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FRANCE – EUROPE



France's police have been placed on alert after revelations about Islamism, reports say

By Josh Lowe On 1/12/17 at 5:53 AM

French authorities have been placed on alert over claims radical islamists are attempting to infiltrate the police force.

A book published Wednesday claims that at least 16 police officers have joined Islamic State, *The Times* reported.



The book, titled *Where Have Our*

Spies Gone?, and authored by Eric Pelletier and Christophe Dubois, also claimed that around 12 former French soldiers had joined jihadist movements in Iraq and Syria.

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The Eiffel Tower, Paris, December 9, 2016. France's police allegedly have a problem with Islamist infiltration. Gonzalo Fuentes/reuters

Its authors claim that The General Inspection of National Police, an internal inspection unit, has been tasked with assessing the rise of radical islam in the force.

French police are required to adhere to secularist values, and extremist religious views often come to light when these guidelines are breached, the book said.

For example, one female officer was dismissed when she wrote in an

email that "it's Islam which is going to dominate the world," after being questioned over her refusal to observe a minute's silence for murdered staff at the *Charlie Hebdo* satirical magazine.

Ex -Kosovo Premier Freed Pending French Extradition Decision

• By The Associated Press

PARIS — Jan 12, 2017, 7:06 AM ET

A French court has ordered the release of a jailed former prime minister of Kosovo pending a decision on whether to extradite him to Serbia

, where he's wanted on war crimes charges.

Overturning an earlier decision, the court in the eastern French city of Colmar said in a statement Thursday that Ramush Haradinaj can leave jail but must stay in France under judicial supervision while his case is studied.

Serbia's government formally requested his extradition after French police detained Haradinaj last week at Basel Mulhouse Frieburg airport.

The arrest has angered Kosovo, where lawmakers called on the European Union to intervene to secure his release.

Haradinaj, a former guerrilla fighter in Kosovo's 1998-1999 war for independence from Serbia, was cleared of war crimes charges by a U.N. tribunal.



Paris's Socialist mayor Anne Hidalgo has hit out at François Hollande

By Josh Lowe On 1/12/17 at

7:56 AM

Paris's Socialist mayor has hit out at France's outgoing president and two of the candidates hoping to replace him, blaming them for the decline of the left in the country.

Anne Hidalgo, elected Paris's first female mayor in 2014, told *Le Monde* that the five-year presidency of fellow Socialist François Hollande had been

an "immense waste."

She said that Hollande, whose popularity plunged to record lows, had "led us to a state of absolute confusion."

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The Socialist party is struggling in France, and many observers believe its candidate will not even make it to the second round of the presidential election in the spring.

The party's primary race is underway, and a candidate will be chosen at the end of this month.

Alongside Hollande, Hidalgo said she also blamed Manuel Valls, a prime minister under Hollande who is now competing for the Socialist party nomination.

And she turned her fire on Emmanuel Macron, a former adviser to Hollande and economy minister who is running for the presidency on an independent ticket.

Hidalgo is supporting former education minister and Socialist Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Vincent Peillon in the primary race. She told the paper that Peillon "elevated the debate" and represented "an expression of social democracy" that could unite the left.



France's Socialists to Debate as Presidency Seen as Lost Cause

- Polls show Valls, Montebourg would fail in general election

The seven socialist politicians seeking France's presidency will debate on television Thursday evening, even as the task looks increasingly like a lost cause.

The candidates, who include former Prime Minister Manuel Valls and four other ex-ministers, are

competing in the primary of France's leftist parties, and polls show that whoever wins is unlikely to survive the initial ballot of France's presidential elections in April.

Manuel Valls

Photographer: Bocs/Bloomberg

Krisztian

"The most likely scenario for the left is a pretty gloomy one of elimination in the first round," said Fabien Escalona, a researcher at Sciences Po Grenoble. "But not all is lost, in that the winner is likely to get a flurry of media attention that could provide a much needed boost."

A Harris Poll released Jan. 5 showed Valls getting 43 percent of the vote in the first round of the primary, followed by former

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11 janvier 2017 à 19:00 UTC-5

- Seven leftist candidates to battle it out in party's primary

Economy Minister Arnaud Montebourg securing 25 percent and former Education Minister Benoit Hamon drawing 22 percent. In the second round, Valls would beat either candidate by at least 10 percentage points. A separate Kantar Sofres poll released Jan. 9 showed Valls winning the first round with a narrower score of 36 percent, and then losing a theoretical run-off to Montebourg by 6 percentage points and being in a dead heat with Hamon.

The candidates, who include former housing minister Sylvia Pinel and two ecological campaigners Jean-Luc Bennahmias and Francois de Rugy, all belong to a federation of left-wing political parties that agreed to jointly organize the primary. Francois Fillon won the center-right primary in November.

"Turnout is expected to be light, much lower than turnout in the

primary of the right and center that elected Fillon," Art Goldhammer, a researcher affiliated with Harvard University's Center for European Studies, said on his blog. "This augurs ill for the eventual winner, whose victory celebration may resemble a wake around the corpse of the Socialist Party."

Polls have been unanimous that whoever emerges from the primary will finish a distant fourth or fifth on April 23 behind the conservative Republican Fillon, Marine Le Pen of the anti-European National Front and former economy minister Emmanuel Macron. Some polls even show Valls or Montebourg finishing behind Jean-Luc Melenchon, who is running with the backing of the communist party.

"The main hope for the left is that Fillon's polling numbers have been falling, so it may turn out to be a

more open race than it appears now," Sciences Po's Escalona said.

Valls' Platform

Le Pen, Melenchon and Macron announced their candidacies directly and didn't have to compete in a primary. About 4.4 million people voted in the center-right primary and Socialist Party head Jean-Christophe Cambadellis said Jan. 5 on Europe1 radio that he's hoping for 2 million voters in the leftist primary.

President Francois Hollande cleared the path for Valls -- his former prime minister -- last month when he said he wouldn't run to prevent the divisions on the left that could favor extremist parties.

Valls, 54, has sought to defend his two-and-a-half years as premier, even though Hollande is the least popular president in French history. Valls has said he'd end the

government's ability to push through legislative measures without debate, even though he frequently did so in his most recent role. Valls' platform, released Jan. 3, dropped many proposals that he'd made earlier in his career such as getting rid of France's 35-hour workweek.

On Tuesday, in the central town of Clermont Ferrand, Valls spoke to 300 people in a half-full gymnasium, whereas Macron in the same town on Jan. 10 filled a 2,000-person conference center. Valls snapped at journalists in attendance who asked him if his campaign was flagging, pointing out the many press shortcomings in elections around the world last year.

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CNBC : French socialists could be fighting a lost cause

Silvia Amaro

DOMINIQUE FAGET | AFP | Getty Images

French Prime Minister Manuel Valls delivers a speech during the 'Paris Europlace' financial forum

The seven candidates fighting to represent the socialist party in the upcoming presidential election in France are facing each other in the first of four TV debates on Thursday.

However, their efforts may be in vain as support for the center-right candidate, Francois Fillon, and the independent Emmanuel Macron strengthens.

"The current simulated polls for the first round show any socialist candidate ... getting a bad 10 percent," Charles Lichfield, Europe associate at the Eurasia group, told

CNBC on Thursday.

Among the seven candidates is the former prime minister, Manuel Valls, who left the seat vacant to run for the presidency. However, discontent in France with the socialist leadership both in parliament and in the presidency, tied up with stronger public support for right-wing views, is making the socialist case difficult to get across.

The socialist primaries take place on January 22 and 29.

Current opinion polls show that whoever leads the French socialist party in the election will have a hard time to overtake the center-right leader Francois Fillon and the far-right candidate Marine Le Pen. A POP 2017 poll showed Thursday a lead of 24 percent to Fillon, slightly

above Le Pen. The same survey showed the independent runner Emmanuel Macron, who previously served as economy minister, in third place with between 16 to 20 percent of the votes, Reuters reported.

According to Lichfield, Fillon is "the favorite to win, absolutely." Also a former prime minister, Fillon has proposed a quota regime for non-EU nationals moving to France and wants more market-friendly policies, such as lowering labour costs.

"But there's a brutality to his message which I think he hasn't managed to counter or alleviate and that's becoming a bit of a problem," Lichfield added.

Though support for the far-right party Front National seems to have decreased over recent weeks, the central scenario remains a second

round dispute between Marine Le Pen and Francois Fillon.

"The FN's brand is still rather toxic. (Marine Le Pen) has tried to detoxify it and in doing that she has confused what she's saying a bit. The fact she has lost a bit of ground in polls recently suggest to me that some of the conservative values people have moved back to the candidate of center-right Francois Fillon and you have other candidates suddenly taking off, so it's not a certainty that she will even be in the second round anymore though, that is the central scenario," Lichfield added.

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F But M. Macron, The Euro Has Already Failed - The Only Question Is What Do We Do About It?

Tim Worstall

Emmanuel Macron is one of those running to be the next French President. And as he does so he really needs to get up to speed with his economics. For he claims that the euro could fail within the next 10 years unless something is done about it. This is an error, a serious one, for the euro has already failed. The only interesting or useful question left is what do we do about it?

The euro may not exist in 10 years' time if Paris and Berlin fail to bolster the single currency union, French presidential candidate Emmanuel

Macron said on Tuesday. Marcon said he believes the current system benefits Germany at the expense of weaker member states. Macron was economy minister under Socialist President Francois Hollande until he resigned last year to create his own political movement and stand as an independent candidate in this year's presidential election.

It doesn't in fact benefit Germany. An independent German currency would have a much higher value than the current euro--thus the euro is making Germans poorer by that decline in the foreign value of their currency.

"The truth is that we must collectively recognise that the euro is incomplete and cannot last without major reforms," Macron said in a speech at the Humboldt University in Berlin.

Speaking in English, he added: "It has not provided Europe with full international sovereignty against the dollar on its rules. It has not provided Europe with a natural convergence between the different member states."

You can't and won't promote convergence by forcing people into the one currency and thus one monetary regime. That's just not

how it works--you can only have an effective single currency when economies covered are already converged. Most importantly, given that one currency does mean one monetary policy, you need all the members to have correlated economies, to be passing through the business cycle at the same speed and time. This is something which simply is not true of the eurozone economy and it's most unlikely that it ever will be either. Thus it was a bad idea to begin with.

As Milton Friedman noted way back when before it all started:

If one country is affected by negative shocks that call for, say, lower wages relative to other countries, that can be achieved by a change in one price, the exchange rate, rather than by requiring changes in thousands on thousands of separate wage rates, or the emigration of labor. The hardships imposed on France by its "franc fort" policy illustrate the cost of a politically inspired determination not to use the exchange rate to adjust to the impact of German unification. Britain's economic growth after it abandoned the European Exchange Rate Mechanism a few years ago to refloat the pound illustrates the effectiveness of the exchange rate as an adjustment mechanism.

Since then we've had massive property booms (and the inevitable crashes) in Ireland and Spain. Driven by euro interest rates that were too low for their economies and set for the benefit of that struggling German one. Post crash the ECB kept interest rates much too high for too long. Italy has had pretty much no economic growth for two decades, Spain's youth unemployment rate is still up near 50%. Greece of course is a disaster and even Finland is having to grind through an internal devaluation.

What's worse is that none of the economic benefits touted have arrived either. There was the claim that there would be much more cross border trade—that just hasn't

turned up. As it happened, the estimates of such were based upon the combination of previous monetary unions, monetary unions that had also coincided with customs unions. And we've now found out that it was the customs union (which is the Single Market) which is the important part, not the monetary union.

There are really only two viable policies to follow how given that we do know that the euro is a failure. We could try to introduce fiscal union. This would be like the US system—money flows into Washington DC and then out again. Such redistribution mitigates the effects of that single monetary policy. But this requires that

Europeans will send 20% of GDP to Brussels to be spent by the bureaucrats there. Or, as we might put it, that Germans really will be paying Greek pensions.

It. Ain't. Gonna. Happen.

The other policy is to admit failure, dismantle the thing and declare victory. Which is what we should do. The euro failed, the only route to making it better is not politically possible. Thus best to dismantle it before events do that for us and in the chaos that forcing the issue would cause.

Seattle Times : Le Pen's world: French nationalism at heart of campaign

Originally published January 12, 2017 at 4:47 am

PARIS (AP) — France is partnered with the United States and Russia in a global battle against Islamic militants. Francs, not euros, fill the pockets of French citizens. Borders are so secure that illegal immigration no longer fuels fears of terror attacks or drains public coffers.

That is France as envisioned by far-right leader Marine Le Pen, a leading candidate for president in the spring election: no globalization, no European Union, no open borders. The nation is its own master.

It's a vision that holds increasing appeal for voters once put off by the image of Le Pen's anti-immigration party as a sanctuary for racists and anti-Semites. A series of deadly extremist attacks, 10 percent unemployment and frustration with mainstream politics have helped make the party she has worked to detoxify a potentially viable alternative.

Early polls place her as one of the top two contenders. The other is former Prime Minister Francois Fillon, a conservative who would slash the ranks of civil servants and trim state-funded health care — an untouchable area for Le Pen whose campaign slogan is "In the Name of the People."

Le Pen believes her chance of victory has been bolstered by Britain's decision to leave the European Union and Donald Trump's election to the U.S. presidency, for her revelatory signs of a world in transition with nationalism and protectionism the new watchwords. She speaks with

confidence of winning, saying "I will" change France.

"This page in the history of the world is turning. We will give back to the nations reasoned protectionism, economic and cultural patriotism," she said last Friday at a meeting with the Anglo-American Press Association. She assured such an approach won't stop a deepening of international ties.

Like Trump, Le Pen, 48, a mother of three and lawyer by training, envisions improved relations with Russia, which she and other National Front officials have visited. But she takes it further.

"I want an alliance to emerge between France, the United States and Russia to fight Islamic fundamentalism because it's a gigantic danger weighing on our democracies," she said at a meeting last week with the Anglo-American Press Association.

"Terrorism is a pistol in the hand of the guilty" and only an alliance can defeat it. "I don't only fight the pistol. I fight the ones who hold it," she said.

For Le Pen and her supporters, "massive migration," notably from Muslim North Africa, is supplanting French civilization and at the root of many France's modern woes. "On est chez nous" ("We're in our land") is a mantra at National Front rallies.

Le Pen insists she has no problem with followers of the Islamic faith, but wants people who espouse radical political ideas in the guise of religion to be put on trial and expelled before they install Sharia, or Islamic law, in France.

Traditional Muslim dress, which many in France consider a gateway to radicalization, could disappear from public view should Le Pen win the presidency. The National Front's

No. 2, Florian Philippot, said last weekend that Le Pen's platform calls for extending a 2004 law banning "ostensible" religious symbols like Muslim headscarves from French classrooms to include the streets. Philippot assured on the France 5 TV channel that "yes, it is part of her project."

Le Pen took over leadership of the National Front in 2011 from her father, party co-founder Jean-Marie Le Pen. Her make-over included sidelining him. The elder Le Pen's party membership was revoked last year after he repeated an anti-Semitic reference that had drawn a court conviction.

But the slogan "French First" — coined by the elder Le Pen in 1985 — remains alive under Marine Le Pen.

Newcomers of all stripes would have to spend several years paying a stipend before being able to avail themselves of free school and health care, Le Pen has said, benefits she considers a draw for immigrants. A National Front statement this month linked lack of shelter for French homeless with the "massive migrant flux."

Nonna Mayer, a leading expert on the party and its electorate, said Le Pen has "gone half-way in changing the party," ridding it of its long-time anti-Semitic image, but making Islam the enemy.

"At the heart of the party of Marine Le Pen ... there is something which is not really compatible with the values of democracy. That's national preference," she said. "It's the idea that one must keep housing, social benefits, family stipends, employment to the French."

For Le Pen, "The enemy is the other. The other is the immigrant and the immigrant is Islam," Mayer said.

Le Pen emphatically rejects the label of extremist, proudly calling herself "a patriot." The words "democracy" and "democratic" roll often off her tongue.

Yet her entourage includes one-time members of an extreme-right movement once noted for its violence. A former leader of the hard-core Identity Bloc in Nice, Philippe Vardon, joined National Front ranks and quickly won a councilor spot in regional elections.

Under Le Pen, the National Front was France's big winner in 2014 European Parliament elections, taking more seats than any other French party. But she wants to do away with the EU, which she claims has stolen national sovereignty, and the euro currency, which she describes as a "knife in the ribs" of nations, ruining economies.

Her EU exit formula is "very simple:" try immediately to negotiate a return of borders, currency, "economic patriotism" to protect French jobs and industry and freedom to pass laws unadulterated by directives from Brussels. Six months later, she would call a referendum and counsel remaining in a "new Europe," if her negotiations are fruitful, or advise bailing out as Britain has done.

"My program cannot be put into place if we remain subjugated by European diktats," she said. "I see the grand return of nationalism."

Le Pen is expected to present her full presidential agenda during a Feb. 4-5 convention. But she set the tone with her New Year's greeting to the French, a "wish of combat" to defeat political adversaries she contends represent the interests of banks, finance, the media — the "system" she decries.

Le Pen in New York for Unannounced Visit During French Race

by

Helene Fouquet

12 janvier 2017 à 07:41 UTC-5

- Marine Le Pen has repeatedly backed Trump and his policies
- Presidential candidate Le Pen is ahead in latest French poll

Marine Le Pen.

Photographer: Marlene Awaad/Bloomberg

French National Front leader Marine Le Pen is in New York on an unannounced visit less than four months before France's presidential election, according to a senior campaign official.

Le Pen, who leads in the latest opinion poll for the presidency, is making a private visit to New York, her campaign chief of staff, David Rachline, said in a text-message exchange. He declined to

say if she would meet publicly with President-elect Donald Trump or anyone from his entourage.

"It's not on her public agenda," Rachline said, when asked if she planned a meeting with Trump or officials close to him. "We don't communicate about private visits."

Le Pen is set to launch her official campaign on Feb. 4 in a meeting with supporters in the French city of Lyon. She has repeatedly said she was supportive of Trump's policies for the U.S. and called him "a sign of

hope" for European anti-establishment politicians in a press conference this month.

Trump has met on several occasions with Nigel Farage, the former leader of the U.K. Independence Party, most recently in December.

Before it's here, it's on the Bloomberg Terminal.

Breitbart : Britain's Ambassador to France Confirms He Won't Be Meeting With Le Pen

The UK's ambassador to France has confirmed that he will not be forging links with Front National leader Marine Le Pen ahead of the French Presidential elections, as the British government has a policy of not engaging with her party.

