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## Middle East conflict

# Iran strikes were launched without approval from Congress, deeply dividing lawmakers

UPDATED FEBRUARY 28, 2026 · 7:25 PM ET

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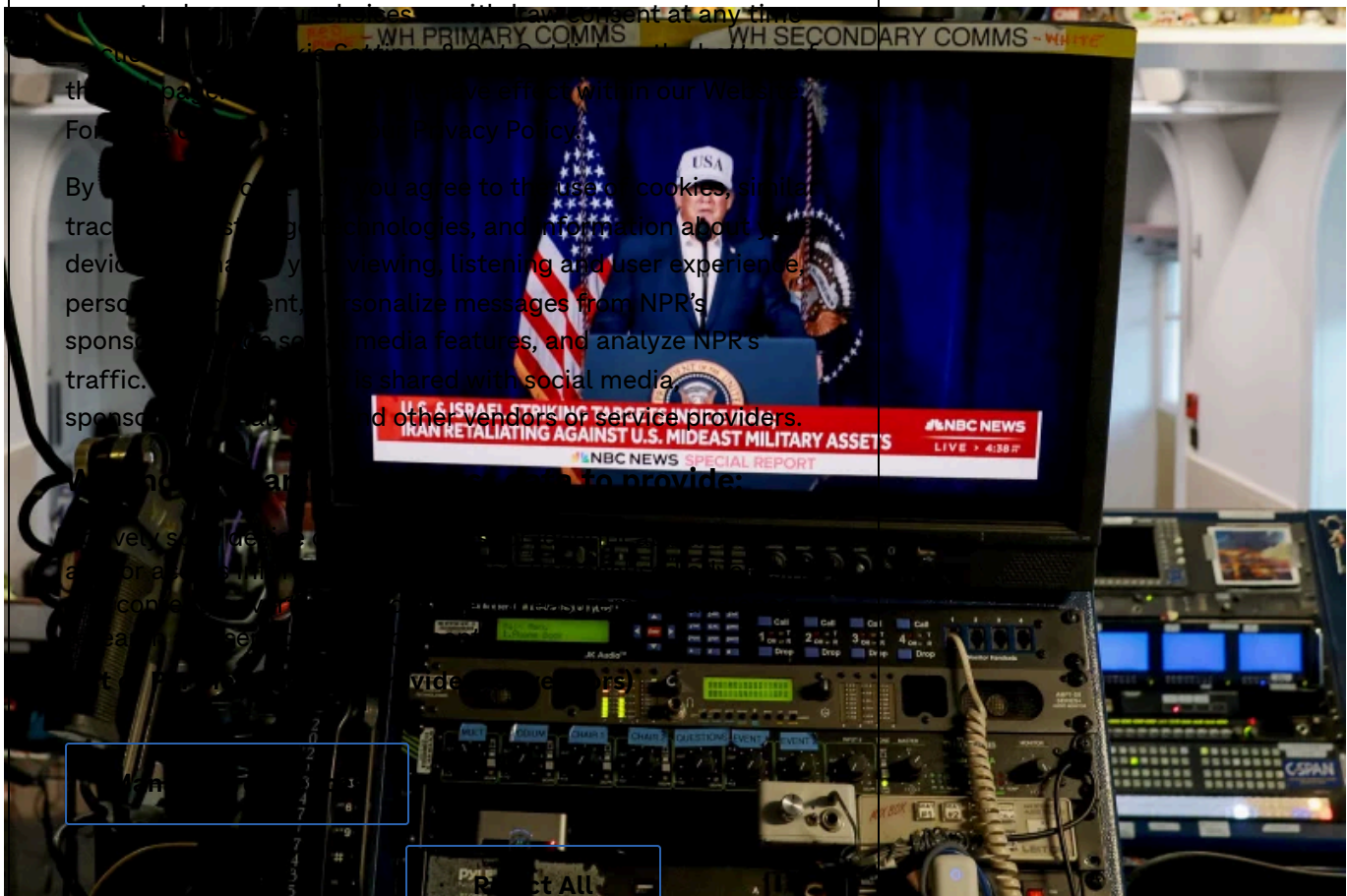
HEARD ON WEEKEND EDITION SATURDAY

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**3 Minute Listen**

PLAYLIST

TRANSCRIPT



Video of President Trump's announcement of U.S. strikes on Iran airs in the White House James S. Brady Press Briefing Room on February 28, 2026.

Anna Moneymaker/Getty Images

**Accept All**

An effort to limit the ability of the president to carry out sustained military action in Iran without approval of Congress is taking on new urgency after the U.S. and Israel launched strikes aimed at overthrowing the regime.

The strikes, which began early Saturday, were launched without congressional authorization. Article 1 of the Constitution gives Congress, not the president, the power to declare war. Top Congressional Democrats and Republicans that make up a group known as the Gang of Eight – party leaders from both chambers, as well as the Intelligence committees' leadership – were notified by the White

House shortly before the attack.

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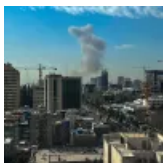
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Initial reaction to the overnight attack has not split cleanly on partisan lines, though **We and our partners process data to provide;** including Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., and House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La.

and/or access information on a device. Personalised advertising and content, advertising and content measurement, audience research and services development. "Today, Iran is facing the severe consequences of its evil actions," Johnson wrote in a statement. "President Trump and the Administration have made every effort to pursue peaceful and diplomatic solutions in response to the Iranian regime's sustained nuclear ambitions and development, terrorism, and the murder of Americans—and even their own people."

### MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT

**Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, has been killed**



Thune commended Trump for launching the strikes, saying Iran's nuclear ambitions, missile program and support for terror groups has posed "a clear and unacceptable threat" to U.S. interests in the region.

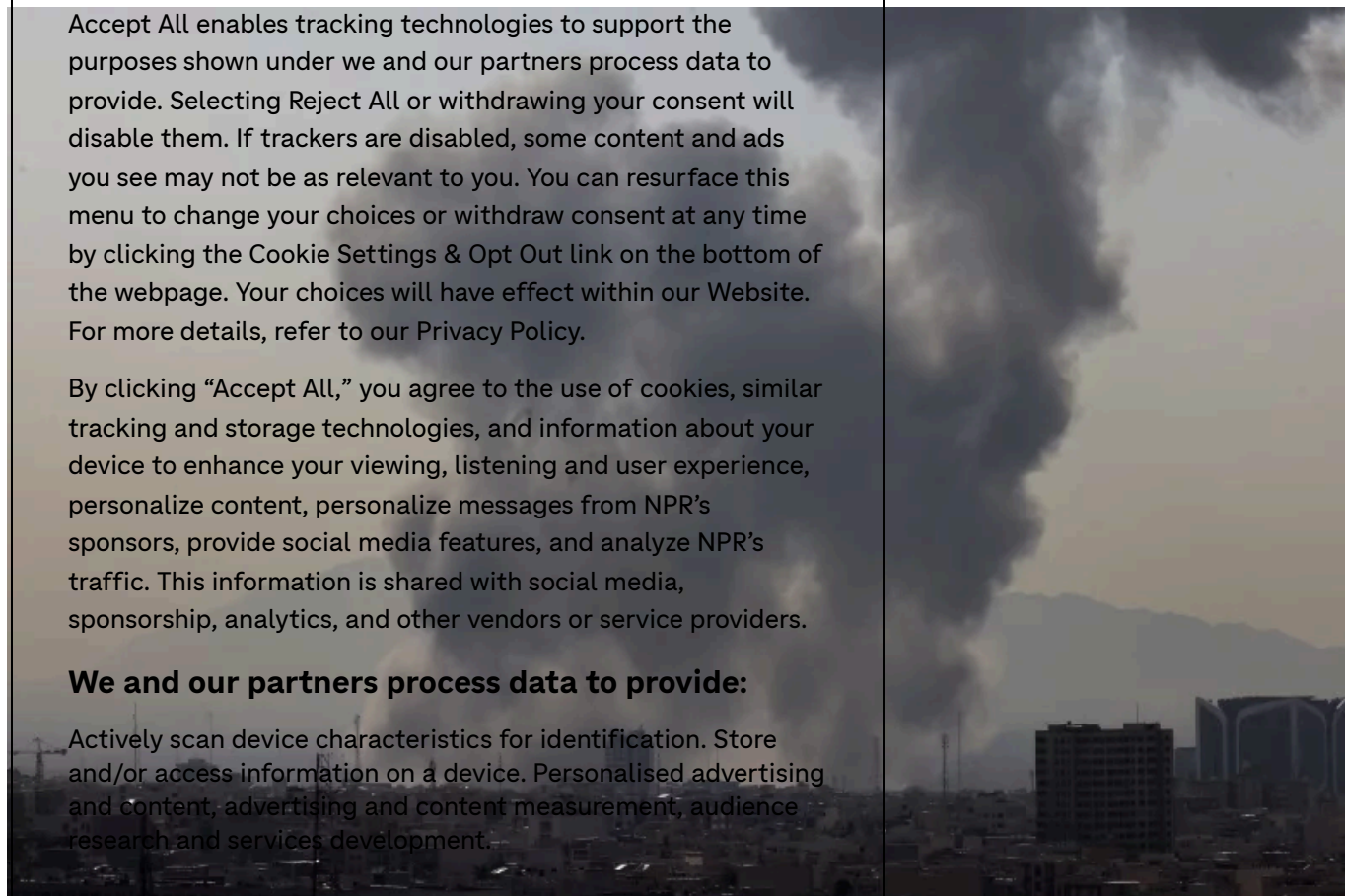
"I am confident it will successfully carry out the very clearly stated goals of this operation," wrote Rep. Rick Crawford, R-Ark., the chair of the House Intelligence Committee. "I would strongly advise the Iranian regime heed President Trump's warning."

