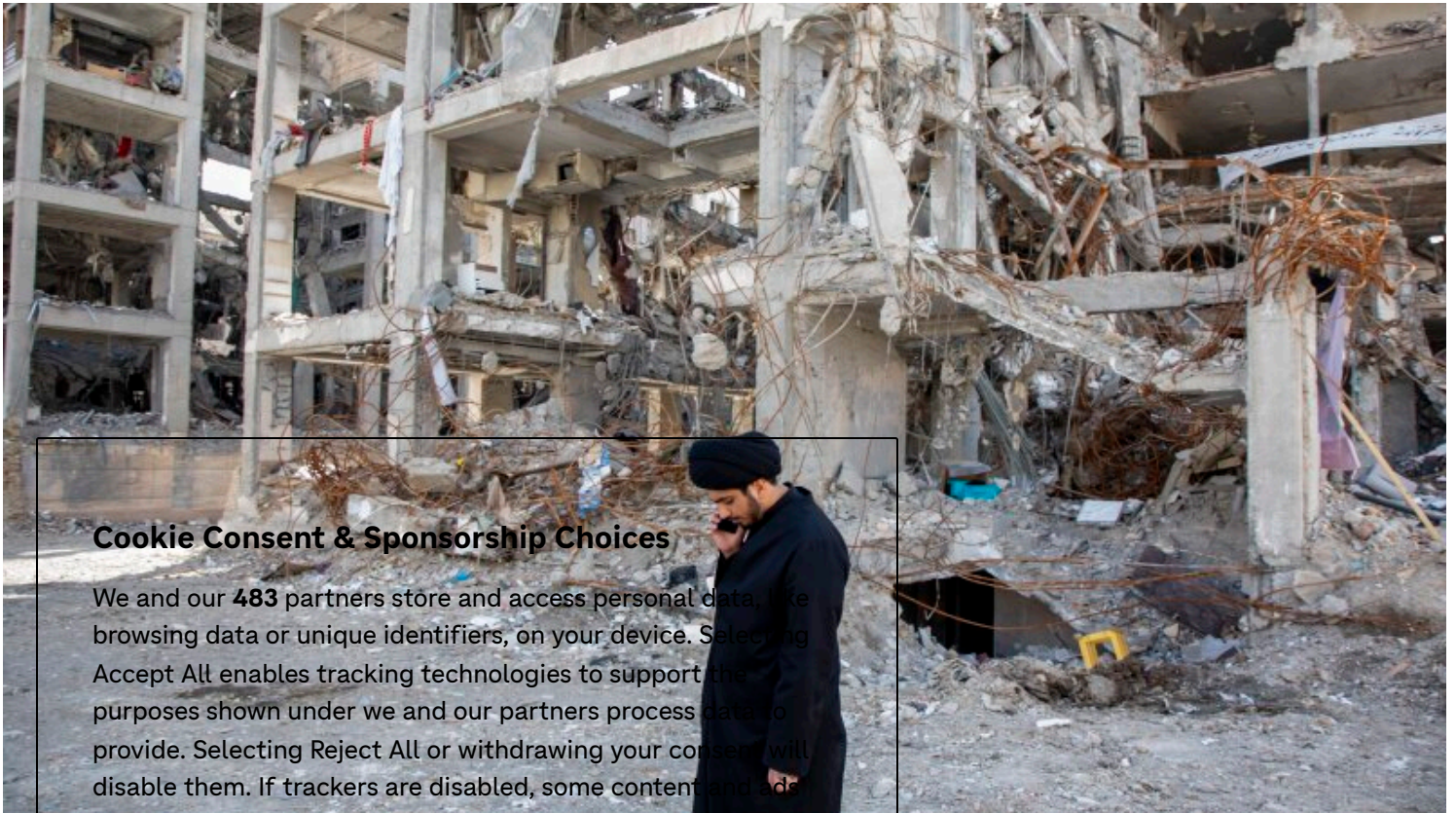
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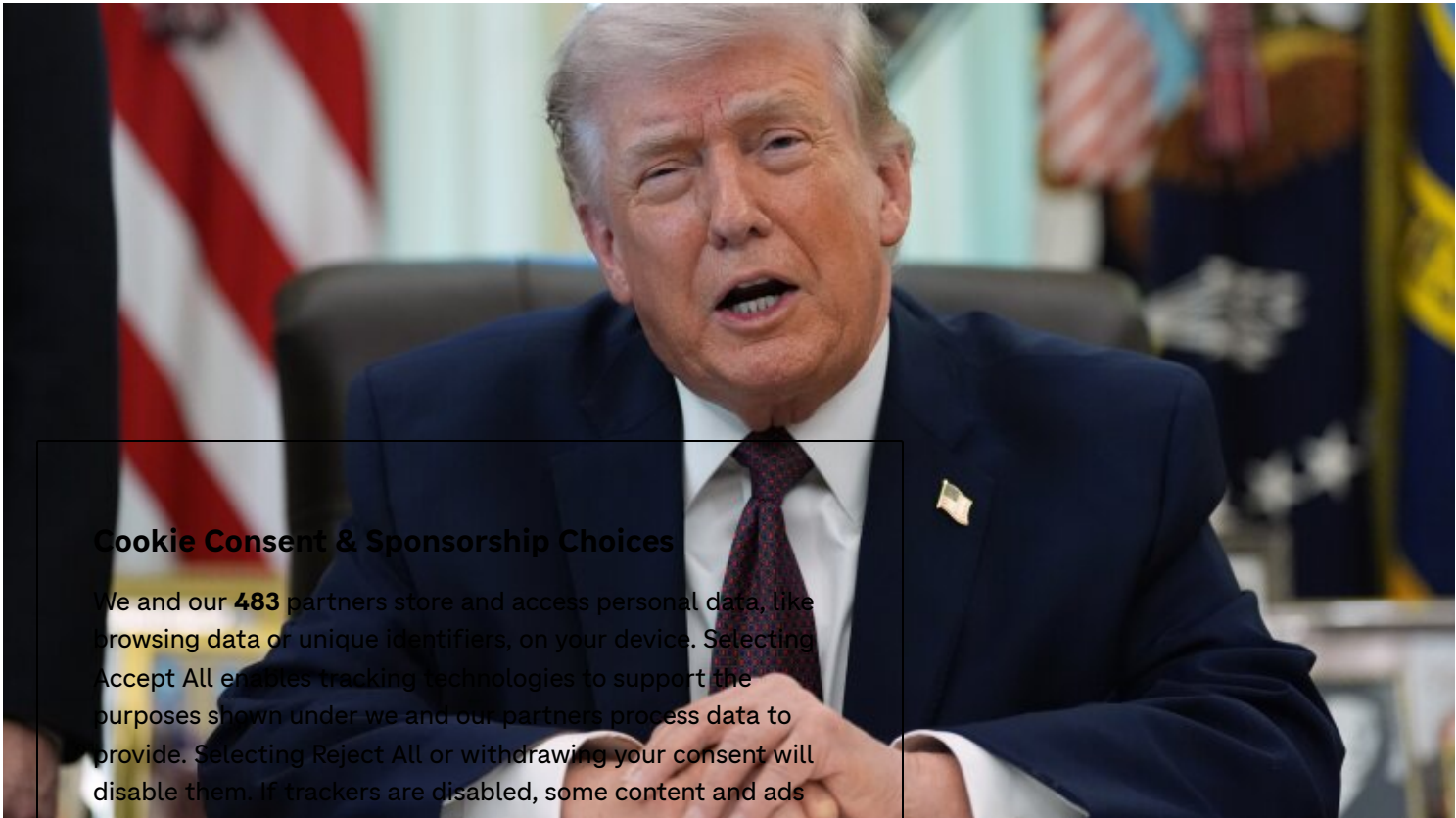