Appearing in front of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee on Tuesday, Lord Llewellyn told MPs: "With respect to the Front National, we have a policy of not engaging, there is a longstanding policy. That is the policy, which has been the policy for many years."

He earlier confirmed that his offices in Paris had made contact with François Fillon, the Republican candidate, and had already reached out to people within the French

Socialist party ahead of the selection of their candidate.

"We know who the candidate is on the centre-right, the candidate is Monsieur Fillon, obviously we have contacts with him and his team," he said.

"On the left we don't know who the candidate is going to be. We will know the answer on 29 January after the second round of primaries ... my team [is] in touch with people across the picture on the left."

The chair of the committee, Conservative MP Crispin Blunt, expressed surprise at the position taken by Lord Llewellyn in relation to Ms Le Pen, considering that the National Front leader is currently

polling in second place nationally, and is expected to reach the final round of polling in the Presidential elections.

But Lord Llewellyn countered that any change in the government's policy would be a "matter for ministers".

Le Pen has spearheaded efforts to re-position her party as a populist party, standing up for French patriotism against the incursions of the European Union and liberalism into French life.

In December 2015 she stated: "The National Front is the only party to defend an authentic French Republic, a Republic with only one vocation: the national interest, the

development of French employment, the conservation of our way of life, the development of our tradition and the defence of all the French."

That message has seen her party surge in the polls, as evidenced by the 2014 European Parliament elections where the party enjoyed an 18.5 percent increase on their previous result, taking them from seventh place, and three seats, to first place with 24 MEPs.

That success has since been replicated in mayoral and local elections, putting Le Pen on course to become a serious challenger for the Presidential title later this year.

Vice News : A leading French newspaper gives up on public opinion polls ahead of presidential election

By Alexa Liautaud on Jan 11, 2017

One of France's leading newspapers has given up on public opinion polls ahead of France's presidential election in April, and its reasoning, it says, comes down to two recent, unforeseen events: President Trump and Brexit.

"We have been thinking about it for some time now, especially since Brexit and the election of Donald Trump," Stephane Albouy, Le Parisien's editor-in-chief, told AFP last week. Albouy added that they "want to avoid giving the sort of commentary that accompanies a horse race, always focusing on who is in the lead."

France's upcoming presidential election is one of the most decisive of its kind in the country's recent history. With widespread economic and political malaise in Europe and mounting concerns over terrorism providing familiar temptations for the rise of anti-

establishment populism, a far-right win from the National Front could put the future of the European Union at risk.

Already, French voting has upset common trends taken for granted by pollsters. Few predicted extreme-right candidate Marine Le Pen would be considered a viable candidate, let alone a frontrunner. Even fewer predicted she'd be running against center-right candidate Francois Fillon, who, once dubbed "Mr. Nobody," beat out favorites former President Nicolas Sarkozy and former Prime Minister Alan Juppé.

"Commissioning opinion polls now is useless because they will have no bearing on the final result."

In what it says is an effort to create a deeper understanding of France's shifting political landscape, Le Parisien, a daily newspaper focused on France's capital and its surrounding suburbs, will not be commissioning opinion polls during

the election, and will instead focus on their "on-the-ground" reporting.

Le Parisien's senior political reporter, Philippe Martinat said that polling wasn't helpful in terms of understanding the election because popular opinion has yet to fully develop. Journalist Adrien Sénécat writing for Le Monde voiced a similar distrust of polling in November, though the newspaper will continue polling throughout the election.

"Commissioning opinion polls now is useless because they will have no bearing on the final result," said Martinat. "This doesn't mean that we are against polling, but we prefer to focus our political analysis based on what we see and capture on the ground, rather than rely on opinions that have yet to fully develop over the course of the campaign.

Though the focus on "on-the-ground" reporting was reiterated by editor-in-chief Albouy in an interview with FranceInter radio, Albouy also

mentioned they would be saving "tens of thousands of euros," by not doing polls. Additionally, Le Parisien reporters would still be able to comment on those commissioned by other outlets.

This muddled approach highlights the financial challenges confronting most French newsrooms rather than the journalistic limits of polling, according to Esteban Pratiel, a research manager for IFOP, a French public opinion and market research company commissioned by leading newspapers in France.

"Newspapers have already strongly reduced their commissions of polls for a certain time because the French press is in crisis," said Pratiel alluding to the drop in circulation in French press in the last decade. "Other clients have... started to replace newspapers in commissioning public opinion polls, especially for this election."

French newspapers have decidedly less disposable income than in previous elections to spend on polling. Between 2009 and 2013, revenue of French newspaper publishing dropped by almost a fourth, from 7.4 billion dollars to 5.6 billion, according to the most recent data released by Statista, an online data company. The company predicts revenue to fall a further 22 percent, from approximately 4.86 billion to 3.74 billion dollars.

Declining newspaper revenues, unpredictable politics, and underlying questions about the future of the

Bloomberg

Air France-KLM Chief Downbeat on Prospects for 'Difficult' 2017

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by

12 janvier 2017 à 05:54 UTC-5

- Carrier braced for squeeze as oil prices start to climb
- Janailac says low margins, high debt are biggest challenges

Air France-KLM Group Chief Executive Officer Jean-Marc Janailac delivered a downbeat assessment of the carrier's prospects for 2017, saying it faces "difficult" times in the year ahead amid rising oil prices and an ongoing struggle to rein in expenses.

Weak margins combined with high debt remain the greatest challenges to Europe's biggest airline, Janailac said in an address at a press reception in Paris late Wednesday. He declined to comment on the status of talks with pilots linked to the cost-cutting drive, citing the need to build trust with unions.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Jan. 12, 2017 6:53 a.m. ET

PARIS—A French court acquitted Guy Wildenstein, the heir of a famous art-dealing family, in a landmark tax-fraud case in which prosecutors had requested a €250 million (\$265.7 million) fine.

The French tax authorities had sued Mr. Wildenstein and other members of the family in a criminal court claiming they had evaded inheritance taxes. Daniel

French media are all seemingly converging during April's pivotal election.

"The election will have a major impact on the whole French media landscape," said Alice Antheaume, the executive dean of Sciences Po Journalism School in Paris in a recent report for NiemanLab. "The news competition will be fierce. We won't know who'll have the greatest impact until the final runoff results. France's legacy media companies are not so strong."

Specifically in an election that is so uncertain, Pratviel worries that

French media can't replicate the breadth of representation of widespread surveys.

"In our polls we interview people from all backgrounds, all horizons, we are able to represent those who are not represented in the media," said Pratviel. "If we look at the elections so far, the polls have always been right. Oftentimes the errors will be in the analysis of the polls."

Le Parisien is the first large newspaper to turn away from opinion polls ahead of April's election, but they most likely won't

be the last, according to Pratviel. If other newspapers follow suit and public opinion surveys decline, the pollster anticipates French voters will end up with a murkier understanding of its political landscape rather than a clearer one.

Alexa Liautaud is a French-American reporter based in New York City.

Cover: (AP Photo/Francois Mori)

Jean-Marc Janailac speaking in Paris on Jan. 11.

Photographer: Eric Piermont/AFP via Getty Images

"We will have to face the increase of oil prices, of the dollar, and an increase in interest rates, and this while our profitability is weak and we have a high debt without the option of appealing to our shareholders, given our weak stock valuation," the CEO said.

Janailac took over in July after predecessor Alexandre de Juniac quit following clashes with unions over plans to pare expenses and move more flights to Air France-KLM's Transavia discount unit, amid a squeeze from Mideast carriers on long-haul and routes and discount specialists such as EasyJet Plc in Europe.

The new chief, whose background is in buses and trains, has taken a more conciliatory approach, though the rise in oil costs against a background of falling fares tied to a glut in capacity will only heighten the pressure to deliver savings. Passenger numbers at the Air France arm slipped 1.4 percent last year, and the group relied on

Transavia and Dutch division KLM for gains.

Deutsche Lufthansa AG, where traffic grew faster than at Air France-KLM in 2016, last week issued guidance for yields and fuel costs that analysts said pointed to a profit decline this year. The International Air Transport Association, now led by de Juniac, warned in December that European airline earnings would slump 25 percent, depressed by "intense competition" and the threat of terrorist attacks.

The new head of the Air France brand, Franck Terner, said at the reception that he'll introduce a management revamp on Jan. 26. He has said previously that the changes will restructure a business held back by "widely recognized limits and complexities."

Plans for a new French long-haul carrier, dubbed Boost, with a lower cost base are advancing ahead of its introduction next winter, starting with medium-sector routes and extending into intercontinental services in summer 2018.

Discussions with pilots about the airline, which Janailac said will be positioned in "the most competitive

markets," should be completed before the end of March. Lufthansa already operates lower-cost long-haul services via its Eurowings brand and British Airways said on Dec. 22 that it will introduce a similar service starting with flights from Barcelona next summer.

Janailac said that 2016 was broadly positive overall, despite factors including the spate of terrorist attacks on French soil that discouraged travel, the squeeze from Persian Gulf operators and the emergence of new competitors such as French Blue and Norwegian Air Shuttle ASA.

"All of this creates some overcapacity compared to demand that grows, but not as much," he said. Air France-KLM will report full-year earnings on Feb. 16.

Before it's here, it's on the Bloomberg Terminal. LEARN MORE

French Court Acquits Art Mogul Guy Wildenstein of Tax Fraud (online)

Inti Landauro

Wildenstein, Guy's father, and Alec Wildenstein, his brother, died in 2001 and 2008 respectively.

The French court ruled that even though Mr. Wildenstein and other members of his family dissimulated family assets through trust funds set up in tax havens, they hadn't broken French law.

No French law detailed how the transmission of trust funds had to be taxed until 2011, the court said.

"It is not the role of the court to take the place of the legislator," Judge Olivier Geron, the court president, said in his ruling. Mr. Geron said he understood the French people would probably struggle to accept the ruling given the wealth of the defendant, but justice has to treat everybody equally, "be they rich or destitute," he said.

The lawsuit was closely followed by the art world. The case showed that tax authorities in France and elsewhere are starting to go after valuable art pieces held in offshore

trust funds and free ports that were considered out of reach until now.

The ruling isn't final. The prosecutor can lodge an appeal.

Mr. Wildenstein, who wasn't present for the ruling, is "satisfied and relieved", his lawyer Hervé Temime said after the court hearing.

Mr. Wildenstein still faces a separate dispute with the French tax authority.

Write to Inti Landauro at inti.landauro@wsj.com

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

UBS Loses Human Rights Appeal in French Tax-Evasion Case (online)

John Letzing

Updated Jan. 12, 2017 7:58 a.m. ET

ZURICH—UBS Group AG has lost a bid to appeal its treatment by France's legal system at the European Court of Human Rights, which ruled that the Swiss bank had not had its right to be presumed innocent violated.

The Strasbourg, France-based ECHR said Thursday that a French court was within its own rights to require Zurich-based UBS to post a €1.1 billion (\$1.2 billion) bond as part of a continuing probe of the bank's alleged aiding of tax evasion among French clients.

In 2014, French investigating judges had ordered UBS to post the bond,

which could ultimately be put toward fines and restitution, as part of an expanding examination of the bank's alleged facilitation of the laundering of the proceeds of tax fraud.

UBS responded by calling the bond amount "unprecedented and unwarranted," and in 2015 filed its relatively unusual appeal with the ECHR, arguing that it was being denied a fair trial.

The ECHR said Thursday the bond "did not prejudge the outcome of the proceedings" against UBS, and was based both on material gathered during the course of an investigation and "thorough reasoning."

The court's decision is final.

A UBS spokesman said in a statement that, "We regret the court's decision and disagree with its reasoning."

The spokesman added: "We value the fact that the court accepted this case for consideration. This already shows the unprecedented nature of this matter."

France is one of a number of countries in which UBS and other Swiss banks have run into legal trouble as a result of the alleged—or acknowledged—aiding of tax evasion by providing accounts shrouded behind Switzerland's bank secrecy laws.

UBS has faced related issues in Germany and Belgium. In 2009, the bank acknowledged helping

American clients evade taxes and agreed to pay \$780 million.

Bradley Birkenfeld, a former UBS employee who assisted the U.S. case against the bank, has also aided the French investigation.

Last year, Switzerland's tax authority ordered UBS to hand over identifying information about French clients, following a request for assistance made by the Swiss authority's counterpart in France. The French request was itself based on data received from tax authorities in Germany, who had seized the information during their own tax-related probes.

Write to John Letzing at john.letzing@wsj.com

Variety : French Director Lisa Azuelos on the Contemporary Resonance of Her 'Dalida' Biopic

January 11, 2017 | 04:51PM PT

"Dalida," the ambitious biopic depicting the rise and fall of famed Egyptian-born Italian-French singer Yolanda Cristina Gigliotti, ranks as one of 2017's most anticipated films in France.

Co-produced, distributed and sold by Pathe, the film bowed in France today and is having its premiere at the opening night of UniFrance Rendez-Vous with French Cinema in Paris, which kicks off Jan. 12. Lisa Azuelos, best-known for helming hit coming-of-age dramedy "LOL," wrote, directed and produced (with Julien Madon) "Dalida," a passion project which took five years to get made. Since unveiling the promoreal of the film in Cannes, Pathe has already pre-sold the film in Benelux, Bulgaria, Canada, Ex-Yugoslavia, Greece, Italy, Middle East, Morocco, Poland, Portugal, South Korea, Switzerland, Tunisia and Turkey. While promoting the film for the UniFrance Rendez-Vous, Azuelos discussed with *Variety* about the making of "Dalida," its star, Sveva Alviti, and the movie's contemporary resonance.

The biggest surprise of "Dalida" is Sveva Alviti, an Italian model-turned-thesp who delivers a breakthrough performance in the title role. How did you find her?

I said, 'let's do an international casting, even if the actress doesn't speak a word of French.' I searched for an actress in many countries, from Greece to Italy and eventually realized that it had to be an Italian actress to get the authentic accent of Dalida. When I came across Alviti, I stopped searching. I had found my Dalida. Sveva has an extremely touching gaze and the same beauty, the same mixture of

strength and vulnerability that Dalida had.

I heard that she learned French for the part.

That's true. She didn't speak French at all when we cast her in late June. She worked tirelessly seven days a week until we started shooting the film in early February. I gave her a lot of freedom to feel the part and play it instinctively, and she delivered a mesmerizing performance.

You were probably approached by many prominent actresses for this part, why did you opt for an actress who isn't well known?

Casting an unknown actress for the role of Dalida was the best decision because it allows the public to not project anything onto the character. When you have a famous actress playing a famous character most often it's hard for audiences to forget about the actress and believe in the character she's playing. It's one of the pitfalls to avoid with biopics.

Why did you decide to start the film with Dalida's first suicide attempt in 1967?

I wanted to tell all of her life but not in a linear way. To me, Dalida's life is divided in two chapters. The first part, which ends in 1967 with her first suicide attempt, depicts her normal life, falling in love and forging a career. The suicide attempt marked a turning point and shaped Dalida's identity during the second portion of her life. She spent it trying to find happiness again, and some appetite for life. But it's very difficult to find happiness when you feel dead inside because you're grieving someone you loved intensely.

How did you research for this film?

Half of it was classic journalistic work: I read a lot of interviews, biographies and watched many documentaries and talked to Orlando (Dalida's beloved brother and manager). The other half was written based on instincts and interpretations. I think I have a lot in common with Dalida so it felt very natural for me to write about her life, to put myself in her mind. I understand her need for spirituality and the struggle she endured, I know what it feels like when happiness slips away and doesn't flow back. So this film is my interpretation of her life and psyche. But truth doesn't exist anyway, there are only perspectives of the truth.

What's striking in the film is the freedom which Dalida had in her love life even though she was a big star, therefore exposed to the public eye. She cheated on her first husband, she dated an 18 year-old man when she was in her 30's, got an abortion, etc. Why do you think she was able to get away with so much and stay popular?

She had a brother (Orlando) who protected her and he was also her manager. It's easy to see that many stars who enjoy a long and mostly scandal-free career are protected. For instance Celine Dion, who worked with her husband until he passed away. Then in the past there were duos like Michel Berger and France Gall. But still, Dalida was almost publicly repudiated when she cheated on her first husband. In the movie, you can hear a man who says: "When you cheat, you should be banned from singing," and that's something I heard in one archive footage.

Would you say the film has a feminist message, or rather do you see Dalida as an icon of feminism?

I'm just relating facts that are tainted with the spirit of feminism. I'm showing what it meant to be a liberated woman, like Dalida, like Brigitte Bardot, in the late 50's, and the price of being such a woman. What's somewhat alarming is that not that much has changed and we're now in 2017. The rights to have an abortion, for instance, is being debated as we speak in some countries. Nothing should be taken for granted.

And yet, as liberated and independent as Dalida was, she aspired to marry and have children before getting a career. How do you explain this ambivalence?

This ambivalence is the core of her problem. Deep inside, Dalida was Yolanda, a woman who was raised in a strict catholic family and she knew how much happiness would children and motherhood bring into her life. And at the same time, on this outside, she was this fiercely independent woman, this powerhouse.

"Dalida" looks glossy but I hear the budget is actually reasonable. What artistic choices did you make to achieve this result?

We were all professionals working on this film. At every stage of the production we had to make drastic choices to depict four big historical periods. The movie's budget would have been 30% higher three years ago, but times have changed and we must adapt. I decided to make an intimate portrait of Dalida and that didn't call for extensive

restitutions and too much exteriors. Anyway, we weren't making a film about Edgar Hoover... The idea was to show Dalida like we had never seen her before, away from the spotlights, and the fact that

we had to work with that budget helped us make the right decisions.

Do you think "Dalida" can interest people abroad, even those who are not so familiar with the singer?

Yes, Dalida's life is fascinating whether or not we know who she was. She was an extremely modern woman and the film deals with universal, contemporary themes that touch women and men, like solitude, love, grief and the star system.

**The
Washington
Post**

Six Volkswagen executives indicted in emissions-cheating scandal

<https://www.facebook.com/stevenoverly>

Volkswagen AG confirmed on Jan. 10 it has negotiated a \$4.3 billion draft settlement with U.S. regulators to resolve its diesel emissions troubles and plans to plead guilty to criminal misconduct. (Reuters)

Volkswagen AG confirmed on Jan. 10 it has negotiated a \$4.3 billion draft settlement with U.S. regulators to resolve its diesel emissions troubles and plans to plead guilty to criminal misconduct. Volkswagen AG confirmed on Jan. 10 it has negotiated a \$4.3 billion draft settlement with U.S. regulators. (Reuters)

Federal prosecutors indicted six executives at German automaker Volkswagen on Wednesday in connection with the company's diesel emissions scandal.

