CATO'S MISSING DOGE MODEL: DOGE IS A PRO-RUSSIAN INTELLIGENCE OPERATION

CATO engaged in an interesting project: faced with all the uncertainty about what DOGE is up to, it attempted to lay out six possible models to explain what DOGE is doing.

> Social science models simplify reality, spotlighting key variables that may shape DOGE's actions in a way that can be tested. The models discussed above clearly simplify the complex endeavor of reforming the largest human organization ever by expenditures—the U.S. federal government. They help explain past decisions and anticipate future moves. The models above try to make sense of DOGE's actions so far. They are not mutually exclusive, yet several can be informative together or alone, while some may only make sense temporarily. Other models not set out here might offer fresh insights, but scholars should try to develop them. Without doing so, one of the biggest policy initiatives of President Trump's second term risks being under-analyzed or misunderstood.

It offered these six possible models:

1. DOGE is seeking to purge progressive influence within the federal government.
2. DOGE is a scaled-up public version of Musk's style of corporate restructuring applied to the federal

government.

3. DOGE is the first step of a public relations campaign to build popular support for spending cuts.
4. DOGE is an essential component of a Trump administration legal challenge to expand the president's power of impoundment.
5. DOGE provides political cover for Congress to be even more fiscally irresponsible.
6. DOGE is about self-interest and cronyism.

Some of these — like the attempt to purge progressivism and cronyism — are partially convincing. Others, such as the claim that DOGE helps either the PR campaign or the legal one, are soundly rebutted by public facts. DOGE's epic failures have increased pushback and provided legal bases to challenge cutbacks that wouldn't exist if done more competently.

Even when it considers the possibility that Elon is self-dealing, CATO's exercise is wildly credulous about DOGE's own — Elon's own — deceit. This piece, which they link, is far less so:

> Elon Musk has many great strengths, but he is **not** a reliable narrator.
>
> [snip]
>
> As has been well covered in mainstream outlets, DOGE has been **extremely sloppy** about cutting contracts and **reporting** the numbers. Most of the biggest ticket savings have been the result of DOGE misreading

> federal contracting data, or killing
> contracts that were already dead. From
> the *New York Times*:

> > When DOGE first published its list of canceled contracts, there
> > were about 1,100 examples.
> >
> > The five largest were wrong.
> >
> > In one case, DOGE listed a contract worth $8 million as actually
> > being worth $8 billion. In another, it mistakenly counted the same
> > $655 million contract three times. In yet another, it erroneously
> > said that a huge contract at the Social Security Administration had
> > been fully canceled, saving $232 million. In reality, only a small
> > project within that contract had been canceled. Actual savings:
> > $560,000.
> >
> > By last week, all of those claims were gone. DOGE revised the total
> > savings from these five cuts from $10 billion down to about $19
> > million.

> What's more concerning than the
> sloppiness itself is that it does not
> appear to be getting resolved over time.
> The same kinds of data parsing errors
> and confusion about how federal
> contracts are awarded and then paid out
> have persisted over two months. Some of
> this comes back to the information
> environment: DOGE has instituted few if
> any **ground-up mechanisms** within the
> federal government to surface real
> savings opportunities.

Both pieces seem to treat the evolving
explanation about what DOGE is (which CATO lays
out in more depth and I've laid out here) as an
evolving *goal*; neither considers whether it is
an evolving *cover story*, necessitated, in part,
by the inaptness of the USDS mission to what
DOGE wants to do, exposed via various lawsuits.

Importantly, both ignore the most troubling
aspect of DOGE: Its repeated rush to access the
live data from these agencies. That has happened
over and over — at OPM, at the Social Security
Agency, at HHS. As Tiffany Flick wrote in a
widely reported declaration, these boys are
being granted access for which they have no
obvious need to know, and they're accessing that
data in insecure ways, to use in rooms remotely
with other DOGE boys.

You don't need to access the Personally

Identifiable Information of all Americans to cut
costs. You don't need to access the PII of all
Americans to harmonize benefit programs across
agencies, in the process making it easier to
identify fraud. You don't need to access the PII
of all Americans to cash in (unless using it for
extortion). Doing so doesn't help your PR case
or your impoundment case.