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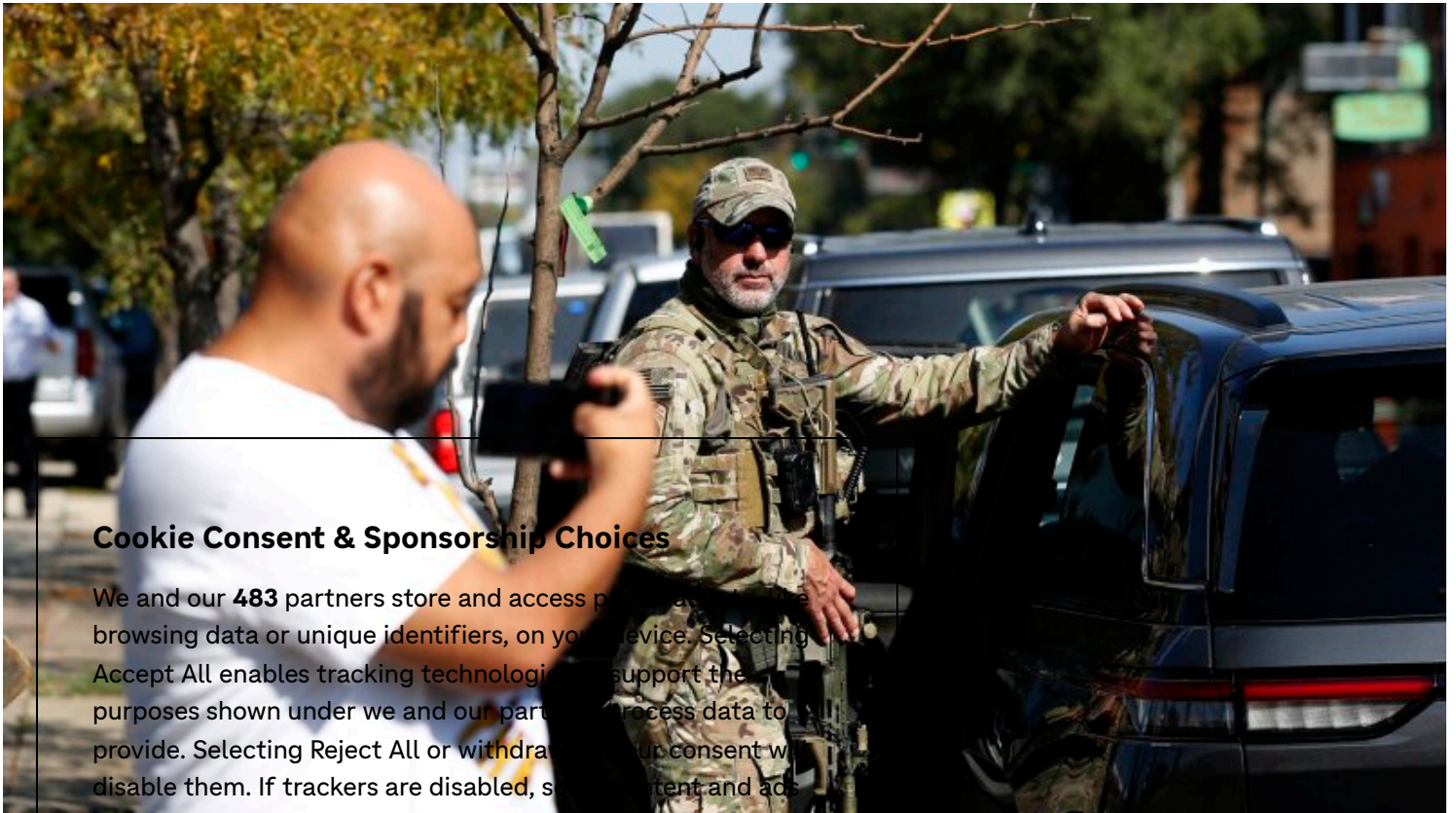
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