Five of the six executives are thought to be residing in Germany, according to the Department of Justice. Attorney General Loretta Lynch said it was too soon to say how that will impact legal proceedings moving forward. The sixth executive was arrested at an airport in Miami over the weekend as he was trying to leave for Germany.

Additional executives at the company are being investigated and could potentially face charges, Lynch said.

The pursuit of executives by criminal prosecutors is a rare occurrence among big companies, whose top people almost never face jail time. In other recent scandals involving automakers such as GM and Toyota — in which safety defects led to deaths of drivers and passengers —

the companies paid big fines but admitted no criminal wrongdoing; and no executive saw the inside of a prison cell.

David Uhlmann, who served as the head of the DOJ's environmental crimes section from 2000 to 2007, said that the settlement was a textbook case of how the agency should address "egregious wrongdoing by corporations."

"Too often, justice comes up short in corporate crime prosecution but not in the VW case," the University of Michigan law professor said.

Officials said Wednesday that the Volkswagen case stood out because the deception lasted 10 years and involved senior managers.

"As you all know we cannot put companies in jail, but we can hold their employees personally accountable and we can force companies to pay hefty fines," said FBI Deputy Director Andrew McCabe.

Volkswagen agreed Wednesday to plead guilty to three criminal counts and pay \$4.3 billion in criminal and civil fines in the settlement.

The six executives face charges of conspiracy to commit fraud, and violation of the U.S. Clean Air Act. Those indicted were Heinz-Jakob Neusser, 56, Jens Hadler, 50, Richard Dorenkamp, 68, Bernd Gottweis, 69, Oliver Schmidt, 48, and Jürgen Peter, 59, all of Germany. Schmidt was arrested and charged earlier this week in Miami. All of the accused have ties to Volkswagen's engine development and quality assurance divisions, both in the U.S. and Germany. They directed employees to develop and install technology to evade emissions testing, then falsely

marketed the car engines as "clean diesel," according to the DOJ.

Another former Volkswagen employee, engineer James Liang, plead guilty to fraud charges in September.

A spokesman for Volkswagen declined to disclose the employment status of the six indicted individuals, citing a policy not to discuss ongoing investigations or personnel matters.

Hans Dieter Pötsch, who chairs the company's supervisory board, said in a statement: "When the diesel matter became public, we promised that we would get to the bottom of it and find out how it happened — comprehensively and objectively. . . . We are no longer the same company we were 16 months ago."

Volkswagen shed several top executives and implemented other internal changes after the emissions scandal came to light. The company also apologized to U.S. lawmakers and pledged to regain the trust of American consumers. The DOJ said those actions helped the company avoid even steeper penalties.

A judge must now approve the settlement before it's made official. That court date has not been set, a DOJ spokesman said.

University of Richmond law professor Carl W. Tobias said the Volkswagen settlement sends a message to other companies that illegal conduct can come with harsh penalties. But the remaining aspects of the investigation will now depend on president-elect Donald Trump's incoming administration.

"Numerous questions remain, such as who else at VW might be prosecuted, whether the five [in Germany] can be brought to justice,

whether VW's behavior will improve, etc.," Tobias said.

Volkswagen is charged with conspiring to defraud the government and violate environmental regulations from May 2006 to November 2015 by installing devices in its diesel engine vehicles that obscure the amount of nitrogen oxide they spew into the air. Those devices and accompanying software allowed Volkswagen to evade regulators for years, the DOJ asserts.

However, Volkswagen falsely claimed that its vehicles met all environmental regulations in order to import and sell the affected models in the United States from 2009 to 2015, according to the charges. In all, the emissions scandal touched 11 million vehicles worldwide, including more than half a million sold in the United States.

When U.S. officials finally caught on, Volkswagen "did corruptly alter, destroy, mutilate and conceal business records" in order to obstruct the investigation, charging documents declare. A Volkswagen supervisor is accused of deleting emails and files related to the deceptive device and instructing employees to do the same, charging documents show.

Wednesday's announcement will bring Volkswagen's total fines to roughly \$20 billion. The largest of those penalties was the \$14.7 billion the company was ordered to pay to buy back cars and otherwise compensate customers impacted by the scandal.

Read more news from The Washington Post's Innovations section.

**The
New York
Times**

Fewer Migrants Entered Germany in 2016, and Rejections Increased

Russell Goldman

Afghans who were deported from Germany left Kabul International Airport in Afghanistan in December. Massoud Hossaini/Associated Press

Germany, once seen as Europe's most welcoming country, rejected or deported thousands of asylum seekers last year, as public support for migrants waned in the wake of

terrorist attacks by assailants from Muslim-majority countries.

About 280,000 new asylum seekers arrived in Germany in 2016, substantially down from the 890,000 migrants who, fleeing war or seeking economic opportunities, entered the country in 2015, the interior minister, Thomas de Maizière, said on Wednesday.

As the rate of new arrivals declined, Mr. de Maizière said, the rate of rejected asylum seekers increased. About 80,000 people either left voluntarily or were deported in 2016, he said, twice as many as in 2015.

The new figures were released just weeks after a terrorist attack at a Christmas market in Berlin, in which 12 people were killed by a Tunisian asylum seeker, and days after the

government of Chancellor Angela Merkel proposed policy changes that would increase the police's ability to monitor migrants and hasten deportations.

Ms. Merkel, who in 2015 declared that there was "no limit" to Germany's acceptance of migrants, has since changed her position ahead of elections scheduled for this fall. Among her government's

proposals are new background checks for more than one million migrants; electronic monitoring of foreigners considered security risks; expanded federal police powers; and increased deportations.

In addition to the Berlin assault, attacks in Germany last year included an ax attack on a train by an Afghan youth and a suicide bombing carried out by a Syrian man.

According to the Interior Ministry, the government received 745,545 applications for asylum in 2016. They included 268,866 applications from Syrians, 127,892 from Afghans and 97,162 from Iraqis.

Deported Afghans at the Kabul airport. According to the German Interior Ministry, the government received 745,545 applications for asylum in 2016, 127,892 of them from Afghans.

The New York Times

Liz Alderman

First it was the icy snow. Now comes the freezing rain.

An arctic blast that has reached as far south as the Mediterranean is generating perilous conditions for thousands of refugees in overcrowded migrant camps in Greece and prompting the European Union to declare the situation "untenable."

On Wednesday, a Greek navy ship docked at Lesbos island to take on as many as 500 refugees. They have been struggling to survive the subzero temperatures in the severely overcrowded main camp in Moria, using pup tents that were supposed to be temporary when they were set up last year in warmer weather.

Video and photos taken by migrants inside the camp and posted to social media showed flimsy shelters sagging under a blanket of snow, and people waiting in long lines in the falling snow for food and to use bathrooms.

In one video, a man identifying himself as a migrant shows people lifting the flaps of snow-covered tents near a slushy pathway. "Look at how human beings are living," said the man, speaking French.

Imploring officials of the European Union to look at the situation themselves, he said: "Why can't people leave here? How is it possible to live in these conditions, my God?"

Massoud Hossaini/Associated Press

The measures that the federal government and the European Union have taken to address the crisis "are taking hold," Mr. de Maizière told reporters. "We've been successful in managing and controlling the process of migration."

Arrivals to Germany have declined since the European Union and Turkey negotiated a deal last spring to limit the number of migrants reaching the Continent by crossing the Aegean Sea, said Frank Laczko, director of data analysis for the International Organization for Migration. But migrants from elsewhere in Europe and Africa are taking routes that do not take them through Turkey, he said.

"Policy makers in Germany are especially concerned about the steadily increasing migratory pressure from the African continent,

particularly West Africa," Mr. Laczko said. Migrants from West Africa are often seeking economic opportunities in Europe rather than fleeing war, like those from Syria.

Many of the migrants who made it to Germany last year did not receive asylum and were returned to their countries of origin. However, Mr. Laczko said, most of that group were not deported but returned voluntarily.

A "record number of migrants, whose claims for asylum have been rejected, are being returned from Germany," he said. "But most of these migrants left Germany voluntarily: 55,000 in 2016, compared to 37,220 in 2015. The number of migrants forcibly returned is much lower: 25,000 in 2016, and 20,914 in 2015."

Elsewhere in Europe, cold weather is forcing governments to provide

better shelter to migrants, many of whom live on the streets or in threadbare tents in refugee camps.

In Greece on Wednesday, a naval ship used for ferrying military tanks was sent to the island of Lesbos to house about 500 migrants living in a refugee camp.

In Serbia, officials said, about 400 migrants agreed to stop sleeping on the streets, in parks, in an abandoned warehouse and in train cars, and instead sought shelter at official asylum centers. A government statement said that no migrant women and children remained on the streets of the country's capital, Belgrade, after a winter storm brought heavy snows and frigid temperatures.

Wintry Blast in Greece Imperils Refugees in Crowded Camps

camp in Greece. Muhammed Muheisen/Associated Press

Eric Kempson, a British citizen who has been living on Lesbos for over a decade, has been documenting the deteriorating conditions in the Moria refugee camp, posting videos of tents collapsing under the weight of snow and migrants slogging through muddy walkways.

"It is now heavy rain and melting snow, which is causing flooding in the camp," Mr. Kempson wrote to The New York Times, via Facebook, describing the conditions in the camp on Wednesday. "It's like we begin the vicious circle again and nothing gets better, only worse."

On Monday, the European Commission issued a statement saying the Greek refugee situation was the responsibility of Greek authorities. "The situation has become untenable," a spokeswoman, Natasha Bertaud, said in Brussels.

The United Nations refugee agency and other aid groups have been working to move migrants from camps into better shelters, including hotels. In some cases, however, they have met resistance: Hotel owners on Samos, for example, were generally refusing to house migrants, Mr. Schoenbauer said.

But a bigger problem is the extremely slow processing of asylum applications for those in the Greek camps. While the numbers of people streaming across the Aegean Sea from Turkey have slowed to a trickle after Turkey and the European Union signed a deal to

resolve the crisis last March, thousands of migrants have yet to be registered for asylum.

That is partly because the European Union has sent just a fraction of the assistance it pledged to Greece last year to help clear the backlog.

A separate European Union plan to ease Greece's burden by relocating tens of thousands of asylum seekers has also failed to take off, with European countries taking only a few thousand of the many stuck in Greece.

The bottlenecks have overwhelmed many of the camps, especially on the Greek islands, where migrants arriving after the March deal are supposed to be held until being deported to Turkey.

The camp at Moria, for instance, run by the Greek police and nongovernmental organizations and designed for about 3,000 people, was reinforced with small container shelters that can each house up to 30 people.

But hundreds of makeshift tents have been set up outside for months to accommodate an overflow of asylum seekers — first under the beating Greek sun, and now under the pelting snow and rain.

"The snow is only the tip of the iceberg," Mr. Schoenbauer said. "The bigger problem is the overcrowding of the islands, and one reason for the overcrowding is the fact that the asylum procedure remains far too slow."

Italy's New Prime Minister in Intensive Care After Emergency Heart Procedure

Giada Zampano

Updated Jan. 11, 2017 12:49 p.m. ET

ROME—Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni had an emergency surgical procedure to clear an obstructed coronary artery and is recovering in the hospital, his spokeswoman said.

Mr. Gentiloni, 62 years old, felt ill late Tuesday, after returning from an official visit to France.

His spokeswoman said the angioplasty operation went well and he was awake in intensive care in Rome's Gemelli hospital. She said it was unclear how long he would remain there, but might need to stay for at least another couple of days.

"I'm well. I'll be back at work soon," Mr. Gentiloni wrote on his Twitter account Wednesday evening. Earlier, the hospital called the operation a success in a short medical bulletin.

The prime minister's spokeswoman added that Mr. Gentiloni was in touch with his staff via phone calls and texts, but declined to comment on whether his health would affect the government in the medium term.

For now, Mr. Gentiloni, who took office in December following Matteo Renzi's resignation, has canceled Thursday's visit to London, when he was due to meet British Prime Minister Theresa May. On Tuesday, the Italian premier met French

President François Hollande in the first of a planned round of international visits.

Mr. Renzi resigned after his proposed constitutional overhauls were defeated in a referendum vote.

Mr. Gentiloni, who has pledged to work in strong continuity with Mr. Renzi's government, faces tough challenges ahead.

One of the premier's first moves has been the creation of a €20 billion (\$21.1 billion) fund needed to shore up the country's troubled banks, setting the stage for the rescue of Italy's lender Banca Monte dei Paschi di Siena SpA.

Mr. Gentiloni has also pledged to take a strong stand in Europe on migration policy, a major issue in a country that remains the main entry point for seaborne migrants, and to continue Italy's push to loosen fiscal austerity rules imposed by the European Union.

Corrections & Amplifications: On Tuesday, the Italian premier had met French President François Hollande. An earlier version of this article misspelled the French President's name. (Jan.11, 2017)

Write to Giada Zampano at giada.zampano@wsj.com

Meet the pro-Russian, anti-Muslim European leader who was just invited to Trump's White House

<https://www.facebook.com/anthony.faiola>

PRAGUE — He is against Western sanctions on Russia and recently got a phone call from President-elect Donald Trump with an invitation to the White House in April. He has said there is no such thing as a "moderate Muslim," hates "political correctness" and does not rule out the possibility that the U.S. Embassy in Prague secretly organized a protest against him.

His name is Milos Zeman, the 72-year-old president of the Czech Republic. Formerly a member of the ruling Social Democratic Party, today Zeman is the honorary chairman of the Party of Civic Rights and a contentious leader known for attempting to pump up the powers of the traditionally ceremonial president. He was elected in 2013 and previously served as prime minister from 1998 to 2002. He sat down Wednesday for an exclusive interview with The Washington Post. From an olive-colored room in Prague Castle, here's what he had to say, redacted for space.

Q. You've been invited by President-elect Donald Trump to visit the White House. How did that come about?

A. I was the single European head of state who publicly supported Trump before the president elections. I stress before, because there are many politicians who admired Trump after the elections, when courage is cheap. ... My reasons, my arguments for such public support? At first, it is just his courage. Politicians should be

courageous and not hesitate ... and he has courage. Second, he has a similar position [to mine] on the fight against Islamic terrorism and illegal migration. And third, you know the term political correctness, so I will give you one example only. Political correctness is to say "international terrorism." Courage is to say "Islamic terrorism." So it will be a pleasure to meet Donald Trump in the White House for those reasons.

Q. When will you be going?

A. The second half of April.

Q. Did Donald Trump's people call you?

A. Donald Trump called me.

Q. Personally?

A. Direct line. It was a private discussion. ... He said that he knows the Czech Republic. He visited the Czech Republic because of his former wife [the Czech-born Ivana]. And that is why he said that the Czech Republic is a very beautiful country. And I have agreed.

Q. Why did an invitation never come from Obama?

A. I disagree with his position toward Israel. ... I dislike any hesitation in this area. And more than that, the situation in the Middle East. Obama's policy destroyed practically all the Middle East's structures and countries.

Q. You have been called pro-Russian. Are you? And do you support an end to the Western sanctions against Russia?

A. This is the standard slogan of my opponents. ... Do you know why I am against sanctions? Because they represent a lose-lose strategy ... because I am against the sanctions, they understand me as a pro-Russian politician. That's all.

Q. Then it is untrue? You are not pro-Russian?

A. I am not financed by Russia ... no vodka from Russia, no money from Russia. ... They say that I am even paid by Russians, but in fact I am only an agent of Czechia, the Czech Republic.

Q. One of your top aides, Martin Nejedly, was a former partner with Lukoil, the Russian oil giant, in a Czech subsidiary. Lukoil even paid a large fine for Nejedly's firm after a failed fuel deal.

A. Probably, yes. It is a problem of the Lukoil company. Not my problem.

Q. An unsubstantiated report from a pro-Kremlin news site emerged claiming that the U.S. Embassy in Prague was behind a 2014 protest against you on the 25th anniversary of the Velvet Revolution. Do you believe it?

A. I don't know.

Q. So you think it's possible?

A: Everything is possible.

Q. In 2016, Czech intelligence issued a report stating that the Russians were perpetrating covert infiltration of Czech media for the purposes of spreading

propaganda and fake news. Do you agree with their assessment?

A. If you have some views, for instance, Russians have some views and you want to formulate it publicly in the media, it is not misinformation, it is not propaganda. Let us take, for instance, political parties. There are exchanges of arguments, sometimes politician slogans. I understand it is a normal situation because I believe in the common sense of citizens, in the Czech Republic and in America. And more than that, I dislike journalists. Because they understand their view as something superior compared to the views of the rest of the population, probably 99 percent. So if they have some views, please let us argue. But if they declare their superiority, that is a mistake — that's why I dislike journalists.

Q. The Czech Interior Ministry recently created a new unit to monitor fake news. I hear you are not a fan?

A. Nobody has the monopoly on truth. This part of the Ministry of Interior, approximately 15 people, who not only do not have a monopoly on truth, but they have no qualifications for analysis for what is true and what is false.

Q. Unsubstantiated reports have emerged that Donald Trump adviser Michael Cohen and others from his team met with Russian officials in Prague during the presidential campaign. Donald Trump has denied this. Do you have any knowledge of any such meeting?

A. If this meeting has been realized, what is his name, Michael Cohen, was very impolite, because there was no meeting with me, the president of the Czech Republic! It is very impolite indeed!

Q. So you have no knowledge of any meeting between the Russians and anyone from Donald Trump's team?

A. No, not at all. I think it is nonsense.

Today's WorldView

**The
New York
Times**

Norway Becomes First Country to Start Switching Off FM Radio

Henrik Pryser
Libell

OSLO — Norway opened a chapter in telecommunications history on Wednesday, becoming the first country to cease FM radio broadcasting. The switch, to digital broadcasting, is intended to save money, but critics are worried about the effect on drivers and listeners of small radio stations.

The move to "radio digitization" was decided by Parliament in 2011, and a timetable was announced in 2015. At 11:11 a.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 11 — a time chosen because it was easy to remember, according to the national broadcaster, NRK — nationwide radio channels began stopping FM broadcasts, switching to a system known as digital audio broadcasting that proponents say offers a wider range of broadcasting options and greater sound quality.

The change is occurring county by county, starting with Nordland, in the north of Norway. Oslo, the capital, will turn off FM broadcasting in September, and the process will be completed nationwide by Dec. 13.

Norway's Culture Ministry estimated that it would save 180 million kroner a year, or about \$25 million.