It certainly could be part of a totalitarian bid
for power, a way to identify undocumented
immigrants who were advised to pay their taxes,
same sex married couples, or trans people who
have changed their gender on official documents.

And that application might explain one of
several troubling new details from recent weeks:
the court filing that revealed that, before he
left Treasury, Marko Elez emailed two unnamed
people at GSA the name or names of people with
transaction details.

> 12. The forensic analysis also revealed
> that Elez sent an email with a
> spreadsheet containing PII to two United
> States General Services Administration
> officials. The PII detailed a name (a
> person or an entity), a transaction
> type, and an amount of money. The names
> in the spreadsheet are considered low
> risk PII because the names are not
> accompanied by more specific
> identifiers, such as social security
> numbers or birth dates. Elez's
> distribution of this spreadsheet was
> contrary to BFS policies, in that it was
> not sent encrypted, and he did not
> obtain prior approval of the
> transmission via a "Form 7005,"
> describing what will be sent and what
> safeguards the sender will implement to
> protect the information.

Over a month after the investigation into what
Elez was up to, Treasury reveals that he was
alerting others to specific details about
entities, with no explanation of why. That has

nothing to do with the optimization he was
supposed to be doing!

So sure, that could arise from an effort to
target specific adversaries of Elon or Trump.

But that doesn't explain another alarming
revelation about DOGE: That Elon set up Starlink
for the White House and GSA (not coincidentally,
where most of his DOGE boys are working with the
PII of Americans).

> Starlink, the satellite internet service
> operated by Elon Musk's SpaceX, is now
> accessible across the White House
> campus. It is the latest installation of
> the Wi-Fi network across the government
> since Mr. Musk joined the Trump
> administration as an unpaid adviser.
>
> [snip]
>
> White House officials said the
> installation was an effort to increase
> internet availability at the complex.
> They said that some areas of the
> property could not get cell service and
> that the existing Wi-Fi infrastructure
> was overtaxed.
>
> [snip]
>
> In recent weeks, Starlink was also set
> up at the General Services
> Administration, which has served as a
> hub for Mr. Musk's government-shrinking
> efforts, according to documents and
> people familiar with the service.
>
> [snip]
>
> It was also unclear if Starlink
> communications were encrypted. At a
> minimum, the system allows for a network
> separate from existing White House
> servers that people on the grounds are
> able to use, keeping that data separate.
>
> "It's super rare" to install Starlink or
> another internet provider as a

> replacement for existing government
> infrastructure that has been vetted and
> secured, said Jake Williams, a vice
> president for research and development
> at Hunter Strategy, a cybersecurity
> consultancy. "I can't think of a time
> that I have heard of that."
>
> "It introduces another attack point,"
> Mr. Williams said. "But why introduce
> that risk?"

It's certainly true that these two details could just be consistent with Elon's plan to adopt totalitarianism himself, using his own personal satellite network.

But taken in tandem with other priorities of DOGE, such as dismantling almost the entirety of USAID, starting with the programs that Russia and Hungary most loathe, but also including those Republicans cherish, you need to at least consider whether this is an intelligence operation. Elon, his sidekick installed at the White House, David Sacks, and the VP they foisted on Trump, JD Vance, all parrot Russian propaganda. Dangles for Elon — cooperation on Mars! — have been included in Russia's efforts to cultivate Trump.

And Musk was cemented as part of the this team at the same time as two other people whose inclusion in the Administration only helps America's adversaries, Tulsi Gabbard and RFK Jr.

DOGE has not been cost-cutting, though that has confused the good government types and libertarians for months. Rather, DOGE has been capacity-cutting, even while it conducts the most intrusive data dive into Americans this side of consumer profiling.

I'm not saying a Russian intelligence operation is the only explanation for DOGE's actions (again, I think a totalitarian plan is another missed possibility, though question why an aspiring totalitarian would want to destroy so much capability in advance of solidifying

power).

I'm saying that experts like those from CATO
look at it and cannot tell what it is doing,
even while ignoring evidence that its claimed
goal — cost-cutting — is false. But no one has
ruled out something far more sinister is hiding
behind a cognitive (if evolving) model designed
to look familiar.