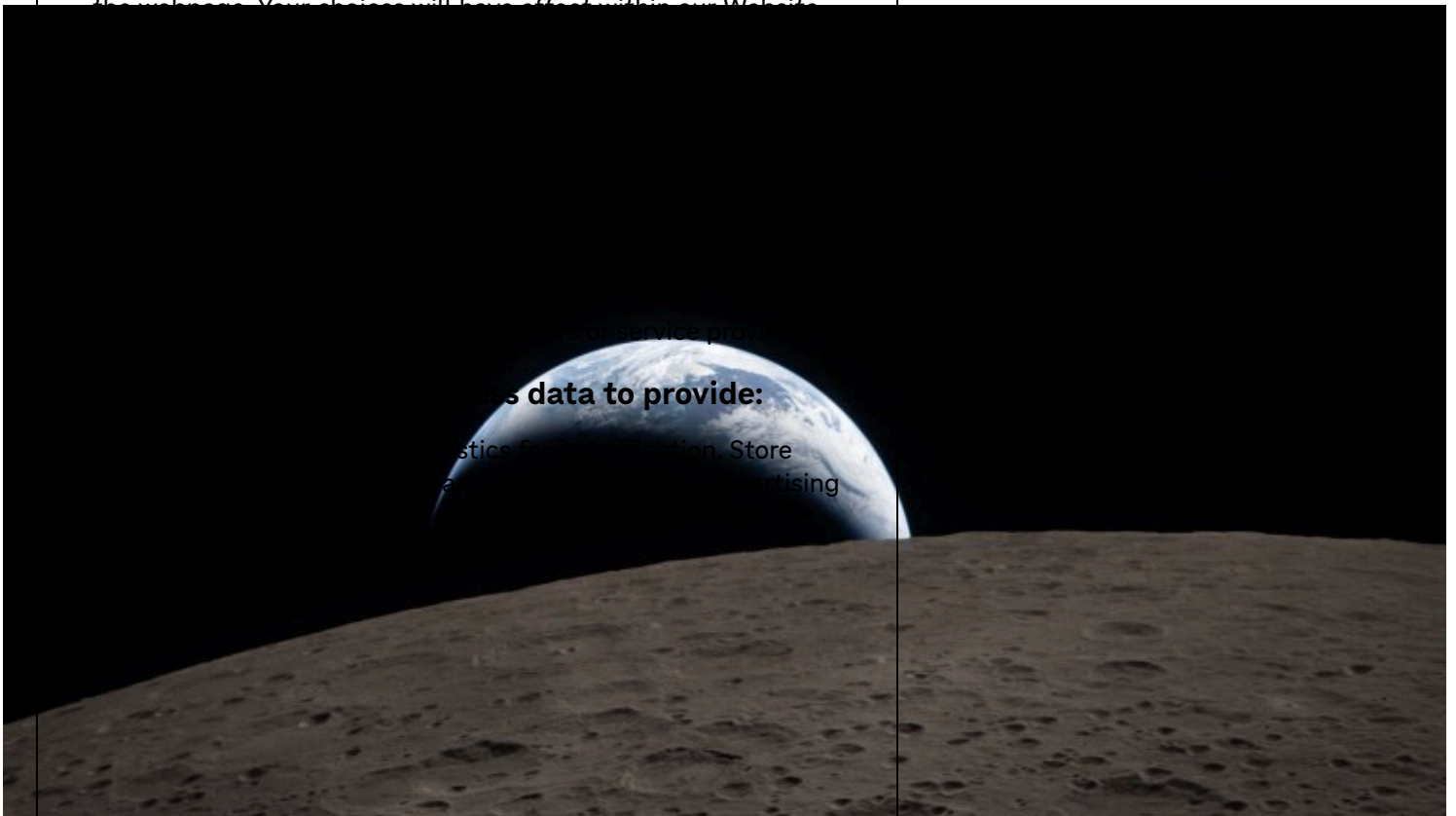


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