FM broadcasting originated in the United States in the 1930s and arrived in Norway in the 1950s. Other countries have considered dropping FM broadcasting, including Britain, Switzerland and Denmark, but no decision has been made; Sweden considered the switch but abandoned the idea.

Some Norwegians, like Benjamin Stage Storm, a hospital doctor living

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

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Q. You have said there is no such thing as a moderate Muslim. Can you explain?

A. Let me start with Nazi Germany. In the '30s in the last century, the Germans were decent people. The nation of Goethe and Schiller and so on. In only three years, they became the fanatic Nazis. They all were not

in Bodo, in Nordland, said the change was no big deal for him and his family.

"We don't listen much to radio, and in the car we have an SD card reader," which lets users play prerecorded music stored on tiny digital cards, he said in a phone interview, "so we listen to music on that, almost old-time mix tapes."

He added: "We do listen to radio shows, but we get them from podcasts or off the SD cards."

Dr. Stage Storm said, however, that the government and NRK were spending a "vast amount of resources on shutting down a functional system and at the same time pushing lots of people into scrapping their otherwise well-working radios."

The change is good news for radio sellers, however.

Camilla Tully, a spokeswoman for the retail chain Clas Ohlson, said the demand for digital radios had grown steadily since Parliament's vote in 2011.

"The sale of DAB radios exploded before Christmas, and the sales tripled over the last couple of months," she said in a phone interview. "Before Christmas, we were sold out of several models. These days the demand is particularly high in Nordland, both for DAB radio and DAB adapters for car stereos."

Oyvind Vasaasen, an official at NRK who is overseeing the change, said that Norway had been an "early mover" in digital radio, introducing internet radio broadcasting as far back as 1995.

victims of this ideology but strong supporters of this ideology. And now, just imagine, you have a Muslim community of approximately 2 billion people. If the Germans were able to be ... radicalized during three years only, there is a serious danger that those people — you might call them moderate Muslims — might be radicalized by, for instance, Islamist State.

Q. You have also said you do not believe Muslims can assimilate into European cultures.

Given the size of the country — with its mountains and fjords — and its small population, it is particularly expensive to offer both FM and digital audio broadcasting, he said.

"The costs of maintaining an upgraded FM system would in the long run affect the quality of programs we can offer the listeners," he said. "Digitizing the radio media is part of the modernization of Norway."

Aage Sveum, a radio collector, expressed fears that the change would put drivers at risk. "What is the purpose of having a mandatory emergency alert system if no one has radios in their cars anymore?" he asked.

Nils Sodal, a spokesman for the Norwegian Automobile Federation, echoed that concern, noting that about two million cars in Norway still did not have digital radios. He said the association did not oppose the switch, but was worried that many motorists would not switch to the digital radios. A new car radio costs about 2,000 kroner, or about \$232.

Thor Magnar Thorsen, the vice president of the Association of Local Radio Stations in Norway, told the newspaper Dagbladet last year that the change might come "at the expense of smaller radio stations."

Stephen Lax, a senior lecturer in communication technology at the University of Leeds in England, said he was not certain that Norway's switch would portend a trend.

"Norway has a small and relatively affluent population that can be convinced into making the transition, in spite of the costs for the

A. There is a strong difference between American and European culture and Muslim culture. And this is the attitude toward women. For Muslims, the women are, well, inferior, inferior beings. So, this is unacceptable in European culture. I could give you other examples, but I think this concerns a half of the population.

consumers," he said. "Norway's switch could prove a symbolic moment in the history of radio broadcasting, but not a significant one, in the sense that it's not going to start a snowball rolling."

He added: "Closing down the FM is not even on the horizon for the United States, where FM will be around for a long, long time."

In addition, he said, digital audio broadcasting is mostly used in Europe, whereas many Americans who use digital radio have opted for HD radio, which broadcasts a digital signal over traditional radio frequencies.

Marko Ala-Fossi, an adjunct professor at the School of Communication, Media and Theater at the University of Tampere in Finland, added a cautionary note.

"Norway is now conducting a massive experiment with the future of radio on a national scale with no guarantee of success," he said. "You can lose older listeners without any prospect of recruiting younger listeners."

Switching to digital broadcasting "might speed up a process where radio can become socially irrelevant, at a time where other medias are growing and converging," Mr. Ala-Fossi said. But, he added, the country would find it hard to retreat from its decision, as it had become "a matter of national prestige."

INTERNATIONAL

Miami Herald : Netanyahu condemns Paris summit as 'rigged' against Israel

The Associated Press

Israel's prime minister on Thursday condemned an upcoming conference in Paris aimed at reviving peace talks with the Palestinians.

"It's a rigged conference, rigged by the Palestinians with French auspices to adopt additional anti-Israel stances," Benjamin Netanyahu said during a meeting with Norway's foreign minister. "This pushes peace backwards. It's not going to obligate

us. It's a relic of the past."

French President Francois Hollande said Sunday's peace conference in Paris aims at ensuring the support of the international community for the two-state solution as a reference for future direct negotiations.

"Peace will be achieved by Israelis and Palestinians, and nobody else. Only bilateral negotiations can succeed", Hollande said in a speech to diplomats, adding that the abandonment of the two-state

solution would undermine Israel's security.

He said the Jan. 15 conference will push for concrete solutions to help develop energy, transportation and city infrastructure to benefit Israelis and Palestinians. French authorities are expecting 72 countries to attend the conference— but not Israel or the Palestinians.

The Palestinians, who in recent years have campaigned for the international community to assume a greater role in resolving the

conflict, have welcomed the French initiative.

Netanyahu insists the conflict can only be resolved in direct peace talks and has repeatedly called on Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to resume them. Abbas refuses unless Israel ends settlement construction first.

The U.S. mediated the last round of talks, which collapsed in 2014.



Kerry Tries to Save 'Two State Solution' for Israel, Palestinians

Secretary of State John Kerry will join world leaders at a conference in Paris on Sunday.

The conference is to be one of Kerry's last **missions** as U.S. secretary of state.

Kerry will try to save what is known as the two-state solution.

The two-state solution refers to a political deal in which Israel and a Palestinian state exist next to each other.

Many experts believe that the possibility of a two-state solution is disappearing. Neither Israeli officials nor Palestinian representatives will attend the Paris conference.

Israeli officials concerned about the conference

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his supporters in Washington are concerned about the conference.

Last month, the United States allowed the passage of a United Nations Security Council resolution that was critical of Israel. Resolution 2334 demands an end to Israeli

settlements. It calls these settlements a "violation under international law."

The United States has blocked similar resolutions in the past.

Kerry explained the action in a speech on December 28.

He said, "We cannot properly defend and protect Israel if we allow a viable two-state solution to be destroyed before our own eyes."

Israel worries the resolution could help the Boycott, **Divestment**, Sanctions, or BDS movement, which aims to put economic pressure on Israel.

Last week, the House of Representatives voted to condemn resolution 2334. Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Ed Royce said this action was, in part, "to **head off** any more moves the Obama administration might have in the next few days."

To "head off" means to stop something from happening.

The Netanyahu government and its supporters still worry that during his remaining days in office, U.S. President Barack Obama might take some action related to the two state issue.

They are concerned he might formally declare recognition of a Palestinian state or support a French resolution in the U.N. Security Council that declares two states.

Ron Kampeas is the Washington bureau chief for the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. He says he thinks such an action by the Obama administration is not likely.

President-elect Donald Trump made it clear that he differs from the Obama administration on American policy toward Israel. After Resolution 2334 passed, for example, Trump wrote on Twitter, "As to the U.N., things will be different after Jan. 20th."

David Friedman, Trump's choice for ambassador to Israel, supports Israeli settlements. He has also said he opposes the two-state solution.

Is there a new Palestinian plan?

Uri Savir is an Israeli diplomat. He also established the Peres Center for Peace. He said a person inside the Palestinian Liberation Organization, or PLO, who did not want to be identified described a new Palestinian plan.

Savir wrote that PLO officials have developed a plan for a temporary agreement. The agreement would establish a Palestinian state until permanent negotiations could be launched a year from now.

Michele Dunne is director of the Middle East Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. She says this proposal probably does not interest the Israeli government.

The Palestinians are not unified, she said. "So even if the current Palestinian Authority Leadership were to accept an initiative like this, many in Israel and elsewhere would say 'Well, the Palestinian Authority doesn't represent that many people anyway.'"

Dunne says the proposal sounds like an attempt to keep the two-state solution alive.

I'm John Russell.

Cecily Hilleary wrote this story for VOA News. John Russell adapted it for VOA Learning English. Mario Ritter was the editor.

We want to hear from you. Write to us in the Comments Section.



Putin and Erdogan's Marriage of Convenience

Paul McLeary | 1 hour ago

It has been a remarkable turnaround. In November 2015, then-Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu and President Recep Tayyip Erdogan proudly took credit for ordering the shooting down of a Russian warplane that had violated Turkish airspace for a grand total of 17 seconds. Russian retaliation in the form of stinging economic sanctions swiftly followed. Eventually, Erdogan was forced to apologize to Russia and concoct a new narrative assigning blame to

the two hapless Turkish F-16 pilots who shot down the Russian jet. The rest of the job fell to the Turkish press, mostly controlled by Erdogan and his allies, which then propagated the notion that F-16 pilots had taken their orders from Fethullah Gulen, the controversial cleric living in exile in Pennsylvania.

One would have had to be very gullible to believe such a fantastic story — and though Vladimir Putin can be accused of a lot of things, naiveté is hardly one of them. For the Turks, however, it was important to convince their domestic

audiences of this narrative. Similarly, a year later, when the Russian ambassador to Ankara was assassinated in plain sight by a rogue police officer, the Turks once again blamed it on their same all-purpose bugaboo. The Russians once again rolled with the new narrative.

These episodes are emblematic of the changing nature of the Russian-Turkish relationship. Frustrated by the Syrian opposition's loss of ground against President Bashar al-Assad, and fearing the empowerment of the Syrian Kurds,

Erdogan began to tuck toward Moscow and away from its Western alliance partners roughly a year after Ankara shot down the Russian warplane. Turkey is now one of the parties in the Syrian cease-fire negotiations, along with Russia and Iran; its equities are the armed Sunni opposition groups that depend on Ankara. By contrast, the United States, Turkey's traditional ally, was excluded from the negotiations and the pending conference in Astana.

Considering that Moscow and Ankara had been at loggerheads

since the beginning of the Syrian civil war, with each supporting opposing factions, how did this new result come about? The answer paradoxically lies more in Erdogan's pique at the United States than anything Putin may have done.

Turning on Assad

The arrival of the Arab Spring in Damascus posed a dilemma for Ankara. Unlike Egypt, where Turkey welcomed the Hosni Mubarak regime's overthrow and rise of its long-standing ally the Muslim Brotherhood, in Syria much more was at stake. Erdogan had invested a great deal in improving relations with Assad, despite the latter's narrow Alawite base. The two leaders had even become quite close personally. Their nations held joint cabinet meetings, celebrating them as "two countries, one government."

At first, Erdogan tried to persuade Assad to introduce modest reforms. But faced with the Syrian leader's staunch refusal to go along, he turned on his former ally.

Soon Turkey was supporting a moderate — though armed — opposition to the Syrian regime.

Soon Turkey was supporting a moderate — though armed — opposition to the Syrian regime. More radical movements — first al Qaeda's affiliate in Syria, the Nusra Front, and then the Islamic State — were to eclipse this opposition.

In October 2014, the Islamic State, flush from its victories in Mosul, decided to capture the Syrian town of Kobani, which was defended by the Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG). U.S. President Barack Obama chose to intervene with a series of airstrikes, because it appeared an opportunity to inflict sizable losses on the Islamic State and its captured American military equipment. Syrian Kurds held the town, demonstrating to Obama that the YPG militia could be turned into an effective ally against the Islamic State when no one else was capable of challenging the Islamist radicals.

The resulting chain reaction brought Turkey closer to Russia. Overnight, America had transformed the Syrian Kurds into a legitimate actor, enabling them to consolidate territorial gains adjoining Turkey. For Ankara, however, this was nothing short of a victory for the hated Kurdistan Workers' Party, which had been instrumental in the creation of the YPG and waged a decades-long guerilla war against the Turkish state.

These developments coincided with the Russian entry into the Syrian theater. Unnerved by the steady

weakening of the Damascus regime, Russia used its airpower decisively to halt the advance of the opposition and then later help the Syrian regime and its allies, Iran and the powerful Lebanese militia, Hezbollah, to recapture territory. In December 2016, this coalition ultimately defeated the opposition in Aleppo.

In August 2016, Turkey launched Operation Euphrates Shield, deploying mechanized army units along with a ragtag array of Syrian fighters first to the town of Jarablus and then to al-Bab, where they appear to be bogged down in fighting. While the operation has been billed as an effort to drive back the Islamic State, in reality it is primarily designed as an attempt to challenge Syrian Kurdish expansion. Turkish officials have repeatedly said they would even capture Manbij, a town liberated from the Islamic State by the YPG. Together with the repeated shelling of YPG positions in Syria, the threat to overtly engage the Syrian Kurds represents a challenge to U.S. efforts to eliminate the Islamic State.

Following the cease-fire deal reached among Turkey, Iran, and Russia, Russian aircraft for the first time bombed Islamic State targets in al-Bab, the current target of Operation Euphrates Shield. As the United States and Turkey remain mired in disputes over the nature of the operation and its goals, the bombing runs signaled that there were benefits to working with Moscow.

Repercussions and conspiracies

Ankara's rapprochement with Russia has occurred amid increasing tensions with the United States.

As a result, the Turks appear to have agreed to allow Assad to remain in power in Damascus.

As a result, the Turks appear to have agreed to allow Assad to remain in power in Damascus. Deputy Prime Minister Numan Kurtulmus said Turkey's Syrian policy had been erroneous from the beginning; Syrians should have been allowed to decide the fate of Syria, not outsiders.

Such a stark admission again belies all logic. Turkey's turnabout is not solely driven by an appreciation of the stark conditions in Syria, but rather by Erdogan's anger at the Obama administration. Obama's kid-gloves approach to Turkish human rights violations and his effort to steer clear of public criticism of Erdogan notwithstanding, the conspiratorial nature of Turkish politics has 79

percent of the population, according to one poll, believing that the United States orchestrated the failed July 15 coup attempt. Not a day goes by without a Turkish official publicly condemning the U.S. role in the coup or in other malicious attacks on Turkey's interests, including terrorist attacks. The persistence of these claims suggests that Erdogan and his confidants believe them themselves — which raises the possibility of miscalculations that could further endanger bilateral relations.

Turkish officials have recently questioned whether the United States will be allowed to maintain its access to the mammoth Incirlik Air Force base, which is vital to the campaign in Syria and power projection elsewhere in the Middle East. Washington, Turkish officials are implying, may have overstayed its welcome.

The harsh Turkish critique of the Obama White House should be seen as a gambit for the incoming Trump administration. Ankara is hoping that the incoming administration will not be invested in supporting Syrian Kurds and, therefore, will be more amenable to prioritizing Turkish interests. In view of Donald Trump's conviviality toward Putin, Turks may also be counting on Russian support for Ankara's new position with Washington.

This ploy, however, could easily backfire with members of the incoming administration who think that defeating the Islamic State remains the No. 1 priority. The same may not be true for Moscow; Russian troops have been reduced since the fall of Aleppo, and U.S. intelligence has made it clear that in their estimation Putin has done little to nothing when it comes to fighting the Islamic State. It also assumes that the Russians will be willing to see the Syrian Kurds defeated; if past Russian behavior in the region and with the Kurds elsewhere is any indication, Moscow is loath to see any group or organization that can one day potentially be useful disappear.

Still, it would be foolhardy to suggest that Erdogan would contemplate abandoning NATO. Turkey lives under the shadow of the Russian giant — its anger at the United States and its Western allies notwithstanding, it needs the protection the alliance offers. Without it, the Russians would be able to intimidate Ankara at will. Erdogan correctly calculates that he can be a free rider in the alliance, cozying up to Moscow and antagonizing Washington, all the while knowing that the U.S.-Turkish

relationship is deeply embedded in NATO.

Putin has made the most of a weak hand. Russia is not only in the middle of a severe economic crisis but was also facing the prospect of "losing" a client state, Syria, to a jihadi alliance supported by its competitors. He has achieved much of what he wanted to achieve, preventing Assad's overthrow and sparking mischief between Ankara and Western capitals. By signing up to the ongoing cease-fire, however tenuous it may be, Turkey has validated Putin's overall stance and reaffirmed his importance in world politics. Nothing could be allowed to spoil this, not even the December 2016 assassination of Russia's ambassador in Ankara.

For now at least, two repressive populist leaders, Erdogan and Putin, have struck up a marriage of convenience. Erdogan is hard at work pushing through a constitutional change that will officially make him, not unlike Putin, the sole decision-maker. They share an ingrained animosity toward the West, have no interest in interfering in each other's internal affairs, and are unencumbered by domestic opposition, granting them a remarkable degree of flexibility. Can it last?

It all depends on Trump. As the new administration formulates its own anti-Islamic State strategy, it will have to set its priorities. This will be the critical factor in breaking the new allies apart, or driving them even closer together. The Trump administration may join the Russia-Turkey alliance, only to discover that it had validated Ankara and Moscow's attitude that the lone superpower can be pushed around. Alternatively, it could choose to pursue its own goals while playing for time and ensuring that Ankara does not take the United States for granted.

In the end, Trump should not forget that he has leverage in shaping the relationship with Ankara. As he begins working with Erdogan, he should remember well that the United States is far more important to Turkey than any other country or combination of countries.

TOLGA BOZOGLU/AFP/Getty Images

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Taliban Release Video of Foreign Professors Abducted in Kabul

Mujib Mashal

KABUL, Afghanistan — The Taliban on Wednesday released a video of two professors from the American University of Afghanistan who were abducted at gunpoint in Kabul in August, the first public confirmation by the insurgents that they are holding the two Westerners.

The 13-minute video, released months after an unsuccessful Navy SEAL raid in eastern Afghanistan to rescue the professors, shows Timothy Weeks, an Australian, and Kevin King, an American, pleading with their governments to cooperate with the Taliban for the release of insurgent prisoners in exchange for their freedom.

"We have been here for a while and we haven't heard anything," said Mr. King, 60. "We ask you to put pressure on the American government and the university to talk more to the Taliban to arrange an exchange."