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A plume of smoke rises following a reported explosion in Tehran on Saturday after U.S. and Israel launched strikes on Iran.

Atta Kenare/AFP via Getty Images

Most Democrats and a handful of Republicans sharply criticized the operation.

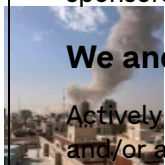
"The administration has not provided Congress and the American people with critical details about the scope and immediacy of the threat," Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., wrote in a statement. "The administration must brief Congress, including an immediate all senators classified briefing and in public testimony, to answer these vital questions."

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### WORLD

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A spokesperson for Warner, the top Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee, said he was notified last night before the strikes by Secretary of State Marco Rubio.

A U.S. official said Rubio outlined the situation on Tuesday in an hourlong briefing with the Gang of Eight.

Rubio called those eight members ahead of the strikes, connecting with seven of them. The Armed Services Committees were notified early this morning after the

strikes began, according to the official.

"Everything I have heard from the administration before and after these strikes on Iran confirms this is a war of choice with no strategic endgame," Rep. Jim Himes, D-Conn., the ranking member on the House Intelligence Committee, wrote in a statement.

### The push for a war powers vote

Rep. Thomas Massie, R-Ky., a frequent Trump critic who is deeply opposed to this kind of intervention, noted the strikes were "acts of war unauthorized by Congress."

As Trump and top officials signaled the possibility of a military action against Iran, Massie and Rep. Ro Khanna, D-Calif., were already teeing up a vote in the House this week on a resolution to curb the president's ability to intervene without approval from Congress.

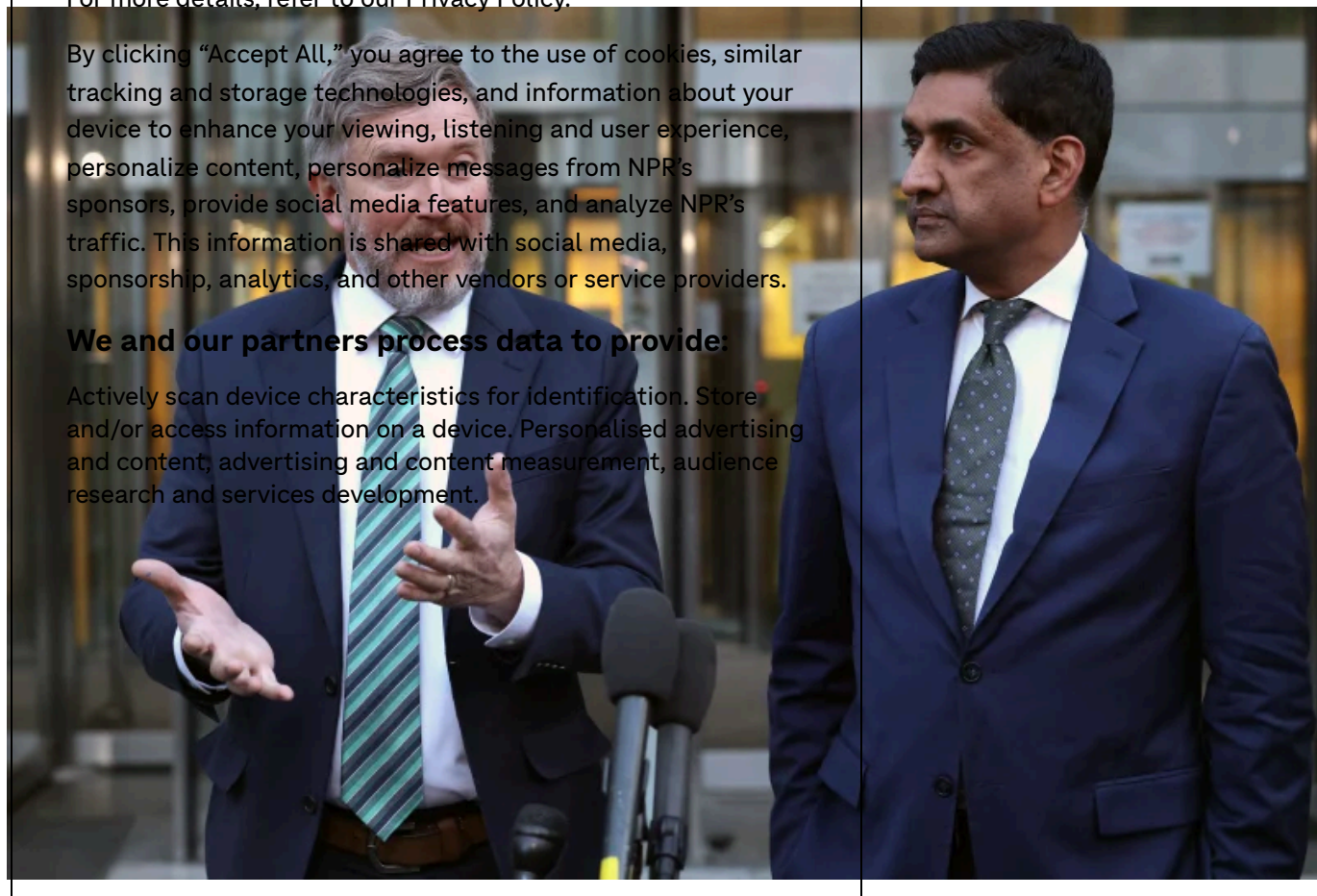
A similar bipartisan measure is also expected to come up for a vote in the Senate, sponsored by Sen. Tim Kaine, D-Va., and Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky.

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Rep. Thomas Massie (left) and Rep. Ro Khanna, seen outside the Justice Department on Feb. 9, have been leading a push in the House for a war powers vote.

Alex Wong/Getty Images

Kaine called on Congress to return immediately to vote on the resolutions, which are privileged, meaning they are guaranteed a vote.

"The lives of our troops are at risk," Kaine told NPR's *Weekend Edition* on Saturday. "We ought to come back to Washington right away to vote on this."

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House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, D-N.Y., is also calling for a war powers vote, telling *All Things Considered* it is unclear what happens next in Iran following reports that Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was killed after the launch of attacks by the US and Israel.

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"The Trump administration has not been able to articulate a plan, one, to ensure that U.S. forces are not entangled in a forever war in the Middle East, which we know would be a disaster," Jeffries said. "And this notion of regime change has never been successful, as most recently indicated by its failure in Iraq, its failure in Libya and its failure in Afghanistan."

More recently, the administration has been striking alleged drug boats in the Caribbean and in January, launched an operation in Venezuela to extradite its then-president, Nicolas Maduro.

A war powers resolution to pull back intervention in Venezuela earlier this year initially got enough Republican support to advance in the Senate, but enough ultimately changed their mind and the measure failed.



**MIDDLE EAST**

**Panic, fury, and some hope, in Iran as U.S. launches strikes**

Backers of these war powers resolutions say that even if they are not successful, it is important for accountability that members vote on the record. The votes can also influence the president and force the public to pay attention to the debate

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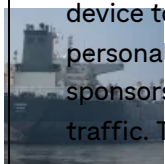
The planned votes on curbing military intervention in Iran were already going to be narrowly decided, but the strikes could shift the calculus for some lawmakers that action is not hypothetical

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And unlike in the case of Venezuela, where the administration was assuring lawmakers that action would be limited, Trump is warning that "the lives of courageous American heroes may be lost, and we may have casualties. That often happens in war"

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**MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT**

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The success of a war powers resolution is far from guaranteed.