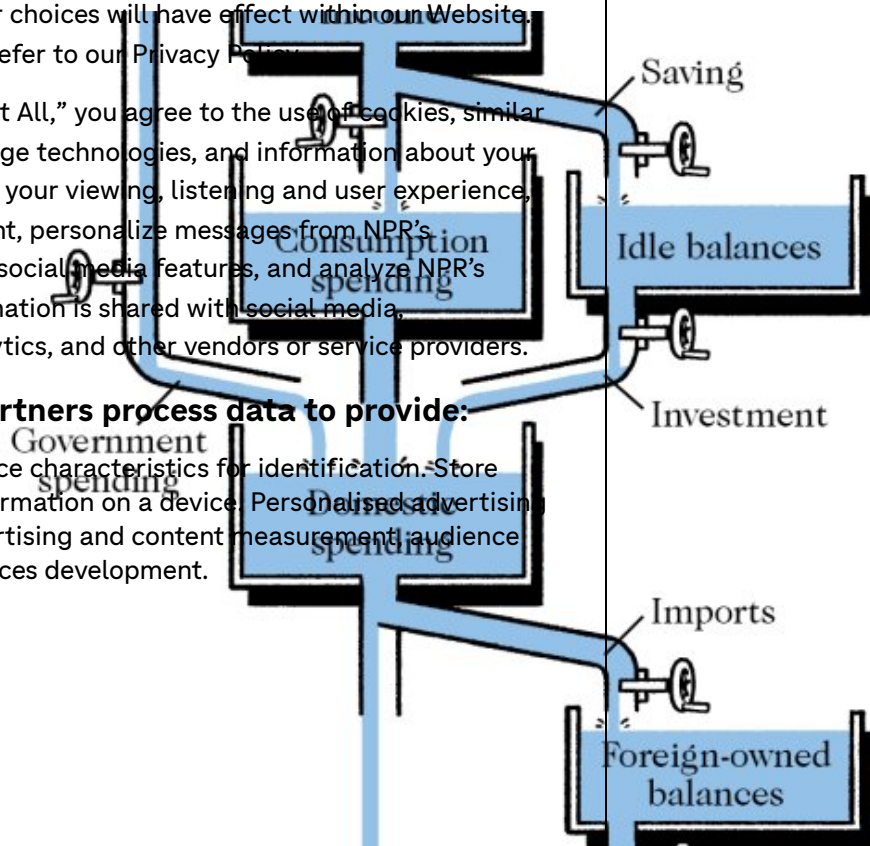
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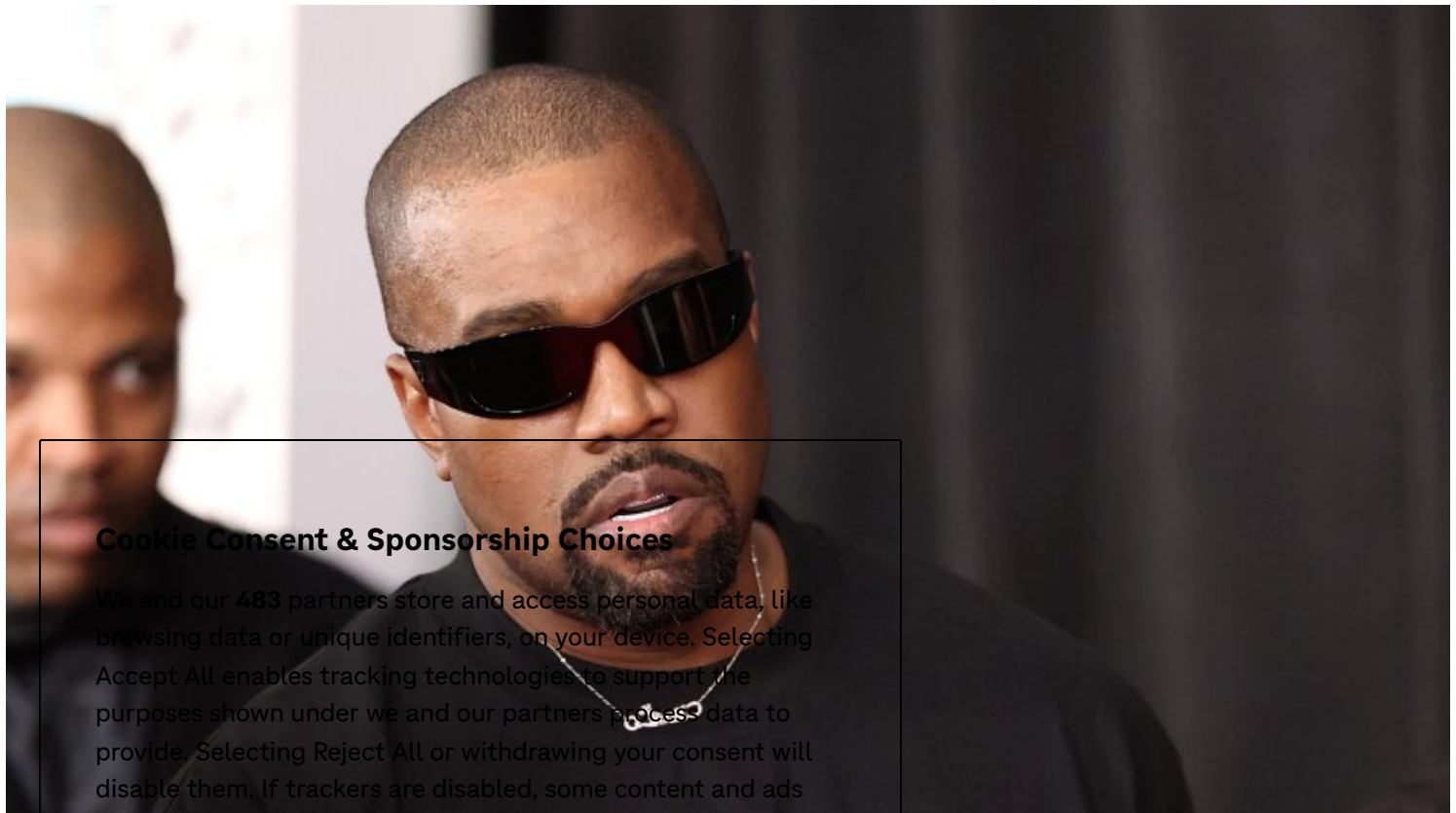