A few weeks after the abduction, on Aug. 7, Taliban gunmen launched a coordinated attack on the university's campus in Kabul as evening classes were underway, killing about a dozen people and forcing the university to close because of security concerns. The release of the hostage video, through the usual Taliban channels, came as university officials were preparing to reopen classes.

The American University issued a statement from its acting president, David Sedney, saying: "We call on the Taliban to release immediately and safely Kevin and Tim and all other hostages. Kevin and Tim came to Afghanistan as teachers, to help Afghanistan. These innocent people have done nothing to harm anyone and need to be reunited with their family, friends and colleagues."

Directly addressing the two men, he added: "Our thoughts and prayers are with you constantly. We will not rest until you are back safely with us."

American officials who have knowledge of the unsuccessful raid say the two professors are being held by the Haqqani network, a wing of the Taliban that has long profited from kidnapping. The Haqqanis had also held Sgt. Bowe Bergdahl, the American soldier who was freed in 2014 in a swap for Taliban prisoners that the United States held at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

Among the Westerners who are also believed to be held by the Haqqanis are a married couple kidnapped south of Kabul in 2012: Joshua Boyle, 36, a Canadian, and Caitlan Coleman, 31, an American. They have had two children while in captivity.

In August, the insurgents released a video of the couple in which they ask the U.S. government to pressure the Afghan authorities into stopping the execution of Taliban prisoners. Anas Haqqani, one of the brothers of the leader of the Haqqani network, is in Afghan

custody and is believed to be on death row.

"We have been told that the Afghan government has executed some of their prisoners," Ms. Coleman said in the video, "and that our captors are frightened of the idea of further executions and further death, and that because of their fear they are willing to kill us, willing to kill women, to kill children, to kill whomever in order to get these policies reversed or to take revenge."

Recently, Jane Larson, a Massachusetts resident, revealed that her 74-year-old husband, Paul Overby, had been abducted two years ago after traveling to Afghanistan to interview the head of Haqqani network. Ms. Larson said in a statement that her husband was abducted in May 2014 when he tried to cross into Pakistan from Khost Province in eastern Afghanistan.

Morocco Said to Ban Sale of Burqas, Citing Security Concerns

Aida Alami

A market in Tetuan, Morocco. Relatively few Moroccan women wear the burqa, a full-body veil generally seen in more conservative Muslim societies. Raquel Maria Carbonell Pagola/LightRocket, via Getty Images

CASABLANCA, Morocco — Morocco has banned the burqa, the full-body veil worn by some conservative Muslim women, according to local media reports.

Although the government did not confirm the ban, the reports said vendors and merchants had been notified on Monday by representatives of the Interior Ministry that they would no longer be allowed to sell or manufacture the religious garment because of security concerns. They said they were given a 48-hour deadline, but it was unclear when the rule would take effect.

Morocco, a majority-Muslim country and former French protectorate where the influence of Western secularist ideals remains, has been trying to foster more moderate expressions of Islam and subtly warn Islamists not to go too far, though acts of extremism remain rare.

The government of King Mohammed VI may have conceived the ban as a gesture to get that point across. Relatively few Moroccan women wear the burqa, which is much more common in conservative Muslim societies like Afghanistan and Pakistan, but many do wear traditional dresses and head scarves. In any case, by targeting people who sell and produce the burqas, there is less risk of a public outcry, like the one in France last summer after the government banned the burkini, a full-body swimsuit favored by some Muslim women.

Le360, a news site close to the Moroccan Interior Ministry, quoted an unidentified ministry official who confirmed the ban on the sale of the garment, which is often blue and covers the head. The official did not confirm whether the ban would be extended to wearing the burqa.

The Interior Ministry did not respond to requests for comment. It also has not yet published an official statement on the specifics of the ban, and it is unclear what kind of religious full-body veils have been specifically targeted. Morocco's official religious authorities have not taken a position on the issue.

Hammad Kabbadj, a conservative preacher and member of the Justice

and Development Party who was not allowed to run in last fall's legislative elections in which his party prevailed because he was deemed too "extremist," denounced the ban on Facebook.

He said he thought the ban was meant to create tensions that would ultimately hurt his party, which has been trying unsuccessfully to form a coalition government since October.

"It is unacceptable," he wrote. "It's a perverted behavior by the public authorities."

The ban has spurred a fierce debate between Moroccans who see the move as repressing the religious freedom of women and those who applaud it as a liberation for women.

"I am against the culture of banning in principle," Ali Anouzla, a Moroccan journalist, said on his Facebook page. "But just to be clear, the Interior Ministry didn't ban the hijab or niqab but banned the burqa, and the burqa isn't part of Morocco's culture."

Stephanie Willman Bordat, a founding partner at Mobilizing for Rights Associates, a Morocco-based nongovernmental organization, said many Moroccans saw the burqa as a neocolonial import from the Gulf states.

"Obviously the government's interest is first and foremost security rather than women's rights," she said. "It's unsurprising given the current security context and the concern the government has with maintaining security and stability and cracking down on the terrorists' networks."

Farah Chérif D'Ouezzan, the founder of the Center for Cross Cultural Learning in Rabat and an expert in comparative religion with a focus on women and Islam, said that there was a great deal of confusion and that a confirmed ban would be difficult to implement.

"If it is true that there is a ban, to me, the ban is justified for security reasons," she said. "But at the same time, there is not evidence for associating the burqa with security threats. I would like to know how many people they have arrested."

"I believe that men or women should have the right to choose how to dress," she added. "The number of

women who wear the burqa in this country is still insignificant."



The Real Cost of Ivory Coast's Military Mutiny

Paul McLeary | 1 hour ago

It was a 20-minute walk from one New Year's Day gathering to the other, but none of us wanted to risk it. Outside, Beijing was smothered in the worst smog of the winter, so that every breath, even behind my filtered mask, had the sour chemical taste of a freshly bleached bathroom. We saw the red "For Hire" sign of the cab through the haze and bundled in.

Half the invitees had begged off from the party, preferring the relative safety of sealed apartments to attempting to find somewhere amid the poison dust. Others had the perma-cold that grips many of us in northern Chinese winters, with sore throats that are unable to heal. The last new year I'd spent 40 minutes searching for a friend's apartment block that I'd been to a half-dozen times before, unable to make out any landmarks amid the haze. Beijing city blocks are undistinguishable even on clear days, but now they were just smudges of thicker gray.

Inside, on the 16th floor, all we could make out of Beijing were the lights of cars on the motorway below and a few neon building signs. Seasoned veterans, we compared air filters and masks. Ben, fresh from the bluer skies of Fuzhou in the south, had brought along a Laser Egg — an oval air-quality monitor small enough to be held by hand — to show our hostess. "195 inside," he said. We were reassured that the air we were breathing was merely "unhealthy," not off-scale like outdoors. "Watch, we can make it lower," Ben said, flicking a switch. "There you go, now it shows the Chinese measurement scale." The number dropped by 40 points or so. "I was talking to the guy who created this, and he said they had to make sure that the Chinese scale came first, or it would never be approved for sale."

But we soon moved on to other topics — architecture, dating, U.S. policing, early education, weddings. Perhaps we shouldn't have. Outside, the air was so curdled with pollutants that unprecedented volcanic reactions were taking place, smearing sulphur over the city.

We live somewhere where it isn't safe to breathe, where every winter day scratches away at our lungs, where rich schoolchildren play soccer underneath sealed domes.

We live somewhere where it isn't safe to breathe, where every winter day scratches away at our lungs, where rich schoolchildren play soccer underneath sealed domes. And yet, on days that were just 200 or 300 on the AQI scale — unhealthy, or very unhealthy, days that would cause a public crisis in New York or London or even Los Angeles — we treat them as just gloomy weather.

In China's north, even the worst days have been normalized, worked into a routine of filters, masks, and checks. In 2012, things seemed very different. That was when the public — prompted in part by the U.S. Embassy's publication of pollution information, one of the most successful U.S.-Sino diplomatic initiatives ever — began demanding change. As the Chinese took to social media to angrily share pollution figures, the government was forced to listen. Unlike beaten peasants or poisoned village soil, after all, the air couldn't be ignored. It crept into the homes of the urban "middle class" — the foundation of support for Chinese government — and snuck its tendrils around Zhongnanhai, the imperial palace where China's top leaders live. Newspapers dropped the euphemisms of "fog" and "mist" and named the problems with relatively openness. I learned the Chinese for "Britain's Clean Air Act" because so many of my friends were posting about it. There was no escaping the "airpocalypse," as a newly coined term went. Eventually, the government stopped denying the problem and began to issue proper data, smog warnings, and traffic and factory shutdowns.

The figures showed slow improvement for a few years after the disasters of 2012. So far this winter, they've been worse again, the north locked into a spiral of airborne shit circling around Hebei, Beijing, and Tianjin. Yet the arrival of regular data on everyone's phones showing today's disastrous PM2.5 figures — tiny particles that are the main risk to health — no longer stoke much public anger. Rather, China's acknowledgment of the problem has served to normalize it, to make the poisoned

air seem like something controllable and manageable and understandable. At the same time, the small spaces won for free discussion in China about the causes of the crisis began to be closed off, as the government took over the rhetoric of air control for itself.

It doesn't take dictatorship to normalize environmental disaster, of course. London's "fog" was an acceptable hazard for decades. "I lost my dog in a deep deep smog, in a deep deep smog in London," my grandmother would sing to me, once a music hall favorite. The stone buildings in my hometown, Manchester, are still marked from the dirt of factories past. It took 12,000 deaths — on a timescale of days, not years — to finally rouse the British.

But what's new in Beijing is the resulting market. My friend Meng bought a 5,000 yuan — an average Beijinger's monthly salary — air filter for every room of her apartment. The front of every 24-hour store has a rack of masks promising "special protection from PM2.5" and "new filter elements." Smog has crept into being a natural hazard, something that good citizens work around. The Beijing municipal government classified it as a "metrological disaster" a few weeks ago — like a tornado or a hurricane.

It's doubtful how much these protective measures actually work.

Testing by the *Beijing News* showed that less than half of all masks on the market gave any real protection — and only 20 percent for the ones marketed at children.

Testing by the *Beijing News* showed that less than half of all masks on the market gave any real protection — and only 20 percent for the ones marketed at children. The efficacy of filters, and whether you need a serious beast of a machine or can slap together one from a do-it-yourself kit, is heavily debated.

And it's almost impossible for us to take on board the toll. We know that the air kills at least a million Chinese a year. We know that it batters at kids' developing lungs, that asthma rates are through the roof, that each day we breathe is another notch of our chances of cancer. But outside of the worst days, it's easy to push that out of our minds, to reduce it to the distant

realm of statistics rather than the reality of our own likely sickness. It's often hard to pin down a culprit. Was my friend Ian Sherman's death from lung cancer at 36 the result of years of Beijing life, or even longer years of smoking, or the sheer bad luck of the genetic dice?

The poor, of course, don't get even the illusion of control. Security guards and street vendors spend all day outside, even when the air is eye-wateringly bad. Even a cheap air purifier is an unaffordable extravagance, especially when the cost of replacing filters and the steep rise in electric bills is taken into account. It would be a mistake to assume public indignation has dissipated. The brief window allowed for discussion of Chai Jing's groundbreaking documentary, *Under the Dome*, which showed that people were still eager to talk about the problem. But the winter airpocalypse has become a seasonal event, not a catastrophe.

This is a northern Chinese story, but it's one the entire world will soon face. Not from the air, probably, but from the slow disasters of climate change — of flooded basements and harsh summers and crop failures — the things we'll be shocked by at first but then come to accept and work around, not fight. We'll mentally rescale, turning the once unacceptable into the merely bad.

And yet, when a break does come, it's all the sweeter. For a couple of blissful days last week, high winds blew the smog away and the skies opened up blue and clear. By the gate of Houhai, one of the city's prettiest parks, I rejoiced with a stranger, a middle-aged man out walking his dogs. We marveled at the sight of the mountains that surround Beijing, but which are usually invisible in the haze.

"Look!" he said, gesturing to the edge of the city. "You can see the Western hills! When the big wind comes, everything bad is blown away"

Photo credit: VCG/VCG via Getty Images



Xi to Stress China's 'Responsible' Global Role in Davos

Mark Magnier 2017 11:14 a.m. ET

Updated Jan. 11,

BEIJING—China's government said its leader would signal at a global forum next week that Beijing

supports multilateralism, in a bid to raise its profile as a benevolent global power amid tensions over the

South China Sea and escalating criticism from the incoming Trump administration over Taiwan.

President Xi Jinping will emphasize China's support for global cooperation and free trade at a keynote speech on Tuesday at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, and in an address to the United Nations in Geneva the next day, the Foreign Ministry said Wednesday. He will be the first Chinese head of state to attend the Davos forum.

Mr. Xi will assert that China is a responsible country and will "contribute China's wisdom" in his meetings with political, economic and academic leaders and the media, said Vice Minister Li Baodong. Mr. Xi also will address the bigger questions of "where mankind came from, where we are and where we're going."

The divisive U.S. election and President-elect Donald's Trump's "America-first" approach presents China with a chance to extend its global sway and present itself as a force for stability.

Mr. Trump, who will be inaugurated Jan. 20, has said he will pull the U.S. out of the Trans-Pacific

Partnership global trade group that was a cornerstone of the Obama administration's goals in Asia. Mr. Trump also has said he will renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement, build a wall on Mexico's border, curb Muslim immigration and impose tariffs on some foreign nations, including China, and U.S. domestic producers with operations abroad.

Mr. Trump has singled out China for scorn, saying it fabricated global warming for its economic benefit, flouted the rules of free trade and unfairly devalued its currency to help boost exports. In fact, China's central bank in recent months has often done the opposite, intervening to prop up the yuan.

"Before when China said it's a responsible power, everyone thought 'Who are you kidding,'" said National University of Singapore professor Huang Jing. "China wants to use Davos as an established platform to demonstrate that it will play a 'positive' role in peace and stability."

"It's quite ironic that the U.S. established this global order and now China is acting as its defender," he added.

Still, China has come under growing criticism for protectionist policies and unfair trading practices. During the first 11 months of 2016, 16 countries and regions launched 41 investigations over \$6.8 billion in steel products imported from China, according to Chinese official figures.

Mr. Li defended China's trade stance on Wednesday. "Some people may accuse China of trade protectionism," he said. "These are unjustified. We have always been very open and inclusive in this area."

China has taken advantage of unexpected global events before to burnish its global image. In 2001 it was among the first countries to express strong support for the U.S. after Sept. 11 and offer to share intelligence, which helped soften President George W. Bush's wariness of Beijing. And in 2009 its \$578 billion stimulus program helped calm markets in the wake of the global financial crisis.

Tensions have escalated between the U.S. and China since Mr. Trump accepted a call from the president of Taiwan in December, breaking with decades of U.S. policy. On Wednesday, China's only aircraft carrier transited the Taiwan Strait in

international waters as it was returning from a training exercise in the Western Pacific, according to the Associated Press.

China's image has suffered from its sometimes blunt foreign policy statements and territorial disputes in the South China Seas. China's soft power, the use of non-military persuasion to achieve foreign policy objectives, rated 28 in the 2016 Soft Power 30 index, compared with the No. 1-rated U.S.

"Trump's election is a political earthquake and China is seizing the opportunity to turn around its image," Mr. Huang said. To further improve its soft power, however, China needs to ease tension over its trade policies, territorial disputes and ensure that its massive Silk Road infrastructure initiative benefit other countries and aren't just promoting China-centric interests, he added.

The international community needs to see "whether they play fair or just talk the talk," Mr. Huang said.

Write to Mark Magnier at mark.magnier@wsj.com

**The
New York
Times**

Taiwan Responds After China Sends Carrier to Taiwan Strait

Michael Forsythe
and Chris

Buckley

HONG KONG — Taiwan scrambled F-16 fighter jets and dispatched a frigate to the Taiwan Strait on Wednesday after China sent its sole aircraft carrier into the waterway, Taiwan's official Central News Agency reported.

The transit of the aircraft carrier, the Liaoning, came amid rising tensions between Taiwan and China after President-elect Donald J. Trump broke decades of protocol by speaking on the phone with Taiwan's president, Tsai Ing-wen, after his election victory. Ms. Tsai leads a political party that has traditionally supported Taiwan's formal independence from China.

Ms. Tsai, who is visiting Central America this week, made two calls to officials in Taiwan seeking updates on the Liaoning's transit, the Central News Agency reported, citing Alex Huang, the president's spokesman. China's decision to send the carrier through the waterway that separates it from Taiwan reflects an early foreign policy challenge for Mr. Trump.

"It's a show of force, and I think it is intended in part to intimidate, and that's worrisome from the U.S. and Taiwan's point of view because we

don't know how much more they are going to ratchet up these pressures and tensions," said Bonnie S. Glaser, senior adviser for Asia at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. "If the Trump administration does see this as a test of U.S. resolve, I suspect they'll push back pretty forcefully."

China sent the carrier, which had been conducting exercises in the South China Sea, into the Taiwan Strait on Wednesday morning. Taiwan's response was the third time in three days that air forces in the region had scrambled jets in response to Chinese military activity, after Japan and South Korea deployed fighters on Monday. Those actions occurred when a squadron of six Chinese bombers and two other aircraft flew over the waters that separate Japan and South Korea and over the Sea of Japan.

Taiwan, considered by Beijing to be Chinese territory, has been governed separately since 1949, when the forces of the Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek fled to the island after their defeat on the mainland by the Communists. China views any assertion of Taiwan's separateness from the mainland — like Ms. Tsai's call with Mr. Trump

— as an affront to its claim of sovereignty.

Since 1979, the United States has recognized the government in Beijing and broke off formal diplomatic ties to Taiwan as part of the One China policy. In the wake of the Trump-Tsai call, China warned the incoming president against making changes to that policy after he takes office on Jan. 20.

Liu Zhenmin, a Chinese vice foreign minister, said on Wednesday that the Taiwan Strait was an international waterway and that it was normal for the Liaoning to pass through it. The passage would not have any effect on cross-strait relations, he said in remarks carried in the Chinese news media.

Mark C. Toner, a State Department spokesman, told reporters in Washington in response to a question about the Liaoning's passage through the strait that the United States "wouldn't have a problem" with countries sailing their vessels in international waters as long as it was done in accordance with international law.

It also was not the first time the Liaoning had sailed through the strait: It passed through in November 2013 on its way to the South China Sea after having been commissioned only the year before.

In that instance, the carrier kept to the western half of the strait, closer to mainland China. In a statement on Wednesday morning, Taiwan's Defense Ministry said that the Liaoning was also staying to the west of the strait's middle and urged citizens to remain calm. A transit on the eastern side, closer to Taiwan, would be viewed as much more provocative.