In addition to robust Republican opposition to clipping Trump's authority, Sen. John Fetterman, D-Pa, is among the lawmakers backing the attack, writing in a

statement that Trump "has been willing to do what's right and necessary to produce real peace in the region."

Rep. Josh Gottheimer, D-N.J., has said a resolution would: "Restrict the flexibility needed to respond to real and evolving threats and risks, signaling weakness at a dangerous moment."

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And in recent months, Congress has signaled a desire to reassert some authority in this space, only for the legislative branch to ultimately bend to the wishes of the executive

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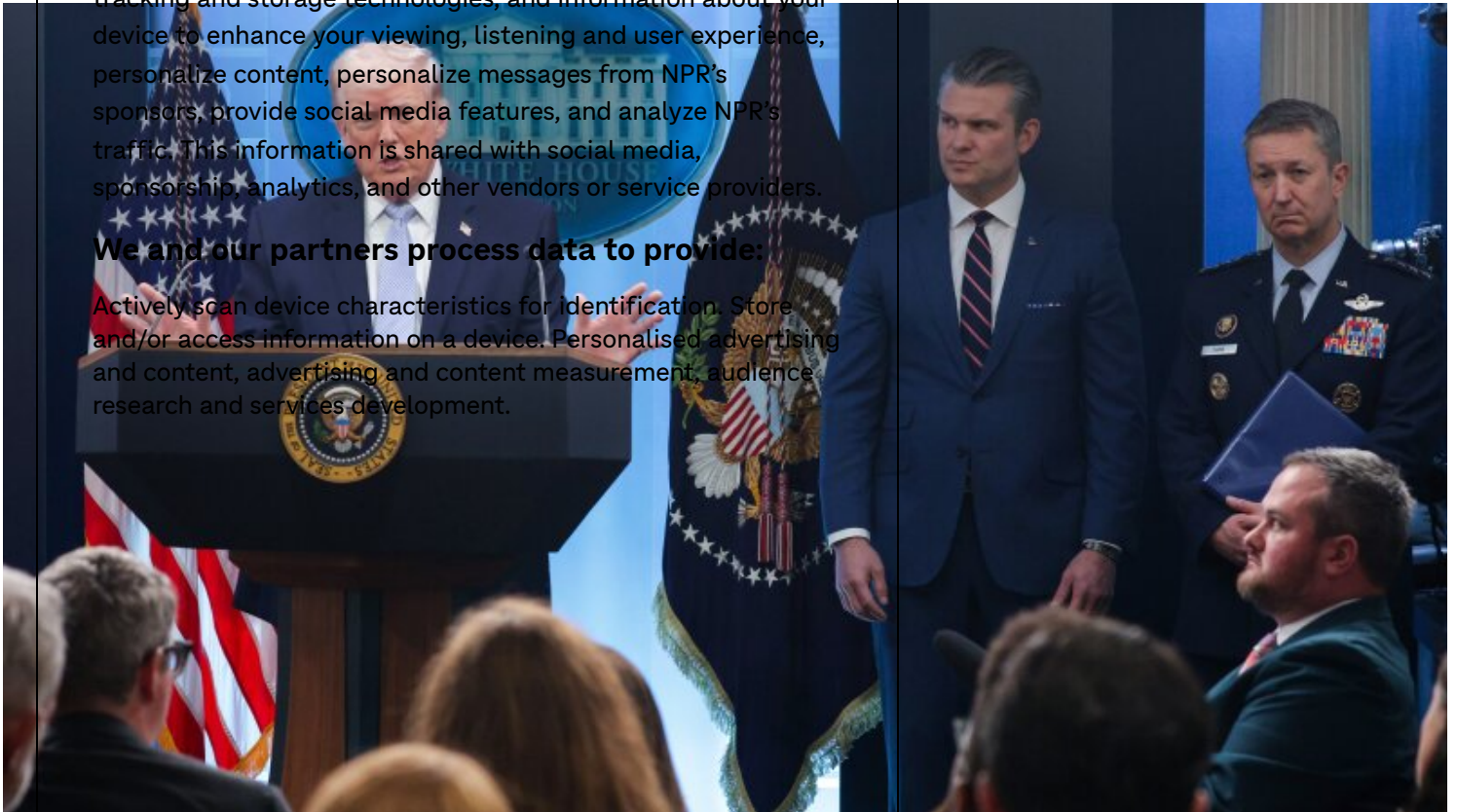
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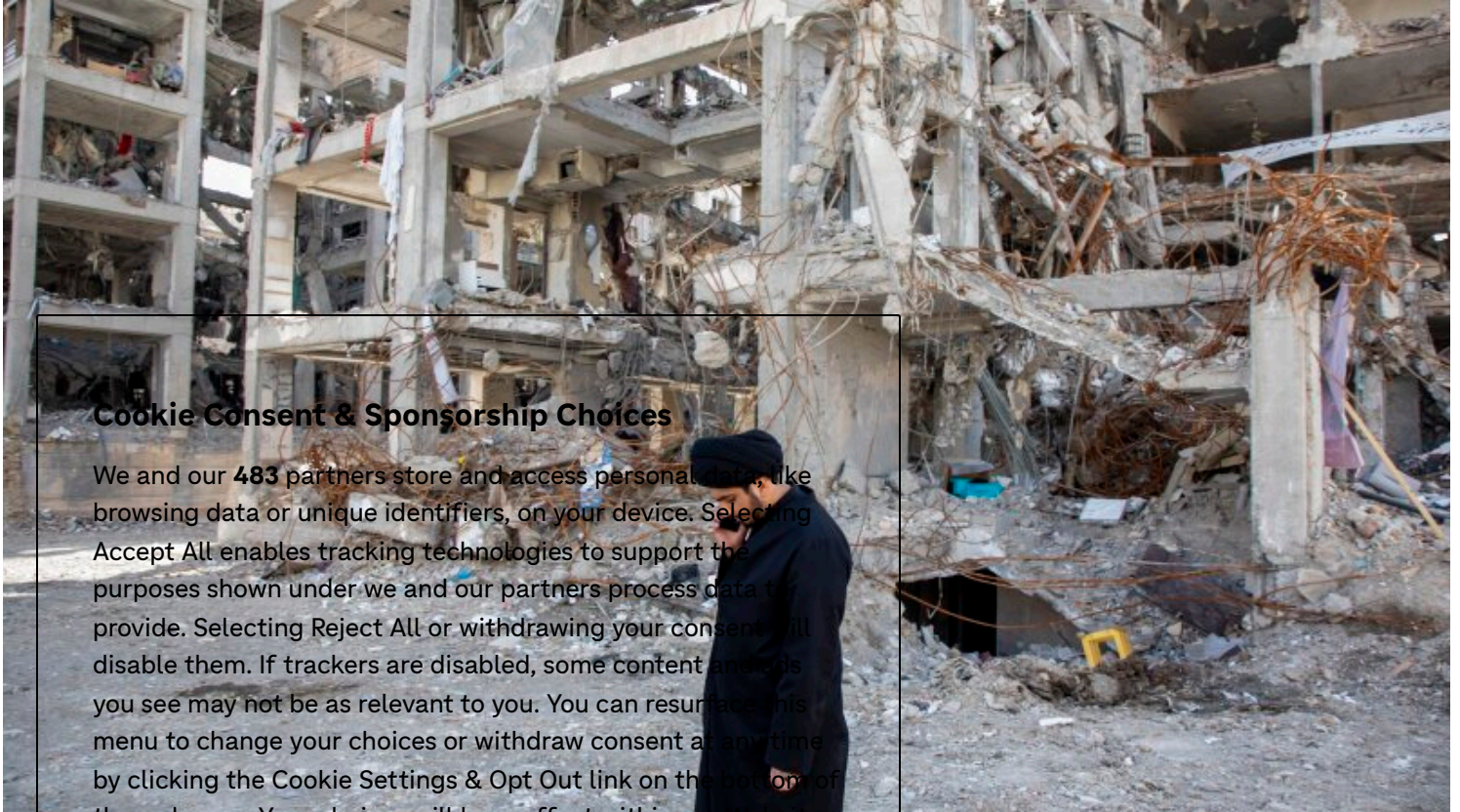
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MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT

Trump reiterates threats to bomb Iran's power plants and bridges



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MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT

Iran rejects a U.S. ceasefire plan as Trump again threatens to bomb its infrastructure

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MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT

# In Lebanon, more than 50 medics have been killed by Israel. Some say they're targeted



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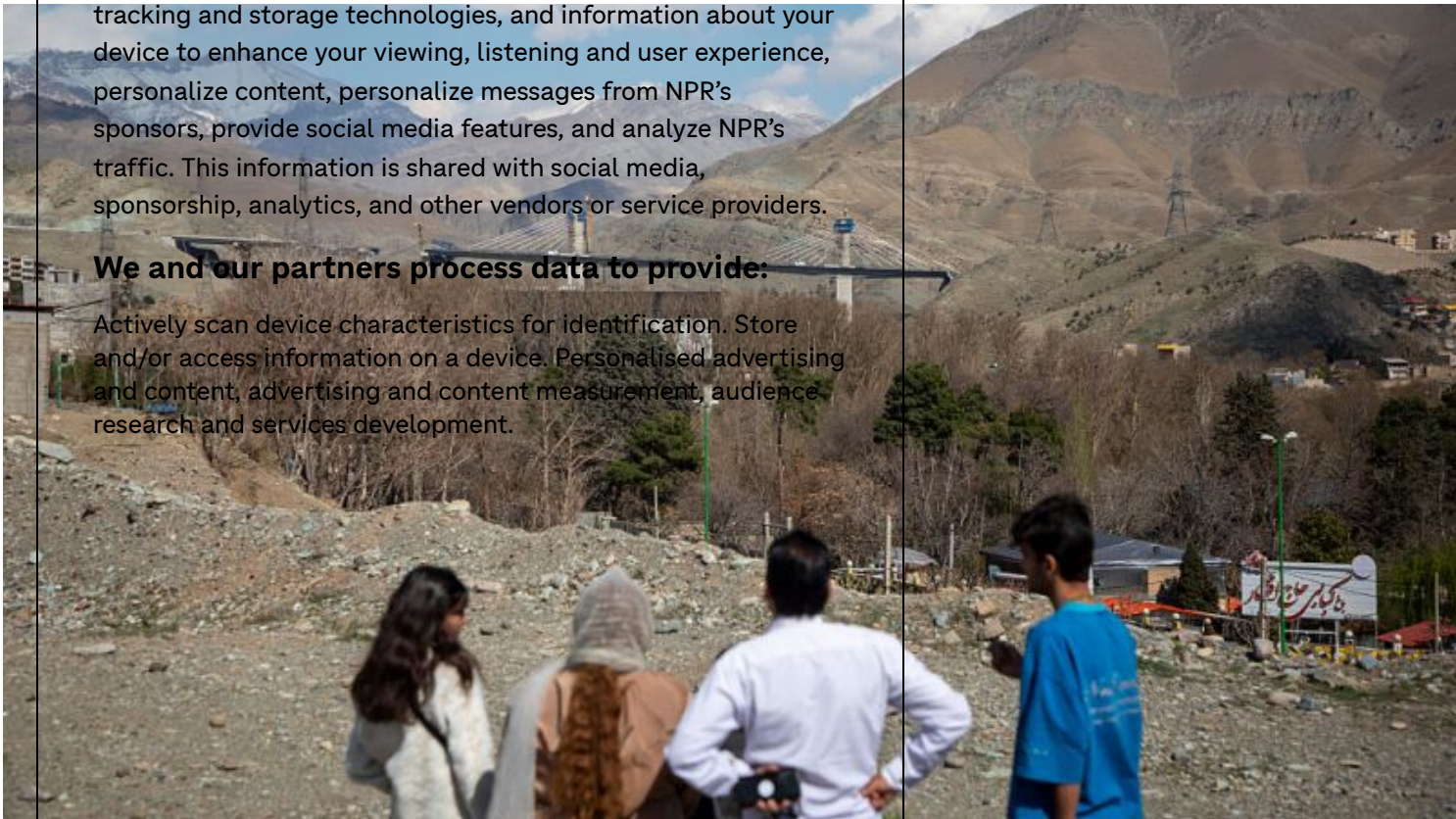
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## Trump unleashes curse-filled social media rant at Iran after U.S. rescues colonel

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### MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT

# Iran war enters its 6th week as military searches for downed jet crew member

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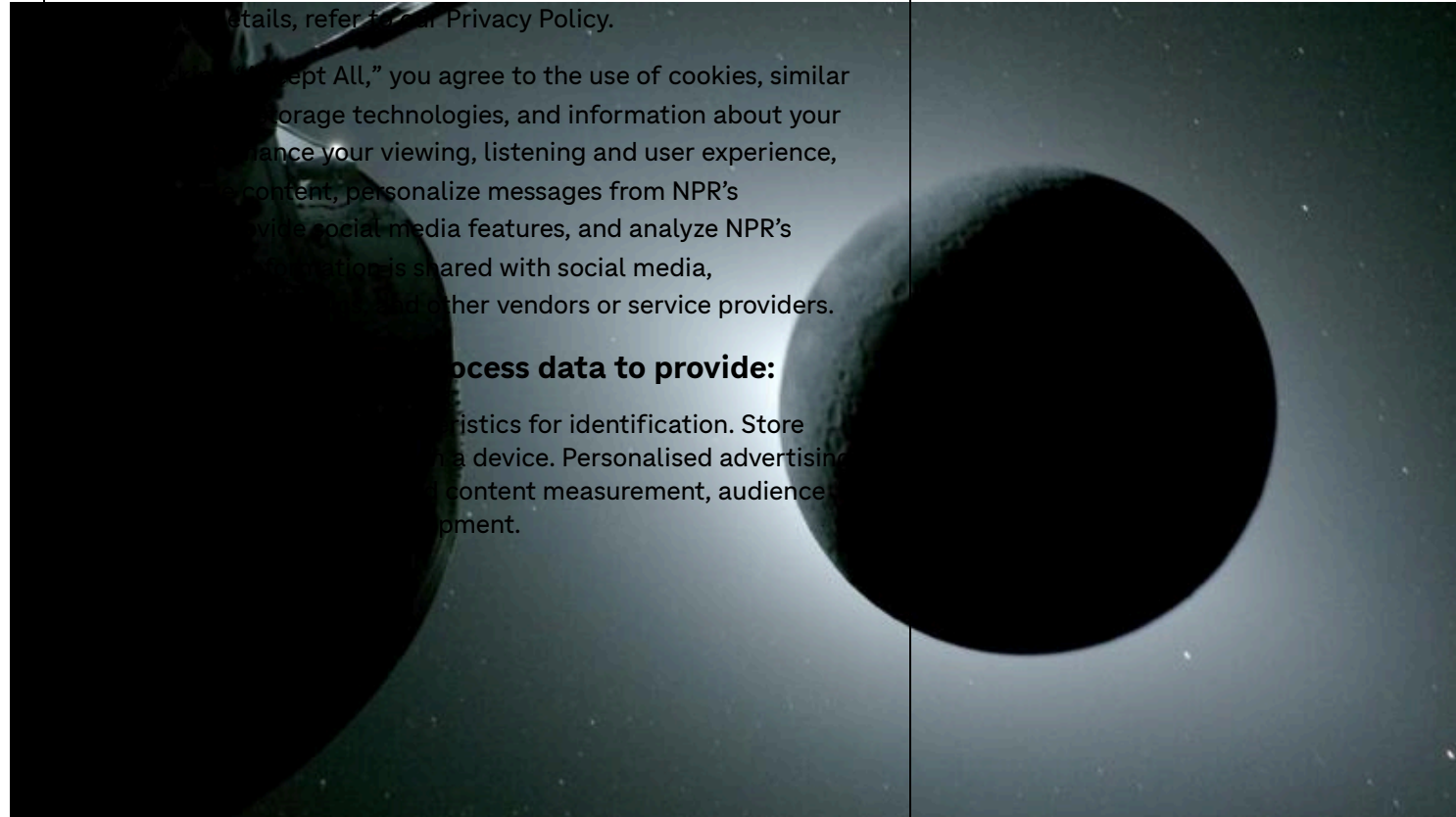
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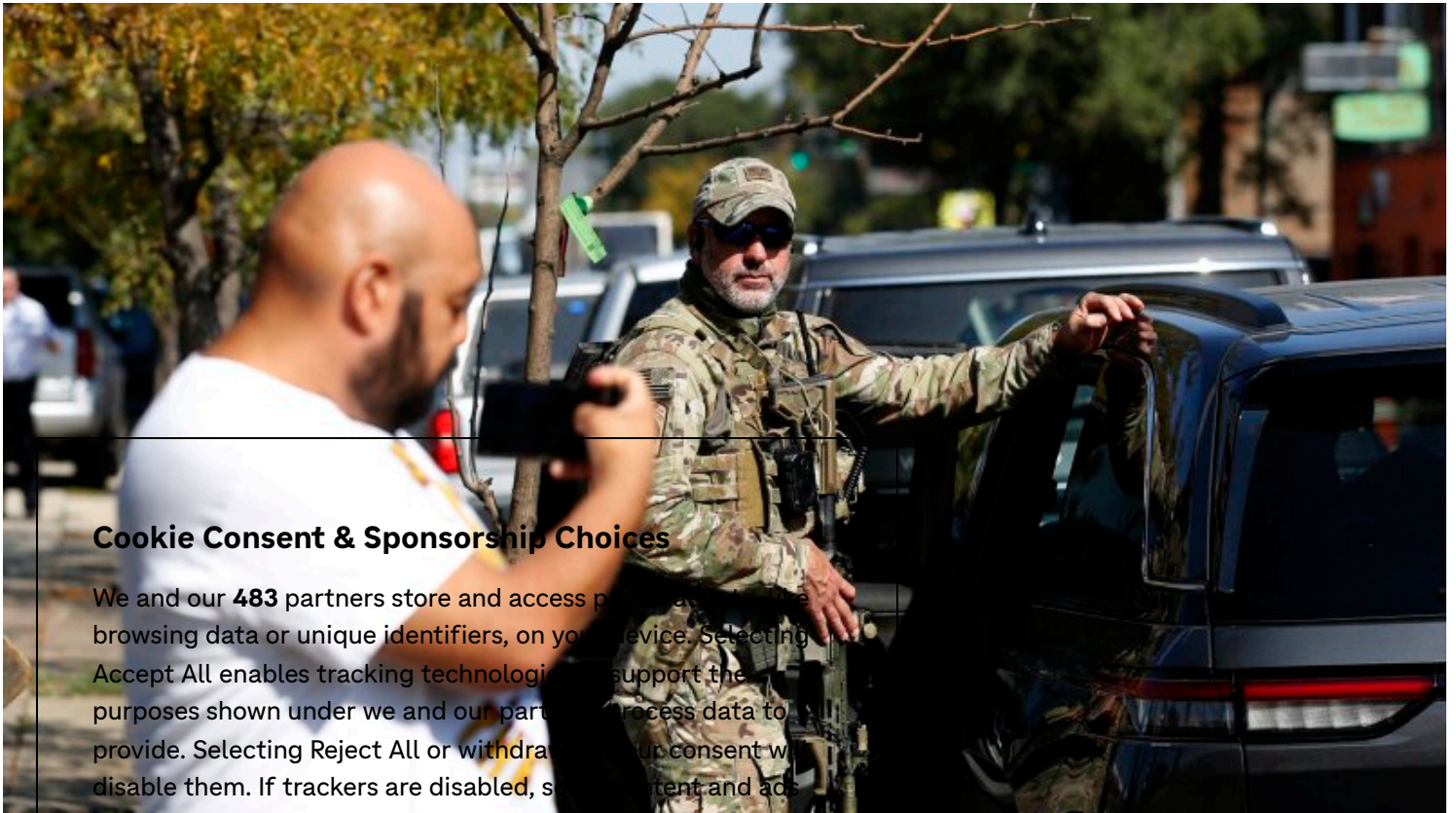
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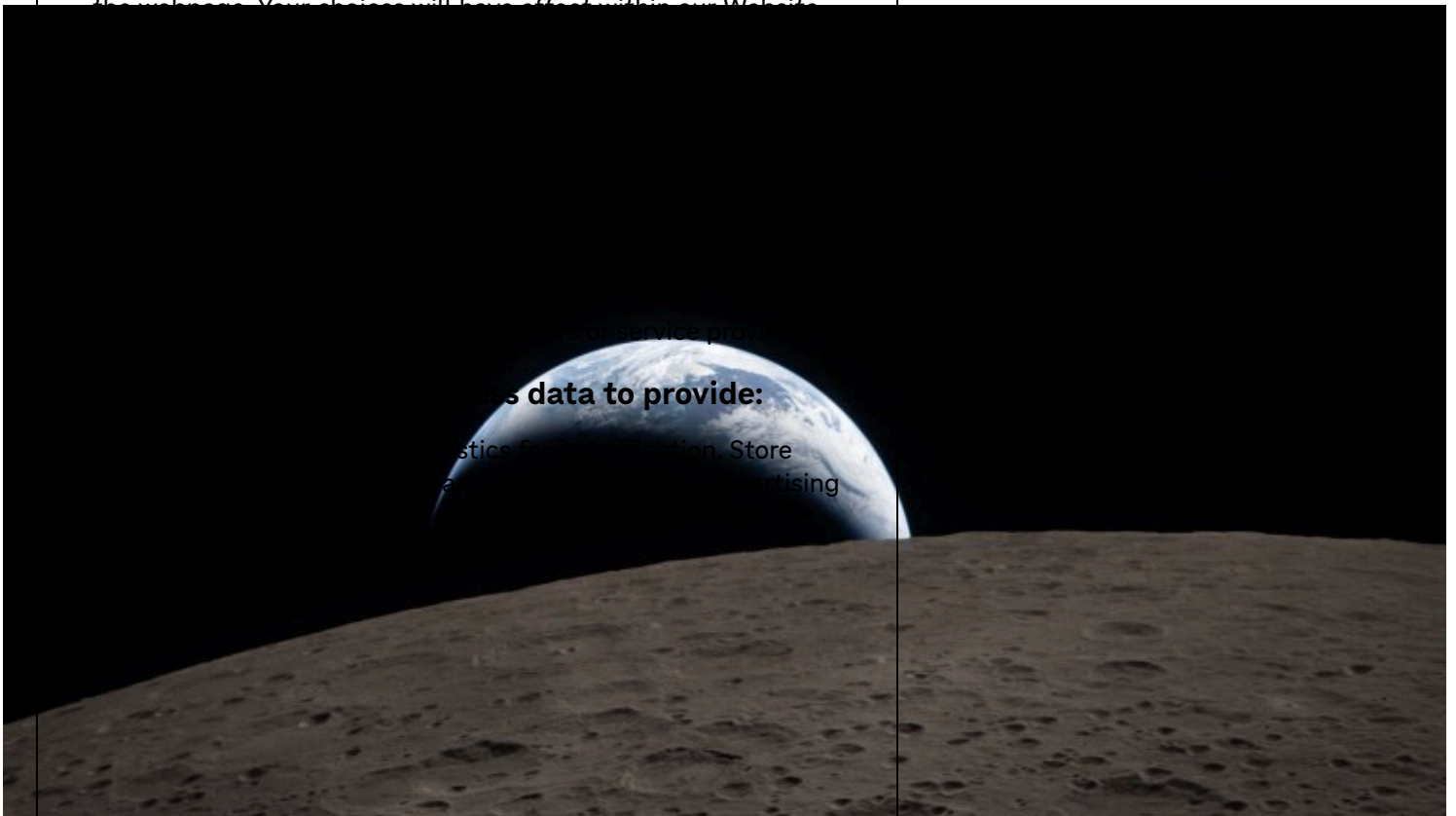