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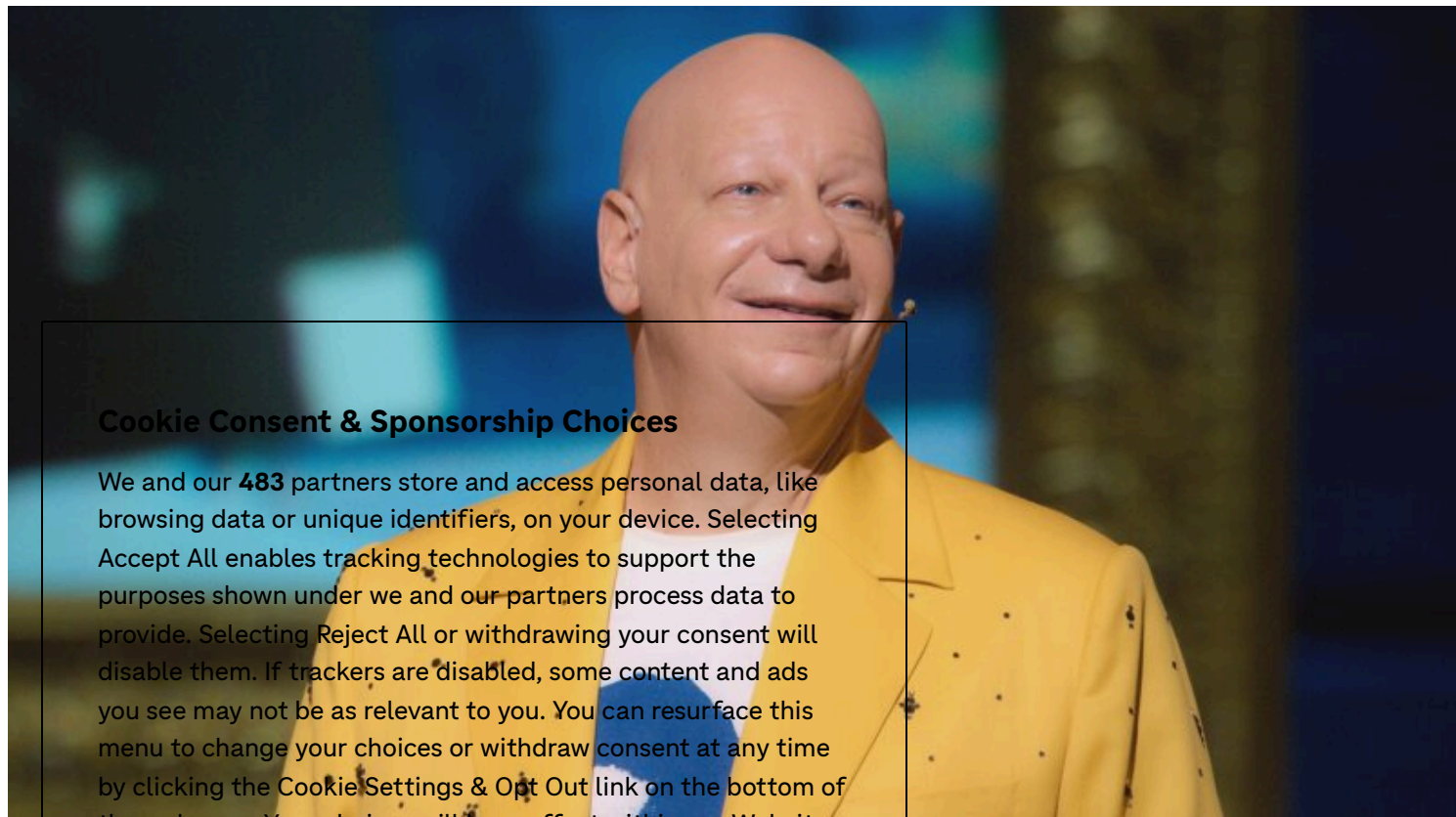
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