Euan Graham, the director of the International Security Program at the Lowy Institute in Sydney, Australia, said that for the Chinese, traveling through the strait was a logical way to move from one area of fleet operations to another along its long coastline. In order for warships based in northern ports, like the Liaoning, to return home from southern waters, they must either pass close to Japanese islands or transit the Taiwan Strait. "Geography forces a very binary choice," he said.

Mr. Graham said it was important to see how the Liaoning conducted its passage. If it had aircraft on deck and was conducting flight operations, that would be seen as more provocative than if it passed through the strait with the aircraft in its hangar bay, he said.

The Liaoning, commissioned in 2012 and built from a Soviet hull, is China's first aircraft carrier. In past

decades, the United States has shown its resolve to defend Taiwan by sailing carriers through the Taiwan Strait. In 1995, the aircraft carrier Nimitz transited the strait amid heightened tensions after Beijing conducted missile exercises in the waters.

China's military decision-making is highly secretive, but it would seem inconceivable for the Liaoning to pass through such contested waters without approval from the president, Xi Jinping, who is also the chairman of the Central Military Commission, which controls the military. And the Chinese military media has described the aircraft carrier as embodying Mr. Xi's plans for a stronger navy, capable of projecting force far beyond China's territorial waters.

**The
New York
Times**

'We'll Grow Again': Bangladesh Cafe Attacked by Terrorists Reopens

Ellen Barry and
Maher Sattar

Employees waited for customers on Wednesday at the newly reopened Holey Artisan Bakery in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

DHAKA, Bangladesh — It was nothing special — just a cafe in a shopping mall supermarket — but when an elegant matron named Aisha Sattar walked into the newly reopened Holey Artisan Bakery on Wednesday, a sweet, reminiscent look came over her face, as if she weren't sure it was all real.

Rocky, one of the waiters, caught his breath when he saw her and trailed off in the middle of a sentence: She was Auntie Nini, one of the regulars. The whole day had been like this. A few customers, an owner said, walked in, stepped behind the counter and wordlessly hugged the staff. One woman burst into tears and bought every last pastry and yogurt carton still on sale.

Six months have passed since anyone thought of the Holey Artisan Bakery with anything but horror.

It was once among the most beloved restaurants in Dhaka, the Bangladeshi capital, situated in its diplomatic quarter and popular with expatriates and locals alike. Until,

Last Thursday, the front page of People's Liberation Army Daily, the official newspaper of the Chinese military, featured a report about the aircraft carrier's latest journey under the headline, "We're sailing under the leader's attentive gaze," a clear tribute to Mr. Xi.

Ma Xiaoguang, a spokesman for the Taiwan Affairs Office in Beijing, said in a news conference on Wednesday that the Liaoning's passage was part of the ship's scheduled training in the western Pacific, which had begun on Dec. 24.

Mr. Ma also said that the Taiwan-China relationship in the coming year would face "increasing uncertainty, looming risks and challenges."

as the dinner crowd was settling in on July 1, five gunmen burst in carrying heavy bags of weaponry, including grenades and rifles.

Diners and waiters and cooks and busboys scattered throughout the building. The gunmen calmly sorted them, explaining that their intention was to kill only foreigners and non-Muslims. They killed the hostages one by one, using guns and machetes, and used the victims' phones to publish images of the bodies on social media.

By the time the ordeal ended, 10 hours later, 22 people, including two police officers, were dead, the restaurant spattered with blood and shattered glass.

For months, Dhaka's diplomatic quarter was a spooked place. Restaurants were empty night after night. Foreigners no longer left the safety of their compounds. Young Bangladeshis found themselves wondering who they could trust: Several of the terrorists came from wealthy, cosmopolitan families, not so different from the young elites who died in the siege.

In an effort to break this trance, the restaurant's owners decided to reopen the Holey, known for its flour-dusted baguettes and homemade pasta. One of the owners, Ali Arsalan, said he was inspired in part by the staff: When

He added that Taiwan's government and "independence forces" there had "seriously threatened the peace and stability of the Taiwan Strait," accusing them of engaging in separatist activities and warning that China would "resolutely safeguard its national sovereignty and territorial integrity."

The aircraft carrier's passage was part of a cluster of recent acts by the Chinese military that have raised hackles in the region.

Last month, a Chinese warship seized an underwater drone belonging to the United States Navy about 50 miles northwest of Subic Bay in the Philippines. The drone was returned after the Obama administration publicly chided China over the seizure. On Monday, Japan said it had sent fighter jets

he paid them two months' salary and suggested they return to their villages to recover from the trauma, they said they would prefer to go back to work.

Outside the bakery on Wednesday ahead of its reopening. Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

So when a friend offered him a space in his new supermarket, Mr. Arsalan said, he and his business partner said yes "pretty much within five minutes."

"What else is there to do except move on?" he said on Wednesday. "No one is going to pay us to sit around and feel bad about what happened."

Many were thrilled by the decision. "Past terror, past grief, past agony," exulted Syeda Zareen Rafa, 17, on Facebook.

She has read in the newspapers about young men who have disappeared, perhaps to join militant groups, and she said she worried in the back of her mind that another big attack might happen. But for the moment, she is, as she put it, "ecstatic" that the restaurant is back.

"It felt like a kind of victory or something," she said.

Still, it was painful remembering. Ms. Sattar — Auntie Nini — was

into the air after Chinese bombers and surveillance planes flew over the East China Sea and the Sea of Japan.

"When China was militarily weaker, Japan considered that area to be its backyard," said Ni Lexiong, a naval affairs researcher at the Shanghai University of Political Science and Law. "This was a way of telling Japan that if there ever is conflict, the location of any future battle space won't be decided by you and America. We have the initiative. So Japan, don't think of meddling further afield in Taiwan or the South China Sea."

close friends with Claudia D'Antona, an Italian garment executive killed in the attack. Mr. Arsalan's 20-year-old nephew, Faraaz Hossain, was one of the victims. Rocky the waiter — whose full name is Rakib Ahmed — had, by the luck of the draw, worked the early shift on the day of the siege. For three or four months afterward, he said, he could not sleep.

The new space is different from the two-story lakeside home where the restaurant stood until July 1: It is much smaller, inside a mall, and ringed with security. He said he was not under the illusion that the new restaurant would be like the old one.

"I can't explain in words how that place felt," he said. "People would bring their children, their dogs, and they would spend all day there. There won't be a place like that again, because the grounds are now being used for something else, and because there is a fear in people now."

He was heartened, though, by the sight of a dozen foreigners who planted themselves at tables over the course of the day; he had not expected them to dare.

"We'll grow again," he said. "We'll see how people Holey's back."

**THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL.**

OECD Indicators Signal Stronger Economic Growth

Paul Hannon

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leading indicators released Wednesday by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

The Paris-based research body's gauges of future activity showed firmer signs of a pickup in growth in the U.S. and other developed

economies, as well as large developing economies such as China and Brazil.

The signal from the leading indicators is consistent with the expectations of some other international economic policy bodies, with the World Bank

Tuesday forecasting that global economic growth would pick up to 2.7% from last year's postcrisis low of 2.3%.

As recently as May, the leading indicators for the U.S. were pointing to a slowdown in growth. They then switched to signal a stabilization,

The global economy is on course for a pickup in growth this year, with only India showing signs of an impending slowdown, according to

but the latest figures based on information available in November mark the second straight month in which they point to a pickup.

Changes in asset prices since Donald Trump's election as the next U.S. president indicate that investors expect U.S. growth and inflation to increase this year in response to a promised boost to infrastructure spending and tax cuts. But the OECD's indicators suggest the economy was already on an upward track before the election, and is therefore at greater risk of overheating if it receives too

much stimulus from the new administration.

The main exception to the global pickup signaled by the leading indicators is India, which the OECD said is "showing signs of easing growth momentum." In early November, Prime Minister Narendra Modi voided all 500- and 1,000-rupee notes to drill out cash piles held by tax cheats and bribe-taking bureaucrats. India's government expects economic growth to slow in the fiscal year through March 2017, but those forecasts don't incorporate the impact of the cash cancellation.

By contrast, the leading indicators now point to a stabilization in Italy's economic growth, having pointed to a slowdown in October.

The OECD's leading indicators are designed to provide early signals of turning points between the expansion and slowdown of economic activity, and are based on a variety of data series that have a history of anticipating swings in future economic activity. The changes in economic activity signaled by the indicators usually follow six to nine months after they are recorded.

The OECD's composite leading indicator for its 34 members was steady at 99.8 in November. A reading below 100.0 points to growth that is slower than normal.

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Corrections & Amplifications: Investors expect U.S. growth and inflation to increase this year in response to a promised boost to infrastructure spending and tax cuts. An earlier version of this article incorrectly stated the increase would occur next year. (1/11/17)

ETATS-UNIS



Trump admits to Russian hacking even as he attacks U.S. intelligence community (UNE)

<https://www.facebook.com/PhilipRuckerWP>

NEW YORK — President-elect Donald Trump acknowledged for the first time here Wednesday that Russia was responsible for hacking the Democratic Party during last year's election, but he denied that the leaks were intended to boost him and argued that Moscow would cease cyberattacks on the United States once he is sworn in.

In a rollicking hour-long news conference, Trump furiously denounced as "fake news" the reports that Russia had obtained salacious intelligence that could compromise him. He suggested that any damaging information collected by Russian President Vladimir Putin's administration would already have been released — and he celebrated what had leaked out about Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton.

"As far as hacking, I think it was Russia," Mr. Trump said. "Hacking's bad, and it shouldn't be done. But look at the things that were hacked, look at what was learned from that hacking."

Allowing his hostility and contempt toward the U.S. intelligence community to again burst into public view, Trump also reaffirmed his belief — first expressed in a tweet earlier Wednesday morning — that intelligence officials were behaving as though they were in "Nazi Germany" with what he termed "disgraceful" leaks to the media.

The Anti-Defamation League asked Trump to apologize for trivializing the Holocaust.

Later Wednesday, Director of National Intelligence James R. Clapper Jr. spoke with Trump and said he told the president-elect that U.S. spy agencies did not believe the information in question was reliable. Clapper said in a statement that he "expressed my profound dismay at the leaks that have been appearing in the press" and told Trump that they likely came from sources outside the intelligence community.

(Bastien Inzaurrealde/The Washington Post)

Russia loomed large over President-elect Donald Trump's news conference and his pick for secretary of state Rex Tillerson's confirmation hearing on Jan. 11. Russia loomed large over President-elect Donald Trump's news conference and his pick for secretary of state Rex Tillerson's confirmation hearing on Jan. 11. (Video: Bastien Inzaurrealde/Photo: Jabin Botsford/The Washington Post)

At the press conference, Trump made a series of promises but provided little specific evidence on how he would deliver them. He vowed to repeal and replace President Obama's Affordable Care Act quickly and nearly simultaneously ("could be the same hour"); to start building a wall along the U.S. border with Mexico before

persuading the Mexican government to pay for it ("that will happen, whether it's a tax or whether it's a payment"); and unveiled how he is disentangling himself from the management of his business empire while still refusing to divest himself of his financial interests.

Trump also said he planned to announce a nominee to fill the Supreme Court vacancy left by the death of Justice Antonin Scalia within two weeks of his Jan. 20 inauguration, having already reviewed a list of about 20 candidates recommended by conservatives at the Federalist Society and the Heritage Foundation. And he promised to bring jobs to the states that supported him in November, calling himself "the greatest jobs producer that God ever created."

[Donald Trump's press conference, annotated]

In a performance that was by turns considered, combative and carnivalesque, Trump also definitively confirmed that winning the presidency has not changed his public presentation to that of a more traditional statesman.

Instead, he repeatedly lashed out at the news media. He shushed correspondents from CNN — "You are fake news," he said — which broke the news late Tuesday that Trump and President Obama had been briefed on allegations that Russian intelligence services have

compromising material and information on Trump's personal life and finances.

Trump also went after BuzzFeed, which published a document Tuesday outlining some of the unverified allegations, which were based on research done by an outside entity engaged in political consulting work and led by a former high-ranking British intelligence official. Trump called BuzzFeed a "failing pile of garbage" and warned it would "suffer the consequences" for publishing the dossier.

About 300 journalists packed into the marble lobby of Trump Tower for the president-elect's first full-fledged news conference since July 27, when, among other pronouncements, Trump urged the Russian government to find and release tens of thousands of Clinton's private emails.

Six months later, the subject of Russian hacking still clouds Trump's transition to power, and questions about the hacking attacks dominated Wednesday's news conference. At first, Trump refused to say whether he or anyone on his campaign had been in contact with Russia, but he clarified as he left the news conference, telling reporters near the elevators that neither he nor his team had any contact with Russia about his campaign.

Trump also insisted that the warm relationship he has cultivated with

Putin is beneficial to the United States.

"If Putin likes Donald Trump, guess what, folks? That's called an asset, not a liability," he said. "Now, I don't know that I'm gonna get along with Vladimir Putin. I hope I do. But there's a good chance I won't. And if I don't, do you honestly believe that Hillary would be tougher on Putin than me?"

[Fact-checking 15 fishy claims from Trump]

At times, Trump also seemed eager to both reminisce about and relitigate his unlikely campaign. He recounted his crowds of thousands that "would go crazy" when he urged them to cheer that Mexico would pay for a border wall. And he poked fun at Sen. Lindsey O. Graham (R-S.C.), a longtime critic who ran unsuccessfully in the 2016 Republican primary, when asked about a bill Graham is co-sponsoring that would increase sanctions on Russia.

"I've been competing with him for a long time," Trump said, nodding to Graham's poor showing in the primaries. "He is going to crack that 1 percent barrier one day."

On cyberattacks, Trump said his administration will produce within 90 days a major report on how to stop the hacking "phenomena."

He also argued that Russia hacked the Democrats because "the Democratic National Committee was totally open to be hacked." Trump claimed credit for instructing Republican National Committee Chairman Reince Priebus, his incoming White House chief of staff, to invest in ordering "a very, very strong hacking defense," and said the Russians had tried to hack his party's internal systems but "were unable to break through."

FBI Director James B. Comey said at a hearing Tuesday that none of the RNC's current computer networks were hacked but that old email servers that were no longer being used were penetrated. The fact that none of that information was released by the Russians factored into the intelligence community's conclusion that Moscow aimed to help Trump win, Comey said.

He noted that the Russian hackers "got far deeper and wider into the DNC than the RNC." Officials have previously said that the DNC's cybersecurity was not as strong as the RNC's.

Like many Trump productions, Wednesday's news conference was strategically staged and cast. Aides carried out heaps of papers in manila folders, which Trump said were the legal documents transferring management of his many business interests over to his two adult sons, Donald Jr. and Eric.

Sean Spicer, the incoming White House press secretary, emerged first at the lectern to play the role of outraged disciplinarian, setting the tone for a news conference that went on offense and also played defense. He half-read, half-shouted a strongly worded statement castigating some media organizations for "highly salacious and flat-out false" reports Tuesday night about Trump and Russia that he said were intended to undermine the new administration.

"The fact that BuzzFeed and CNN made the decision to run with this unsubstantiated claim is a sad and pathetic attempt to get clicks," Spicer said, as his boss looked on proudly.

[Trump outlines plan to shift assets, give up management of his company]

Spicer's admonishment seemed intended to free Trump to rise above the fray — and Trump's initial remarks were measured and largely magnanimous. But a few questions into the news conference, the president-elect delved directly into the topic of Russia.

Asked whether he engaged in behavior during his Russia trip for the Miss Universe pageant that he now regrets and that makes him now vulnerable to blackmail, Trump said he is "extremely careful" when traveling abroad. He said he tells his bodyguards to beware hidden cameras in foreign hotels.

"You have cameras in the strangest places — cameras that are so small with modern technology you can't see them and you won't know," Trump said. "You better be careful, or you'll be watching yourself on nightly television. I tell this to people all the time."

Trump added, "I'm also very much of a germaphobe, by the way. Believe me."

Trump's post-election news conference, where he had planned to formally announce how he would restructure his businesses to avoid conflicts of interest, was delayed for weeks as he and his lawyers worked to disentangle the president-elect.

Midway through, Trump turned over the lectern to Sheri Dillon, a tax adviser at the Morgan Lewis law firm, who read a lengthy statement explaining that Trump was giving up management of the Trump Organization and shifting his assets into a trust managed by Donald Jr. and Eric Trump while he serves as president.

However, Trump will not sell his business or his stake. He also said he would continue to refuse to release his tax returns for public review. "The only ones that care

about my tax returns are the reporters," Trump said.

Trump's company, which has a vast array of licensing deals, buildings, golf courses and other properties around the globe, will make no new foreign deals while he is in office, Dillon said. Any new domestic deals would undergo vigorous review and require approval by an independent ethics adviser.

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

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As Dillon explained the nuances of the new arrangement, Trump stood off to the side appearing restless and perhaps bored. He shifted his stance, whispered back and forth with Vice President-elect Mike Pence and, at one point, ducked out of camera view to take a sip of water.

Yet Trump soon returned to his spot at center stage, parrying questions on a range of subjects before drawing the cameras to focus on the display of papers and folders at the table next to him. He said they were "just a piece of the many, many companies" being put into a trust to be run by his sons.

"I hope at the end of eight years, I'll come back and say, 'Oh, you did a good job,'" Trump said, as his two older sons looked on admiringly.

But Trump couldn't resist a final flourish, underscoring his ongoing struggle to shift from reality television host to leader of the free world. "Otherwise, if they do a bad job," Trump continued, "I'll say, 'You're fired!'"

Ellen Nakashima contributed to this report.

**The
New York
Times**

Donald Trump Concedes Russia's Interference in Election (UNE)

Julie Hirschfeld Davis and Maggie Haberman

President-elect Donald J. Trump on Wednesday conceded for the first time that Russia had carried out cyberattacks against the two major political parties during the presidential election, but he angrily rejected unsubstantiated reports that Moscow had gathered compromising personal and financial information about him that could be used for extortion.

In a chaotic news conference in the lobby of Trump Tower in Manhattan

nine days before he is to be sworn in as the nation's 45th president, Mr. Trump compared United States intelligence officials to Nazis, sidestepped repeated questions about whether he or anyone in his presidential campaign had had contact with Russia during the campaign, and lashed out at the news media and political opponents, arguing that they were out to get him.