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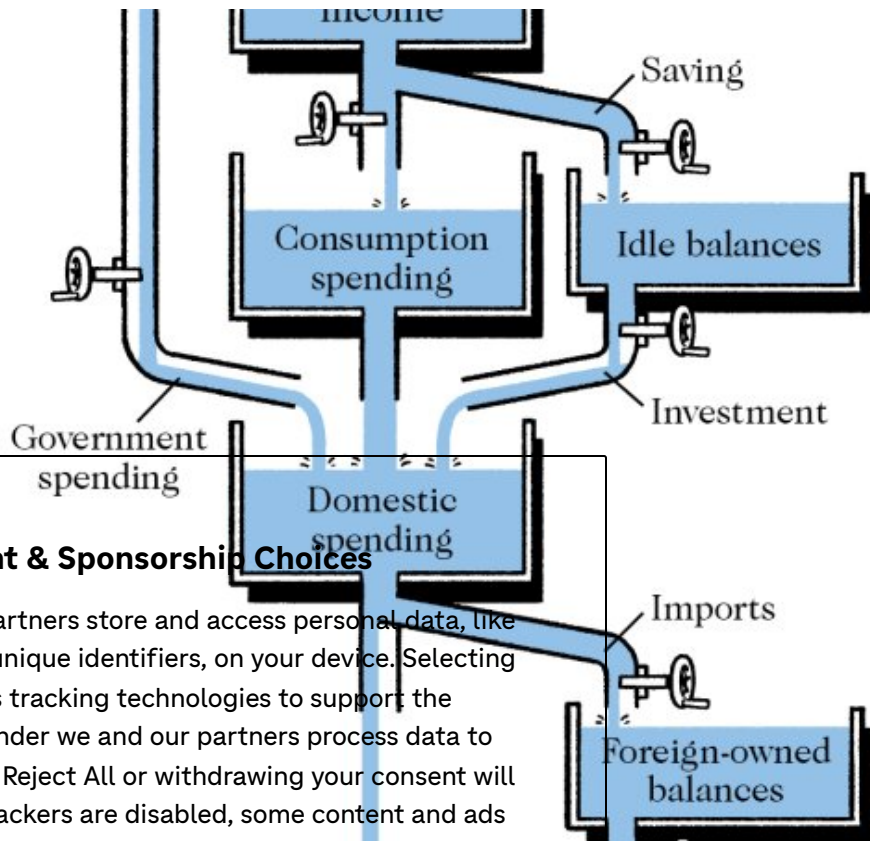
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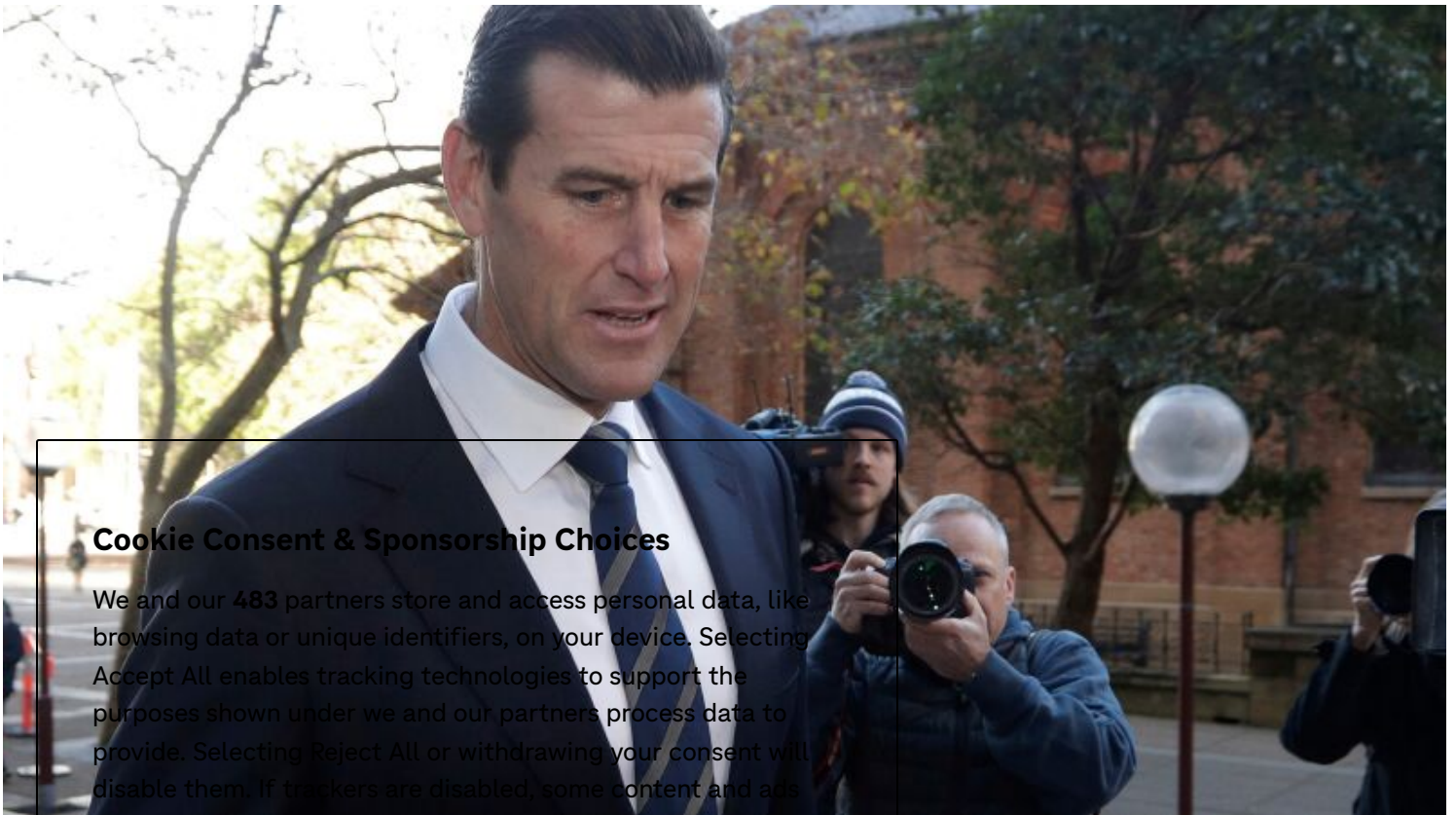
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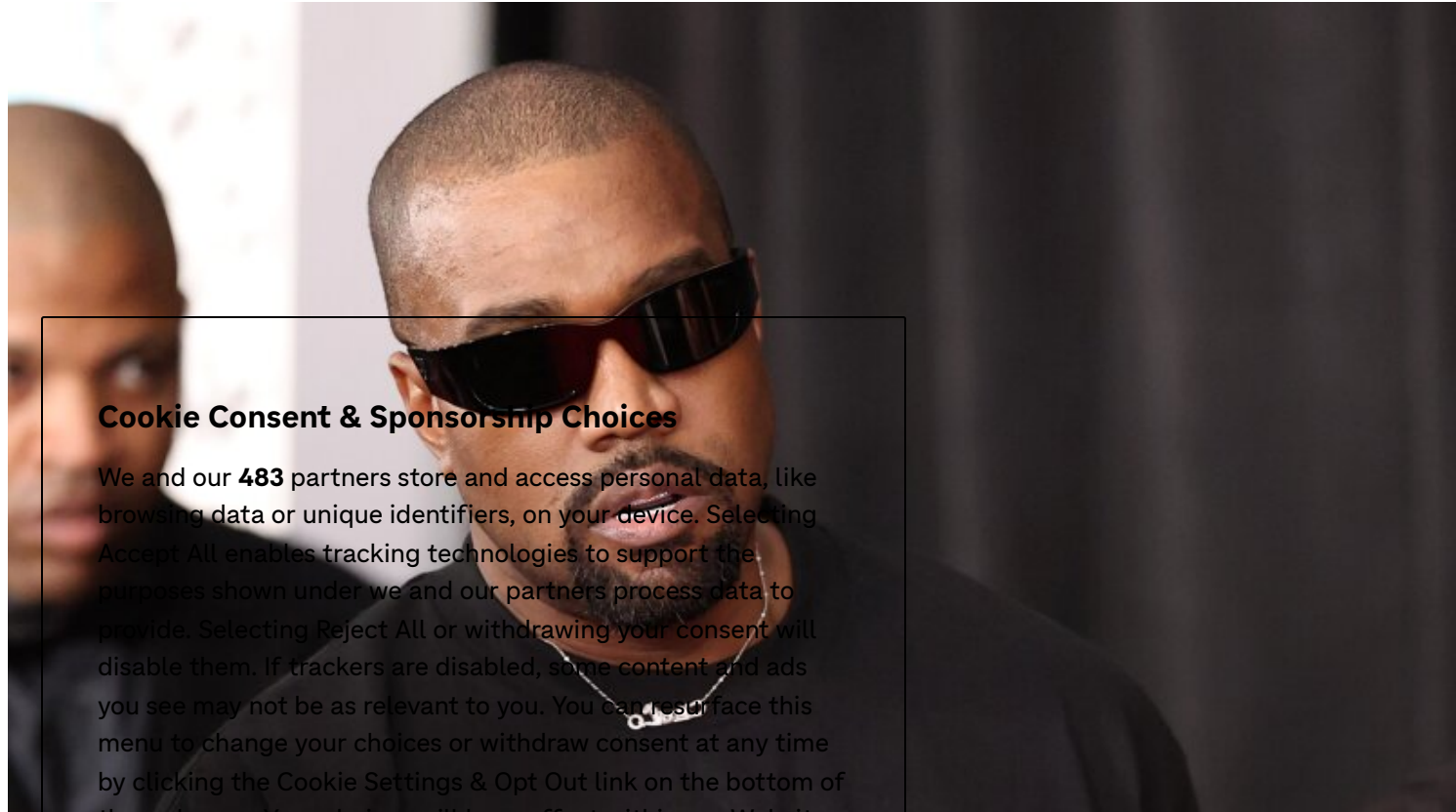
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**ASIA Australia charges ex-soldier with 5 war-crime murders in Afghanistan**