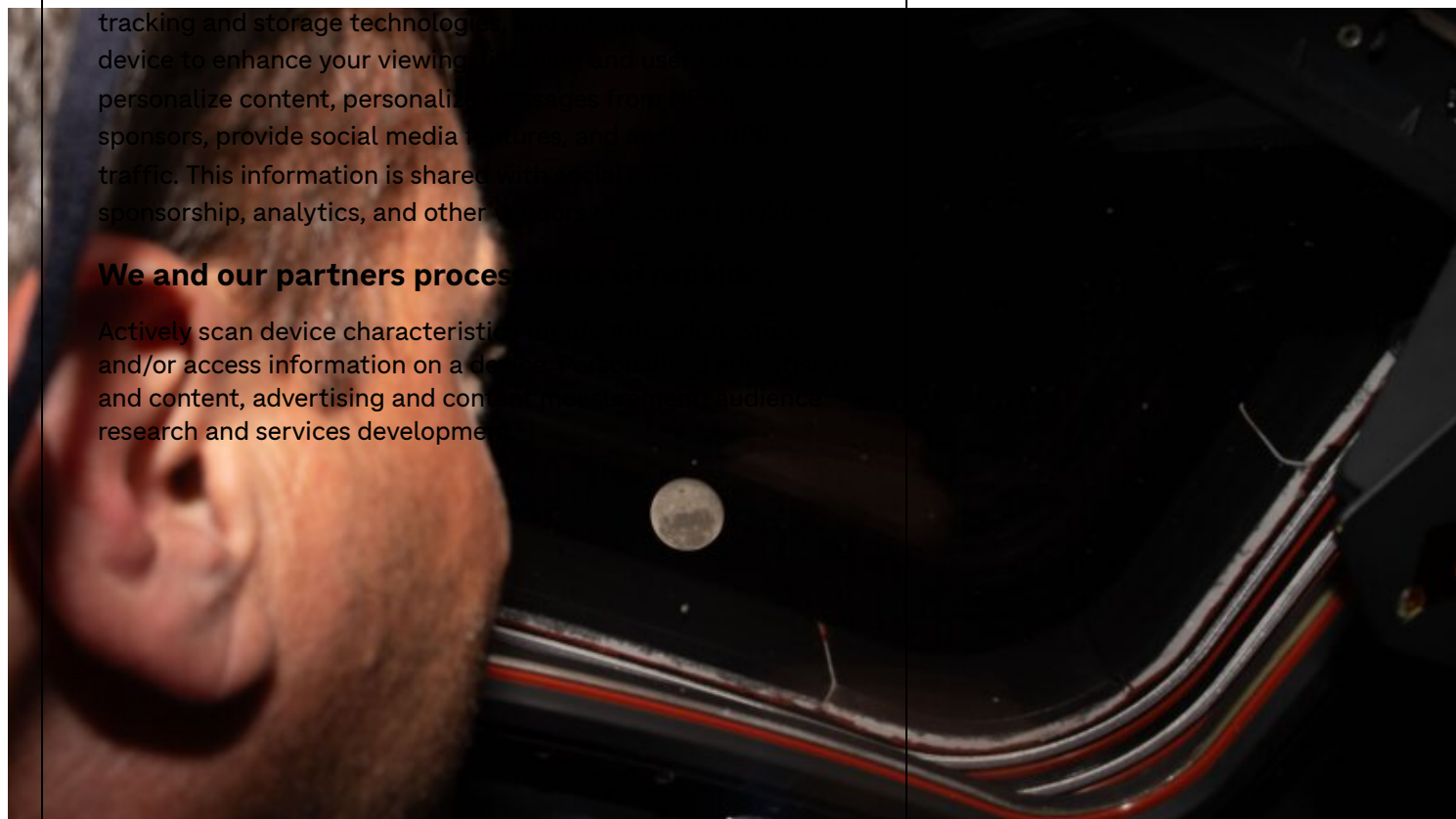
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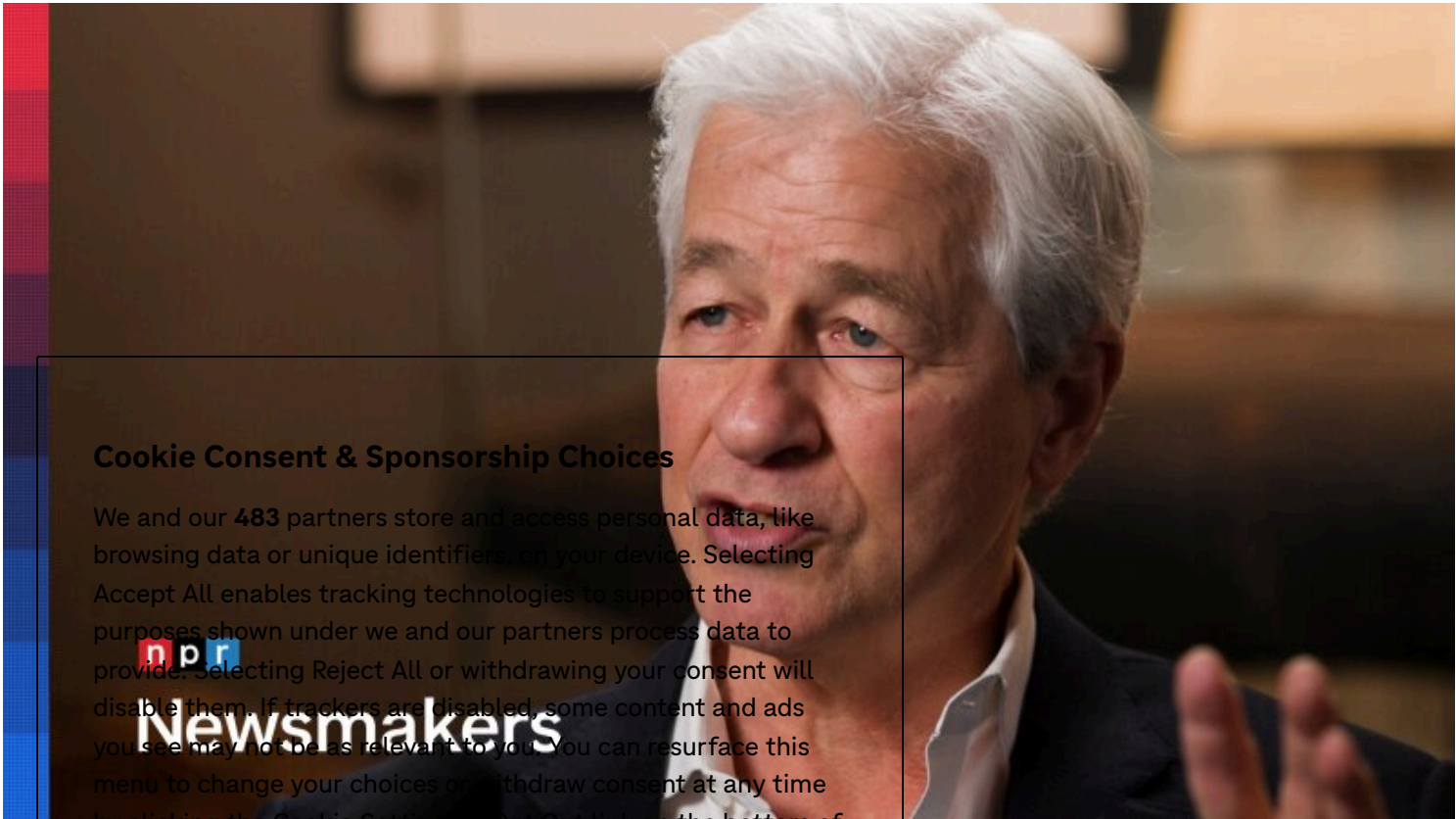