"As far as hacking, I think it was Russia," Mr. Trump said, his first comments accepting the conclusions of United States intelligence officials that Moscow had interfered in the election to help him win. But the president-elect

expressed little outrage about that breach and seemed to cast doubt on Russia's role moments after acknowledging it, asserting that "it could have been others also."

He also quoted a Kremlin denial Tuesday night of reports that it had gathered damaging information to compromise Mr. Trump. "They said it totally never happened," Mr. Trump said of President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia and his government. "I respected the fact that he said that."

The news conference displayed the showmanship, combativeness and sensitivity to criticism that Mr. Trump exhibited throughout the

2016 presidential campaign and underscored his reflex to rebut any criticism or question about his conduct. In his maligning of the nation's intelligence agencies, journalists and Hillary Clinton, the president-elect indicated that he would conduct himself the same way in the White House.

Using the same boastful tone that characterized his campaign rallies, Mr. Trump asserted that his victory in November had vindicated his view that he should not release his tax returns, an issue that he said only the news media cared about, not the public.

Trump Calls CNN 'Fake News'

President-elect Donald J. Trump had sharp words for a CNN reporter: "Your organization's terrible. ... You are fake news."

By THE NEW YORK TIMES on January 11, 2017. Photo by Sam Hodgson for The New York Times. Watch in Times Video »

"I won," he said. "I don't think they care at all." In a Pew Research Center poll this month, 60 percent of respondents said Mr. Trump should release his returns, although just 38 percent of Republican respondents said he should.

Some moments bordered on bizarre for the next president of the United States. Mr. Trump spoke of his awareness as a businessman that there were hidden cameras in hotel rooms in Moscow and other foreign capitals. He called himself "very much of a germaphobe," apparently in an effort to discredit unsubstantiated claims about sex videos with Mr. Trump and prostitutes in a Russian hotel. "Does anyone really believe that story?" he said, calling it "phony stuff" that "never happened."

At one point, Mr. Trump got into a confrontation with a correspondent for CNN, which was among the first to report on the allegations, saying to him, "You are fake news." Moments later, though, Mr. Trump called on another CNN correspondent.

A person who identified himself as a correspondent for RT, the Russian English-language news organization that American intelligence agencies deem a Russian propaganda tool, shouted repeatedly in vain attempts to draw Mr. Trump's attention.

Mr. Trump voiced only faint concern about what United States intelligence officials said was a campaign by Mr. Putin to meddle in American democracy. He reserved his sharpest condemnation for American intelligence officials who he said had failed to keep secret the accusations that could be damaging to him.

On Wednesday, the director of national intelligence, James R. Clapper Jr., said he had spoken with Mr. Trump that evening and expressed his "profound dismay" over the leaks of unsubstantiated information. He said he had emphasized that this information was "not a U.S. intelligence community product" and that the intelligence agencies had not determined that it was reliable. He said he did not believe that the leaks had come from the intelligence agencies.

The president-elect, asked at the news conference whether he believed that Mr. Putin had directed the hacking effort to help him win the presidency, said, "If Putin likes Donald Trump, I consider that an asset, not a liability, because we have a horrible relationship with Russia."

Trump News Conference

President-elect Donald J. Trump holds a news conference in Manhattan.

January 11, 2017. Photo by Sam Hodgson for The New York Times. Watch in Times Video »

"He shouldn't be doing it," Mr. Trump said later of the Russian president. "He won't be doing it. Russia will have much greater respect for our country when I'm leading than when other people have led it."

Of the intelligence officials who will soon serve him, Mr. Trump said: "I think it was disgraceful — disgraceful that the intelligence agencies allowed any information that turned out to be so false and fake out. That's something that Nazi Germany would have done, and did do."

He did not address whether the sanctions President Obama imposed on Moscow for the cyberattacks should stay or be strengthened as some Republicans have urged, especially as the scope of the hacking has become clearer.

The hourlong news conference — Mr. Trump's first in nearly six months — touched not only on reports of espionage and attempted blackmail, but also on potential conflicts of interest with Mr. Trump's vast business empire and questions about domestic policy.

The glut of pent-up questions for the president-elect gave him an advantage in navigating the exchange; he interrupted inquiries about Russia's hacking to introduce a lawyer, Sheri L. Dillon, who spoke at length about how Mr. Trump would organize his business affairs and explain why he was not divesting from his global business empire. "President-elect Trump should not be expected to destroy the company he built," Ms. Dillon said.

Mr. Trump offered glimpses of his plans for his first days in office, including pledging to choose a Supreme Court nominee within two weeks of Inauguration Day to succeed Justice Antonin Scalia and to invite journalists to watch a series of "signings" at the White House, an apparent allusion to the several executive orders he has promised to sign to roll back major pieces of Mr. Obama's agenda.

Calling himself "the greatest job-producer that God ever created," Mr. Trump pledged to continue leaning on American companies to keep jobs in the United States. He took particular aim at the pharmaceutical industry, which he said "has been disastrous" and had been "getting away with murder" on drug pricing. Taking on a powerful lobby that Republicans have long defended, Mr. Trump said he wanted the federal government to use its purchasing power to negotiate drug prices for Medicare and Medicaid — a proposal long favored by Democrats.

Reporters waiting to be called on during Mr. Trump's news conference on Wednesday. Sam Hodgson for The New York Times

But he broke starkly with Democrats over the Affordable Care Act as he repeated a promise to submit a plan to repeal and replace the law "essentially simultaneously," as soon as Representative Tom Price, his choice to be secretary of health and human services, is confirmed.

"Obamacare is the Democrats' problem," Mr. Trump said Wednesday. "We could sit back and let them hang with it. We are doing the Democrats a great service."

He also insisted, despite repeated denials by Mexican officials, that Mexico would pay to build a wall on the southern border of the United States to block foreigners from entering illegally. Mr. Trump said Vice President-elect Mike Pence was working with federal agencies to begin construction quickly, and asserted that Mexico would ultimately reimburse the cost through a tax or other payment.

Mexico's president, Enrique Peña Nieto, reiterated Wednesday that his country would not pay for the wall, but said it would invest in more border security.

In front of Mr. Trump was a table stacked with manila folders that he said contained paperwork for a portion of the companies being put into a trust to be controlled and run by his eldest sons, Eric and Donald Jr., and a trustee.

They stood to his side along with his daughter Ivanka Trump, who also announced on Wednesday that she would sever ties with the Trump Organization and her own company.

Closing the news conference, Mr. Trump even got in a veiled plug for his former reality show, "The Apprentice" — he remains an executive producer of the current version, "Celebrity Apprentice" — by saying that if his sons did not manage his empire well while he served as president, he would tell them, "You're fired."



Donald Trump Said Russia Likely Behind Cyberattacks in First Post-Election News Conference (UNE)

Vladimir Putin, was behind cyberattacks aimed at influencing November's election.

Mr. Trump, in his first post-election news conference, said Mr. Putin "shouldn't have done it." And as he prepares to take office next week, Mr. Trump warned against future attempts to meddle in U.S. elections.

"I think it was Russia, but we also get hacked by other countries,"

Mr. Trump said in New York. Mr. Putin "won't be doing it" in the future, he said.

Mr. Trump's remarks came on a day when Washington buzzed with international intrigues: Russian hacks, a former British spy, alleged clandestine meetings between the Trump campaign and Moscow, and emerging details of how an unsubstantiated dossier—allegedly compiled by an investigations company hired by both Republicans

and Democrats—asserting those ties gained the attention of U.S. intelligence agencies, and the news media.

A hunt also began to identify who or what set in motion the latest firestorm to engulf the Trump team, at a time when the president-elect's picks to oversee the nation's national security and intelligence operations began testifying before skeptical Senate committees.

Carol E. Lee, Michael C. Bender and Rebecca Ballhaus

Updated Jan. 12, 2017 12:16 a.m. ET

President-elect Donald Trump said Wednesday for the first time that he agrees with the U.S. intelligence assessment that Russia, specifically President

Rex Tillerson, the former Exxon Mobil Corp. chief executive officer nominated to be secretary of state, volleyed questions from both Republicans and Democrats about his close ties to Mr. Putin, developed while conducting oil business deals in Russia.

Florida Sen. Marco Rubio, one of Mr. Trump's former Republican primary opponents, pointedly asked if Mr. Tillerson would favor repeal of sanctions imposed by President Barack Obama in response to the cyberattacks on the Democratic National Committee and a top aide to Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton.

"I would leave things in the status quo so that we are able to convey that this could go either way," Mr. Tillerson replied.

In his New York press conference, Mr. Trump didn't answer questions about whether he would maintain those sanctions and would now support tougher action against Russia in response to the cyberattack. He also didn't respond when asked whether anyone connected to him or his campaign had any contact with Russia during the campaign.

Mr. Trump's harshest remarks of the day were aimed at U.S. intelligence officials. While he called their work "vital" to American interests, he accused them of leaking the fact that his classified briefing last week on Russian activities during the U.S. election included information on unsubstantiated allegations that the Kremlin might have compromising material on him.

"That's something that Nazi Germany would have done and did do," he said, accusing intelligence officials of leaks. "I think it's a disgrace that information that was false and fake and never happened got released to the public."

The Central Intelligence Agency declined to comment.

U.S. Director of National Intelligence James Clapper spoke Wednesday evening with Mr. Trump, saying in a statement that he expressed his "profound dismay" over leaks about the intelligence provided to Mr. Trump last week.

"I emphasized that this document is not a U.S. Intelligence Community product and that I do not believe the leaks came from within the IC," Mr. Clapper said in the statement. "The IC has not made any judgment that the information in this document is reliable, and we did not rely upon it in any way for our conclusions. However, part of our obligation is to ensure that policymakers are provided with the fullest possible picture of any matters that might affect national security."

He added that he and Mr. Trump agreed that leaks "are extremely corrosive and damaging to our national security."

A former British intelligence officer who is now a director of a private security-and-investigations firm has been identified as the author of the dossier of unverified allegations, people familiar with the matter say.

Christopher Steele, a director of London-based Orbis Business Intelligence Ltd., prepared the dossier, the people said, for Mr. Trump's political opponents last year. The document alleges that the Kremlin colluded with Mr. Trump's presidential campaign and claims that Russian officials have evidence of Mr. Trump's behavior that could be used to blackmail him.

The allegations in the document, while unsubstantiated, provoked concern in official circles in Washington. Sen. John McCain (R., Ariz.), chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said he received a copy of the document late last year and forwarded the report to the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

"Upon examination of the contents, and unable to make a judgment about their accuracy, I delivered the information to the Director of the FBI," Mr. McCain said in a statement.

In the document, Michael D. Cohen is named as one of the Trump officials who allegedly held secret meetings with Russian officials to discuss the hacking operation. In an interview with The Wall Street Journal last week, Mr. Cohen described himself as Mr. Trump's "fix-it-guy."

Mr. Cohen has denied attending meetings with Russian cyberattackers bent on influencing the U.S. election.

Mr. Trump on Wednesday said he demanded proof from his lawyer. "I said, 'I want to see your passport,'" Mr. Trump said at his news conference. "He brings his passport to my office. I say, hey, wait a minute. He didn't leave the country. He wasn't out of the country. They had Michael Cohen of the Trump Organization was in Prague. It turned out to be a different Michael Cohen. It's a disgrace what took place. It's a disgrace and I think they ought to apologize to start with Michael Cohen."

The FBI looked into the alleged Cohen meeting and found no evidence he was in the Czech Republic in the time period when the meeting supposedly took place, said officials familiar with the matter.

Russia has denied it has compromising material on Mr. Trump—a move the president-elect praised on Wednesday. Moscow also denies that it used cyberattacks to try to influence the election.

Mr. Trump appeared not to fully agree with intelligence officials' determination that Russia was trying to help him defeat Mrs. Clinton. He said he believes that if Mr. Putin had information on him, he would have released it during the campaign, as U.S. officials accuse Russia of doing to Democrats.

"I think, frankly, had they broken into the Republican National Committee, I think they would've released it just like they did about Hillary," Mr. Trump said.

Mr. Trump said it is an "asset, not a liability" for the country if he is admired by Mr. Putin. But he also suggested that he, like his predecessors, could find himself vexed by the Russian leader.

"I don't know that I'm going to get along with Vladimir Putin. I hope I do. But there's a good chance I won't," Mr. Trump said.

One intriguing unknown in the drama is who set in motion the clandestine investigation into ties between Messrs. Trump and Putin.

Some early indicators suggested it might have been one of Mr. Trump's multiple GOP primary opponents.

Candidates for the White House and Congress increasingly rely on private-sector investigators to collect research on their opponents, but Mr. Trump's rivals and their organizations in the GOP campaign denied they commissioned the report.

Mike Murphy, a longtime Republican strategist who headed the super PAC supporting Republican Jeb Bush wrote on Twitter that his organization "had zero to do with this; never saw report, never heard of this ex MI-6 guy."

Tim Miller, a spokesman for Mr. Bush's campaign who later worked for an anti-Trump group, also denied any involvement. "It defies logic," he said. "If we had it, why didn't we use it?"

Officials involved with several Republican candidates and organizations said Wednesday that the report compiled by Mr. Steele didn't look like a typical research report commissioned for use by a political campaign. "No one on a campaign would invest in a product like that," said Joe Pounder, who served on Mr. Rubio's presidential campaign and previously ran the GOP opposition research firm America Rising. He said the report has "all the hallmarks of a corporate intelligence firm."

No presidential campaigns or political groups reported payments to Orbis in their required Federal Election Commission filings. However, several groups involved in the 2016 presidential campaign reported payments to limited liability companies, which don't always have to make public their ownership or how they, in turn, spend their funds.

—Shane Harris, Alexandra Berzon, and Felicia Schwartz contributed to this article.

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Christopher Steele, Ex-British Intelligence Officer, Said to Have Prepared Dossier on Trump

Bradley Hope, Michael Rothfeld and Alan Cullison

Updated Jan. 11, 2017 4:20 p.m. ET

A former British intelligence officer who is now a director of a private security-and-investigations firm has been identified as the author of the dossier of unverified allegations about President-elect Donald Trump's activities and connections

in Russia, people familiar with the matter say.

Christopher Steele, a director of London-based Orbis Business Intelligence Ltd., prepared the dossier, the people said. The

document, which an official close to the matter said was prepared under contract to both Republican and Democratic adversaries of Mr. Trump, alleges that the Kremlin colluded with Mr. Trump's presidential campaign and claims

that Russian officials have compromising evidence of Mr. Trump's behavior that could be used to blackmail him.

Mr. Trump has dismissed the dossier's contents as false and Russia has denied the claims.

Mr. Steele, 52 years old, is one of two directors of the firm, along with Christopher Burrows, 58.

Mr. Burrows, reached at his home outside London on Wednesday, said he wouldn't "confirm or deny" that Orbis had produced the report. A neighbor of Mr. Steele's said Mr. Steele had said he would be away for a few days. In previous weeks, Mr. Steele has declined repeated requests for interviews through an intermediary, who said the subject was "too hot."

A LinkedIn profile in Mr. Burrows's name says he was a counselor in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, with foreign postings in Brussels and New Delhi in the 2000s. The Foreign Office declined to comment. A LinkedIn profile for Mr. Steele doesn't give specifics about his career. Intelligence officers often use diplomatic postings as cover for their espionage activities.

Orbis Business Intelligence was formed in 2009 by former British intelligence professionals, it says on its website. U.K. corporate records say Orbis is owned by another firm that in turn is jointly owned by Messrs. Steele and Burrows. It occupies offices in a building

overlooking Grosvenor Gardens in London's high-end Belgravia neighborhood. The firm relies on a "global network" of experts and business leaders to provide clients with strategic advice, mount "intelligence-gathering operations" and conduct "complex, often cross-border investigations," its website says.

The dossier consists of a series of unsigned memos that appear to have been written between June and December 2016. Beyond creating the document, Mr. Steele also devised a plan to get the information to law-enforcement officials in the U.S. and Europe, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation, according to a person familiar with the matter.

"We have no political ax to grind," Mr. Burrows said, speaking about corporate-intelligence work in general terms, "the objective is to respond to the requirements set out by our clients. He said when clients asked a firm like Orbis to investigate something, you "see what's out there" first and later "stress test" your findings against other evidence.

No presidential campaigns or super PACs reported payments to Orbis in their required Federal Election Commission filings. But several super PACs over the course of the campaign reported that they paid limited liability companies, whose ultimate owners may be difficult or impossible to discern.

The New York Times How a Sensational, Unverified Dossier Became a Crisis for Donald Trump (UNE)

Scott Shane, Nicholas Confessore and Matthew Rosenberg

WASHINGTON — Seven months ago, a respected former British spy named Christopher Steele won a contract to build a file on Donald J. Trump's ties to Russia. Last week, the explosive details — unsubstantiated accounts of frolics with prostitutes, real estate deals that were intended as bribes and coordination with Russian intelligence of the hacking of Democrats — were summarized for Mr. Trump in an appendix to a top-secret intelligence report.

The consequences have been incalculable and will play out long past Inauguration Day. Word of the summary, which was also given to President Obama and congressional leaders, leaked to CNN Tuesday, and the rest of the media followed with sensational reports.

Mr. Trump denounced the unproven claims Wednesday as a fabrication, a Nazi-style smear concocted by "sick people." It has further undermined his relationship with the intelligence agencies and cast a shadow over the new administration.

Late Wednesday night, after speaking with Mr. Trump, James R. Clapper Jr., the director of national intelligence, issued a statement decrying leaks about the matter and saying of Mr. Steele's dossier that the intelligence agencies have "not made any judgment that the information in this document is reliable." Mr. Clapper suggested that intelligence officials had nonetheless shared it to give policymakers "the fullest possible picture of any matters that might affect national security."

Parts of the story remain out of reach — most critically the basic question of how much, if anything, in the dossier is true. But it is

The dossier's emergence—it was published online and widely circulated Tuesday—has generated a firestorm less than 10 days before Mr. Trump's inauguration. U.S. officials have examined the allegations but haven't confirmed any of them. The Wall Street Journal also hasn't corroborated any of the allegations in the dossier.

"It's all fake news," Mr. Trump said in a news conference Wednesday. "It's all phony stuff. It didn't happen."

The dossier contains lurid and hard-to-prove allegations. The FBI has found no evidence, for example, supporting the dossier's its claim that an attorney for Mr. Trump went to the Czech Republic to meet Kremlin officials, U.S. officials said. The attorney has also denied the claim.

The author of the report had a good reputation in the intelligence world and was stationed in Russia for years, said John Sipher, who retired in 2014 after 28 years in the CIA's clandestine service, where he specialized in Russia and counterintelligence. Mr. Sipher is now director of client services at CrossLead Inc., a Washington-based technology company set up by retired U.S. Army Gen. Stanley McChrystal.