POLITICS

Congressional Democrats raise alarm over Trump's comments on Iran



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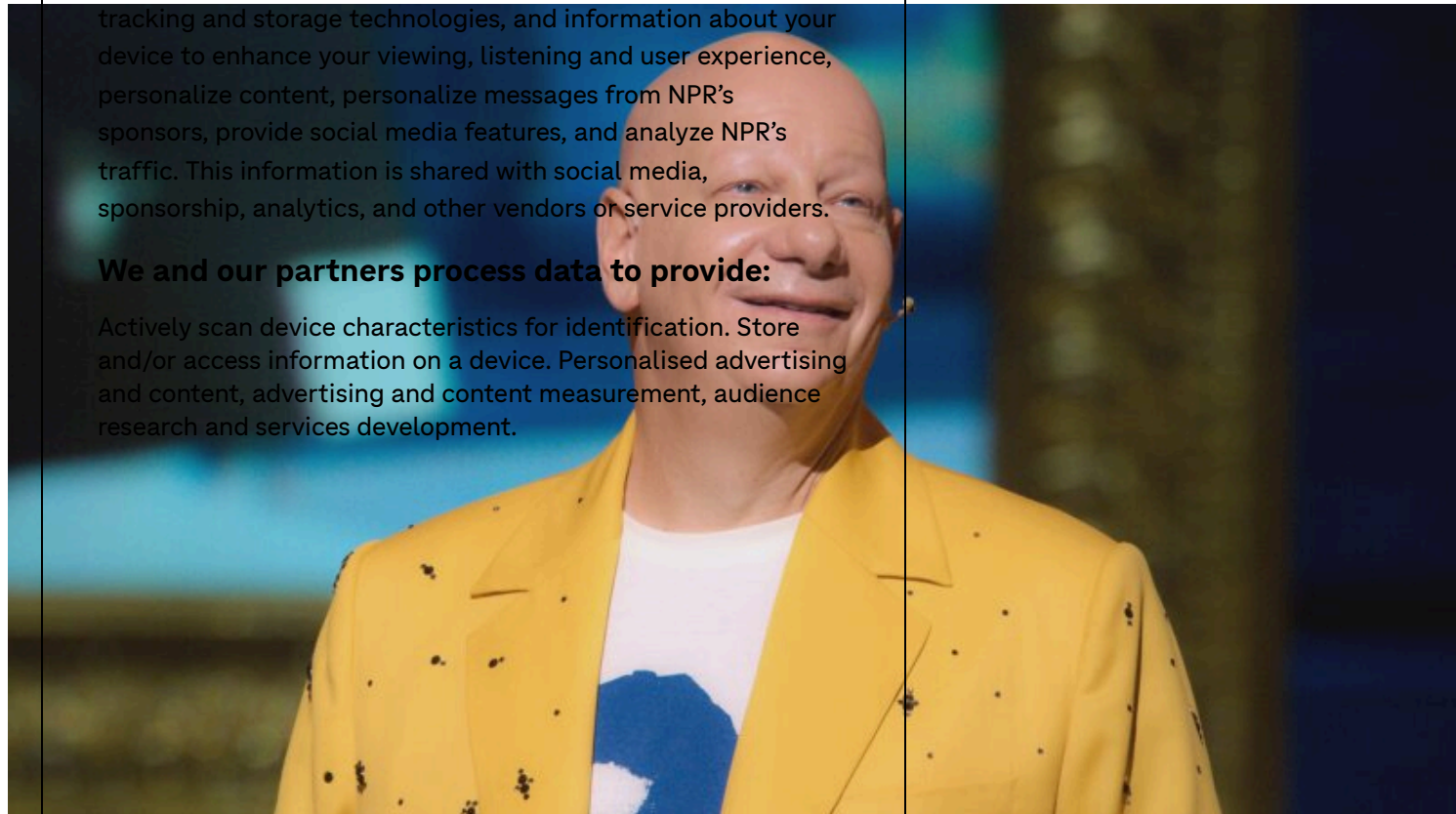
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**U.K. issues Ye travel ban over antisemitism, leading to festival cancellation**

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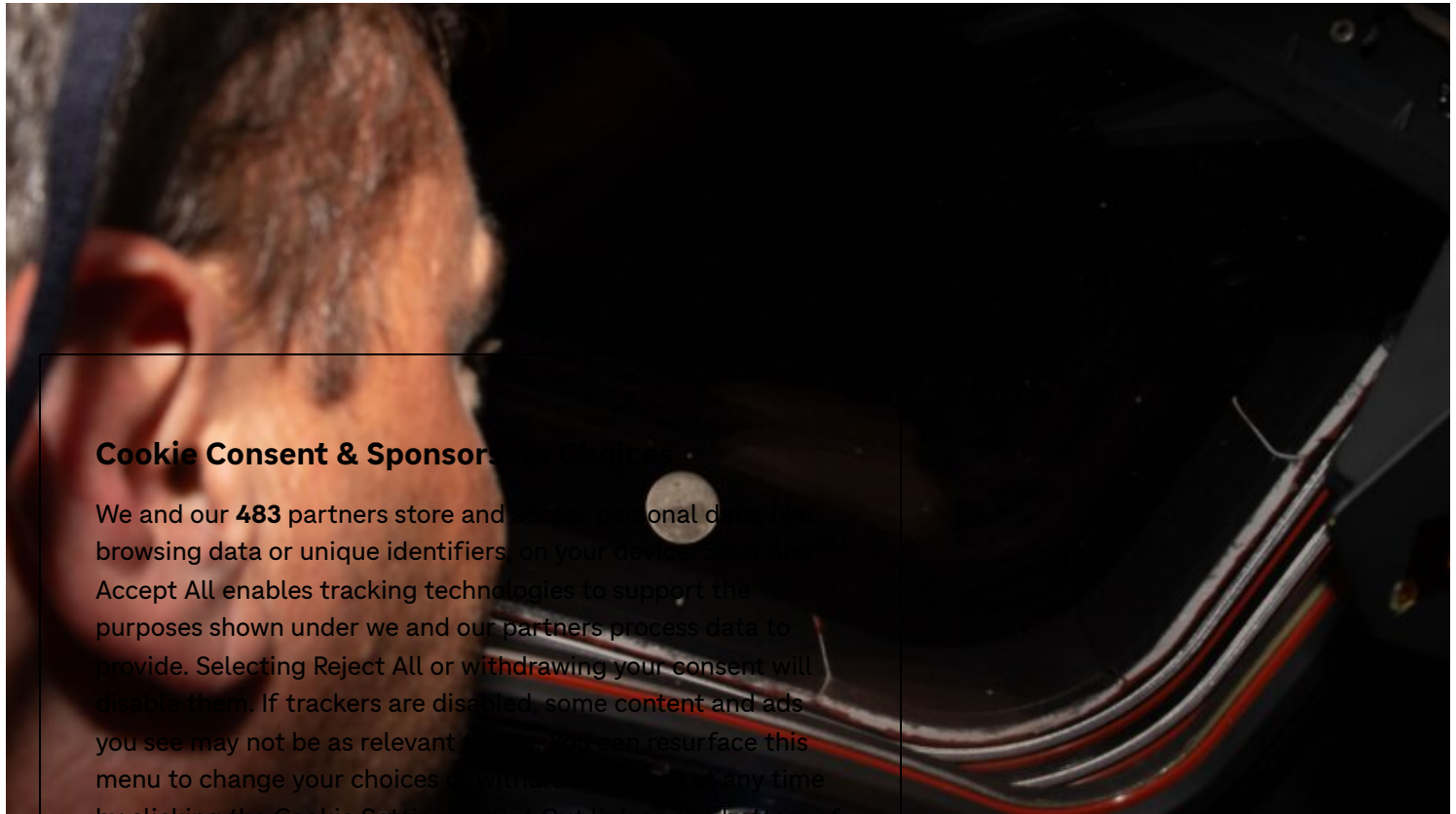
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TELEVISION