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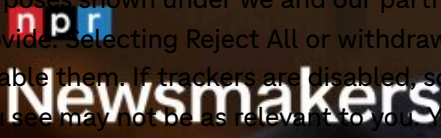
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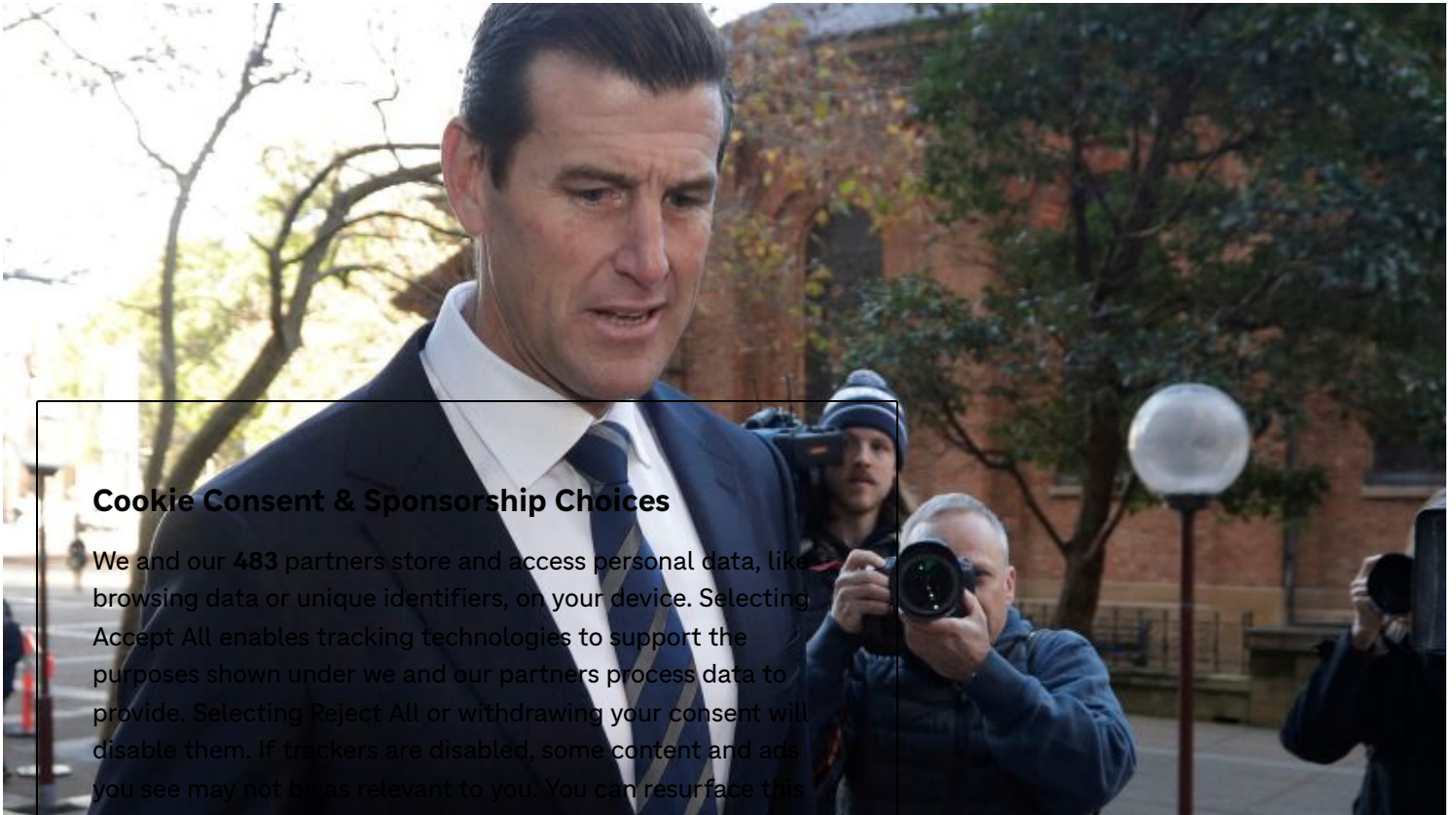
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