# Now cancer-free, 'Roastmaster' comic Jeff Ross still finds humor in loss



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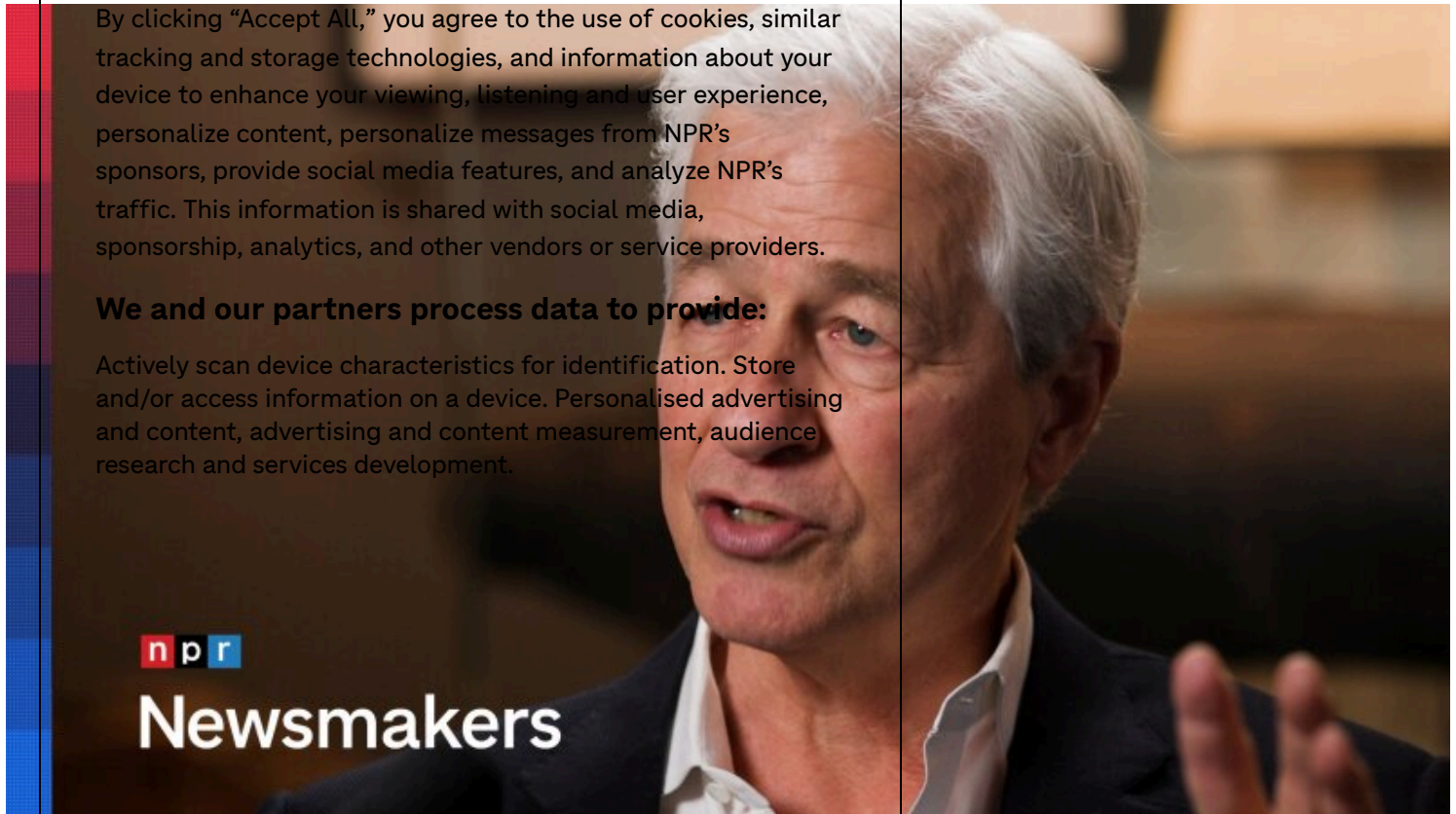
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## SPACE Astronauts suggest naming a moon crater 'Carroll' after their commander's late wife

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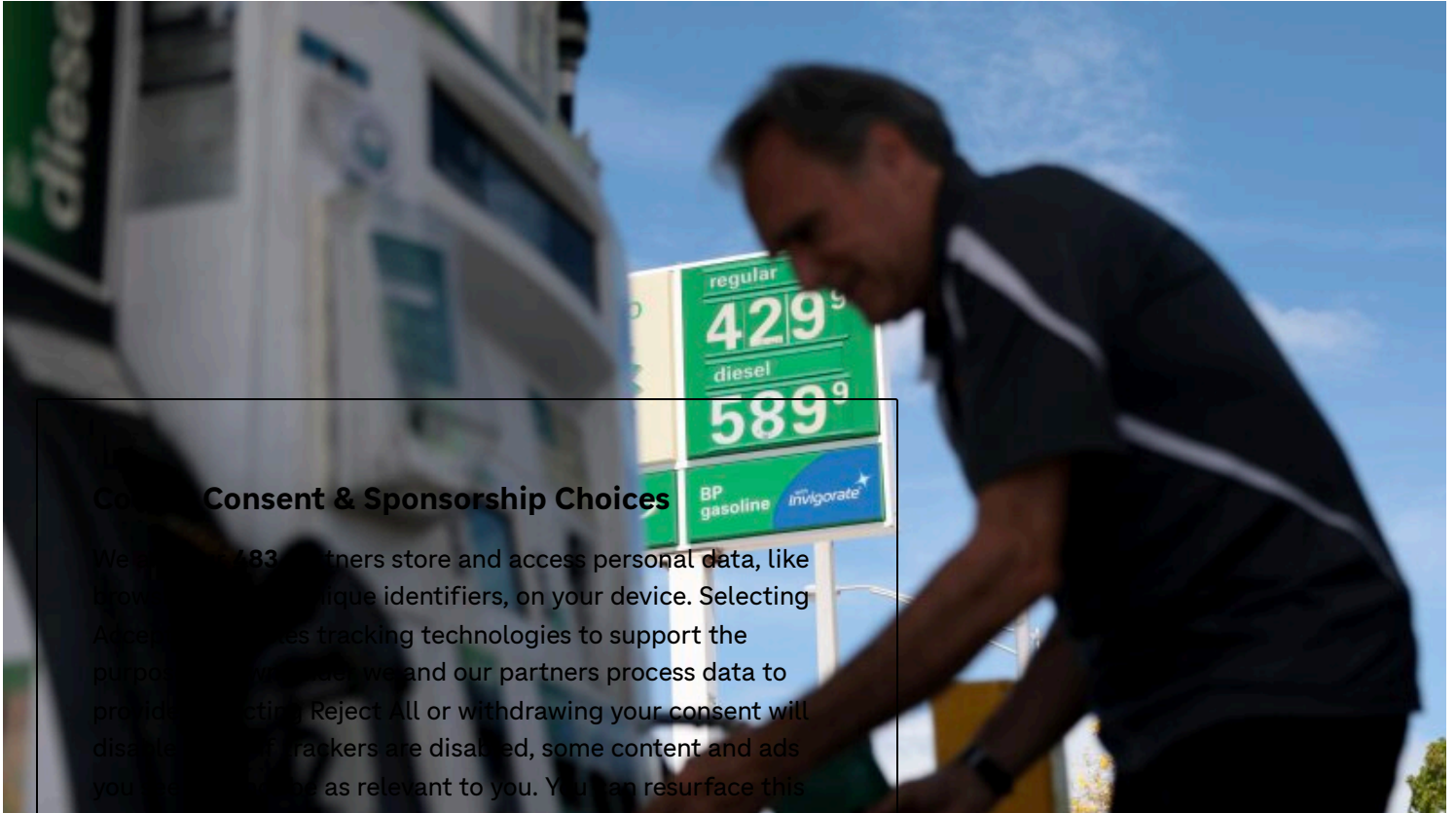
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# Newsmakers

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## CEO of nation's largest bank says Iran war raises risk of 'bad economic outcomes'



**BUSINESS**

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