Private-intelligence firms like Orbis have a growing presence. Major corporations use them to conduct due diligence on potential business partners in risky areas, but quality control can be loose when it comes to high-level political intrigue,

executives of private intelligence companies say.

When government intelligence agencies produce clandestine political reports, they often include thick sections about sources, possible motivations behind their information and the methods used to approach them. Such background helps decision makers determine how reliable the information is.

Andrew Wordsworth, co-founder of London-based investigations firm Raedas, who often works on Russian issues, said the memos in the Trump dossier were "not convincing at all."

"It's just way too good," he said. "If the head of the CIA were to declare he got information of this quality, you wouldn't believe it."

Mr. Wordsworth said it wouldn't make sense for Russian intelligence officials to expose state secrets to a former MI-6 officer. "Russians believe once you are an agent, you're an agent forever," he said.

—Jenny Gross and Jason Douglas contributed to this article.

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possible to piece together a rough narrative of what led to the current crisis, including lingering questions about the ties binding Mr. Trump and his team to Russia. The episode also offers a glimpse of the hidden side of presidential campaigns, involving private sleuths-for-hire looking for the worst they can find about the next American leader.

The story began in September 2015, when a wealthy Republican donor who strongly opposed Mr. Trump put up the money to hire a Washington research firm run by former journalists, Fusion GPS, to compile a dossier about the real estate magnate's past scandals and weaknesses, according to a person familiar with the effort. The person described the opposition research work on condition of anonymity, citing the volatile nature of the story and the likelihood of future legal disputes. The identity of the donor is unclear.

Fusion GPS, headed by a former Wall Street Journal journalist known for his dogged reporting, Glenn Simpson, most often works for business clients. But in presidential elections, the firm is sometimes hired by candidates, party organizations or donors to do political "oppo" work — shorthand for opposition research — on the side.

It is routine work and ordinarily involves creating a big, searchable database of public information: past news reports, documents from lawsuits and other relevant data. For months, Fusion GPS gathered the documents and put together the files from Mr. Trump's past in business and entertainment, a rich target.

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After Mr. Trump emerged as the presumptive nominee in the spring, the Republican interest in financing the effort ended. But Democratic supporters of Hillary Clinton were very interested, and Fusion GPS kept doing the same deep dives, but

on behalf of new clients.

In June, the tenor of the effort suddenly changed. The Washington Post reported that the Democratic National Committee had been hacked, apparently by Russian government agents, and a mysterious figure calling himself

“Guccifer 2.0” began to publish the stolen documents online.

Mr. Simpson hired Mr. Steele, a former British intelligence officer with whom he had worked before. Mr. Steele, in his early 50s, had served undercover in Moscow in the early 1990s and later was the top

expert on Russia at the London headquarters of Britain's spy service, MI6. When he stepped down in 2009, he started his own commercial intelligence firm, Orbis Business Intelligence.



Charles Lane : The Trump dossier is silly — except for one thing

By Charles Lane

Anyone who reads the unconfirmed report on Russia's purported ties to President-elect Donald Trump has to agree with the media organizations that balked at publishing it — until BuzzFeed decided to let Americans “make up their own minds.”

The document's provenance seems to be a dirt-digging contract issued to an ex-British spy by Trump's political opponents; it's a pastiche of claims from unnamed sources, marred by spelling errors and including a tale about a Russia-Trump conspiracy hatched in a city, Prague, that Trump's purported representative at the purported meeting says he's never visited.

It culminates in the assertion that Russian intelligence controls Trump via possession of a video showing him disgustingly engaged with prostitutes in Moscow, a classic KGB-style *kompromat* (blackmail) scenario that seemed a little too vivid even before Trump ridiculed it at a news conference Wednesday.

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There remains, however, one blindingly obvious, utterly true and, so far, insufficiently explained fact: Trump favors Russian President Vladimir Putin, and Putin favors him.

You hardly need a clandestine “Source A” to know that RT, the Kremlin's global media network, has consistently apologized for Trump.

Nor is there much doubt that the Putin regime hacked Democratic Party documents harmful to Hillary Clinton's candidacy, and used WikiLeaks as a front for their release, as even Trump fleetingly and grudgingly conceded Wednesday.

(Bastien Inzaurrealde/The Washington Post)

The Post's Rosalind S. Helderan explains the questions around the unconfirmed claims Russia has compromising information on Trump. The Post's Rosalind S. Helderan explains the questions around the unconfirmed claims Russia has compromising information on Trump. (Bastien Inzaurrealde/The Washington Post)

Through it all, Trump has dodged the issue of Russian meddling in the election and changed the subject to the purported benefits of closer relations with Moscow, insisting Wednesday that “if Putin likes Donald Trump, guess what, folks? That's called an asset, not a liability.”

There needs to be more focus on why this bizarre bromance is so dangerous, even if its origins lie in nothing more sinister than the misguided foreign-policy musings of a celebrity real estate mogul.

Basically, the risks are the same as they would be in allying with any corrupt, dictatorial regime — magnified many times over by Putin's geopolitical and ideological pretensions, which are ambitious indeed.

Whatever its other defects, the leaked document describes those rather well: Putin aims to “encourage splits and divisions in

the Western alliance” so as to foster “a return to 19th-century ‘Great Power’ politics . . . rather than the ideals-based international order established after World War II.”

Trump's big idea is an alliance with Moscow against the Islamic State, which his designated national security adviser, the Russophilic Michael T. Flynn, has promoted for years on the grounds that our “common enemy” is radical Islam.

The problem is twofold: Russia may not have all that much to offer; despite its supposed hostility toward the terrorist group, Defense Secretary Ashton B. Carter says Moscow has done “virtually zero” to fight the Islamic State while otherwise waging war, in alliance with Iran, against Bashar al-Assad's enemies in Syria.

And what little help Russia might supply the Trump administration would not be free. Such trade-offs are a commonplace of U.S. intelligence liaisons with dictatorships, past and present. When dictatorships helped us against, say, Soviet-backed guerrillas during the Cold War, the assistance often came in return for an American blind eye to corruption and human rights violations.

If Putin cooperated against the Islamic State, his price would surely be American indulgence of his designs against Ukraine and, over time, other European states. He would also likely try to penetrate U.S. intelligence, stealing those secrets and technology the Trump administration did not share.

On a subtler — but no less real — level, close partnership with Putin would legitimize his brand of illiberal rule by making it seem effective

against a greater evil, terrorism; conversely, it would delegitimize liberal-democratic politics.

This is precisely the sort of devil's bargain people have in mind when they warn against “letting the terrorists win.”

At least our Western European Cold War allies in NATO were mostly democratic, obviating moral dilemmas; and the United States redeemed its compromise at Yalta, which let the Soviets dominate Eastern Europe, by supporting democracy in that area after 1989.

Even after recent financial crises and democratic backsliding, Europe could have much to offer in the fight against the Islamic State; from Paris to Berlin, events over the past year show that jihadist terrorism is more of a European-American common enemy than a Russian-American one.

Yet instead of urging revitalized transatlantic relations, with NATO as its anchor, and instead of emphasizing values as a bulwark against terrorism, Trump disparages democratic leaders such as Angela Merkel of Germany and celebrates Putin's “strength.”

It would be a profound historical irony, and a profound historical tragedy, if a President Trump were to cozy up to Putin's Russia at the expense of democracy and self-determination for Europe and other regions. It would be kompromat on an international scale.

Read more from Charles Lane's archive, follow him on Twitter or subscribe to his updates on Facebook.



Decision to brief Trump on allegations brought a secret and unsubstantiated dossier into the public domain (UNE)

<https://www.facebook.com/ellenakashimast/>

As the nation's top spies prepared to brief President Obama and President-elect Donald Trump on Russian interference in the 2016

election, they faced an excruciatingly delicate question: Should they mention the salacious allegations that had been circulating in Washington for months that Moscow had compromising

information on the incoming president?

Ultimately, they concluded they had no choice. A 35-page dossier packed with details of supposed compromising personal information,

alleged financial entanglements and political intrigue was already in such wide circulation in Washington that every major news organization seemed to have a copy.

"You'd be derelict if you didn't" mention the dossier, a U.S. official said. To ignore the file, produced by a private-sector security firm, would only make the supposed guardians of the nation's secrets seem uninformed, officials said, adding that many were convinced that it was only a matter of time before someone decided to publish the material.

Their decision appears to have hastened that outcome, triggering coverage of politically charged allegations that news organizations had tried to run down for months but could find no basis for publishing until they were summarized and included alongside a highly classified report assembled by the nation's intelligence services.

[Intelligence chiefs briefed Trump on unconfirmed claims Russia has compromising information on president-elect]

The Post's Rosalind S. Helderman explains the questions around the unconfirmed claims Russia has compromising information on Trump. The Post's Rosalind S. Helderman explains the questions around the unconfirmed claims Russia has compromising information on Trump. (Bastien Inzaurrealde/The Washington Post)

(Bastien Inzaurrealde/The Washington Post)

U.S. officials said Wednesday that the decision had been unanimous to attach the two-page summary of the dossier to a sweeping report on Russian election interference commissioned by the White House and briefed to Obama, Trump and congressional leaders.

But U.S. intelligence officials appear to have been caught off-guard by the fallout, including a blistering attack by Trump, who accused spy agencies of engaging in Nazi-like tactics to smear him.

In an effort to contain the damage, Director of National Intelligence James R. Clapper Jr. said he spoke with Trump on Wednesday and "expressed my profound dismay at the leaks that have been appearing in the press."

Clapper said in a statement issued late Wednesday that he told Trump that the allegations had come from a "private security company," that U.S. spy agencies had "not made any judgment that the information in this document is reliable."

"However, part of our obligation is to ensure that policymakers are provided with the fullest possible picture of any matters that might affect national security," Clapper said.

A U.S. official who spoke on the condition of anonymity said the nature of the summary "was fully explained" to Trump on Friday and "put into context."

(Sarah Parnass, Glenn Kessler/The Washington Post)

Washington Post Fact Checker Glenn Kessler assesses five moments from President-elect Donald Trump's Jan. 11 question-and-answer session with reporters. Washington Post Fact Checker Glenn Kessler assesses five moments from President-elect Donald Trump's Jan. 11 question-and-answer session with reporters. (Video: Sarah Parnass, Glenn Kessler/Photo: Jabin Botsford/The Washington Post)

Clapper, CIA Director John Brennan, FBI Chief James B. Comey and National Security Agency Director Mike Rogers all concurred that both Obama and Trump should know that U.S. spy agencies were aware of the claims about compromising information on Trump and had investigated or explored them to some degree.

U.S. officials emphasized that the summary was merely an annex to the main report, that the allegations it contained have never been substantiated and did not appear in the main body of the report or influence its conclusions that Russia sought to sabotage the 2016 race and help elect Trump.

But linking a collection of unsubstantiated allegations to a classified report that is supposed to convey the intelligence community's firmest conclusions about Russian election interference has blurred the distinction between corroborated intelligence and innuendo.

Former U.S. intelligence officials described the inclusion of the summary — drawn from "opposition research" done by a political research firm — as highly unusual.

"It would be extraordinary if not unprecedented to bring to the attention of a president and - president-elect a private document for which you had no reason to believe the allegations made in it," said Michael Morell, the former deputy director of the CIA and a Clinton supporter.

Spokesmen for the CIA, FBI and the director of national intelligence declined to comment.

[Read the declassified intelligence community report on Russian activities in the 2016 election]

The handling of the matter also seemed to deepen the level of distrust between Trump and the intelligence community, whose work

he has repeatedly disparaged since his election victory two months ago.

In a news conference in New York, Trump blasted U.S. intelligence agencies and accused them of employing Nazi-like tactics to discredit him.

"I think it was disgraceful, disgraceful, that the intelligence agencies allowed any information that turned out to be so false and fake, out," Trump said, referring to a burst of headlines over the past two days about the dossier. "That's something that Nazi Germany would do and did do."

The material in the dossier was assembled by a former British intelligence officer, Christopher Steele, whose security and investigations firm was hired to assist a political research firm in Washington that was initially working for Trump's opponents in the Republican primaries but later offered its services to Democrats, according to individuals familiar with the matter. Steele's role was first reported Wednesday by the Wall Street Journal. Since 2009, he and another former British intelligence officer have jointly operated a Britain-based firm called Orbis Business Intelligence. He could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

The dossier was provided to multiple news outlets, including The Washington Post, which pursued numerous leads, including overseas, but could not substantiate its allegations.

The document was also at some point delivered to the FBI. Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) acknowledged in a public statement Wednesday that late last year he had "received sensitive information that has since been made public" and, unable to assess its accuracy, delivered the file to Comey.

Other officials said that the FBI had obtained the dossier even before McCain's involvement and that U.S. officials had met with Steele, the former British spy, at least twice — once in August and again in mid-October, after Clapper had released a public statement accusing Russia of interfering in the election.

Those meetings were part of a broader effort by the FBI and other agencies to evaluate the claims about Russia and compromising material on Trump. The dossier also included claims of ongoing, unexplained contacts between members of Trump's inner circle and allies of the Kremlin. The status of that inquiry is unclear.

In Senate testimony Tuesday, Comey said that "we never confirm or deny a pending investigation."

The line drew a reaction of disbelief from some lawmakers who have been sharply critical of Comey's decision during the election to discuss the bureau's probe of Hillary Clinton's email use.

"The irony of your making that statement here I cannot avoid," said Sen. Angus King (I-Maine).

Although Comey was one of only four senior officials involved in the decision to include the two-page summary, some in Washington were quick to see that move as another political misstep by the FBI chief — calling arguably unnecessary attention to allegations against a major political figure.

U.S. officials have offered conflicting accounts of what the meetings with Steele accomplished. A senior official said Tuesday that while the allegations in the two-page summary could not be corroborated, it was included in part because the sourcing was seen as reliable.

Others disputed that and said that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to evaluate Steele's claims without getting detailed information about his sources in Russia, information he is seen as unlikely to be willing to share.

A former senior U.S. intelligence official also questioned his ability to maneuver in Russia and gain access to high-level officials with ties to the Kremlin or Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Checkpoint newsletter

Military, defense and security at home and abroad.

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"How did this former British intelligence officer talk to all these Russian officials and not get arrested for espionage?" the former official asked. Steele's identity and association with his investigations firm are public, and are almost certainly known to Russian counterintelligence.

"They would have been all over him," the former official said. "There are aspects of this [dossier] that are believable when you read it. There are other aspects that aren't."

Some details would seem relatively easy for the FBI to assess, including meetings between close associates of Trump and Putin allies.

But a senior law enforcement official acknowledged that other claims — including sweeping characterizations of relationships and rivalries inside the Kremlin — are more elusive. "This is not something we can validate or check

out," the official said. "It's the view of people in Russia. It's not like we

can go out and determine its veracity."

Sari Horwitz and Julie Tate contributed to this report.

The New York Times

Andrew Higgins et Andrew Kramer : Russia's Sexual Blackmail Didn't Die With the Soviets

Andrew Higgins and Andrew Kramer

When the Soviet Union set up the Intourist hotel and travel company under Stalin, the bellboys, drivers, cooks and maids all worked for the N.K.V.D., the secret police agency later known as the K.G.B. Also on the payroll were the prostitutes deployed to entrap and blackmail visiting foreign politicians and businessmen.

Russia's Intourist hotels have since been sold off, including the travel company's once dowdy flagship hostelry just down the road from the Kremlin. Lavishly refurbished and fitted with a spa and special security features, the hotel is now the Ritz-Carlton, a five-star temple of luxurious living that promotes itself as an "unforgettable retreat in the heart of the city."

But, according to uncorroborated and highly defamatory memos prepared by a former British intelligence operative for a Washington political and corporate research firm, the Ritz has remained a place where foreign guests, including Donald J. Trump, can fall victim to the Russian art of "kompromat," the collection of compromising material as a source of leverage.

A summary of the former spy's findings was presented last week to President Obama and President-elect Trump, who at a news conference on Wednesday denounced publication of the allegations as "fake news." A spokeswoman for the Russian Foreign Ministry dismissed the accusations as "mind-boggling nonsense" and "outrageous drivel."

A hotel spokeswoman declined to discuss the matter. "In line with our company standard to protect the privacy of our guests, we do not speak about any individual or group with whom we may have done business," Irina Zaitseva, the hotel's marketing and communication manager, said in an email.

Whatever did or did not happen in Mr. Trump's hotel suite in 2013, when he visited Moscow to attend a Miss Universe contest, Russia has a long and well-documented record of using kompromat to discredit the Kremlin's foes and to lean on its

potential friends.

For decades, hotels across the former Soviet Union visited by foreigners were equipped with bugging devices and cameras by the K.G.B. A remnant can still be seen in Tallinn, the capital of the former Soviet republic Estonia, where the new Finnish owners of the former Intourist hotel have set up a museum to display the surveillance and other techniques used to spy on and blackmail foreign guests.

Peep Ehasalu, who helped set up the museum, said that 60 of the hotel's 423 rooms were bugged and reserved for "interesting persons" like foreign businessmen. Guests who were judged vulnerable to blackmail were put in a handful of rooms with holes in the walls through which special cameras would film dalliances with prostitutes. All the prostitutes, Mr. Ehasalu said, worked for the K.G.B., which chased away freelance sex workers who had not been officially approved.

Most of the guests at the time were from Finland, which had unusually close and accommodating relations with Moscow but which Soviet leaders always worried might tilt toward the West. To discourage that, the K.G.B. targeted decision makers from Finland who made trips to Estonia.

"If a politician or businessman knows that the K.G.B. can publish embarrassing photos of him or send them to his wife, this person is very easy to control," Mr. Ehasalu said in a telephone interview. Businessmen who fell into this trap, he said, "all went back home and said life in the Soviet Union was fine and that Finland should make more business with the Soviets."

An early victim of kompromat was Joseph Alsop, an influential American newspaper columnist who, during a 1957 visit to Moscow, fell into a gay "honey trap" set by the K.G.B., which filmed his encounter with a young Russian man at his hotel.

In his own account of how two K.G.B. officers stormed into his room shortly after he finished having sex, Mr. Alsop said he was told that there were photographs of "the act" and that he needed "to

help them a little if they are going to help me." He informed the American Embassy and hastily left the Soviet Union.

Russia, unlike Estonia, has hardly turned its back on Soviet-era methods. The F.S.B., the successor agency to the K.G.B., lost much of its influence in the early 1990s, but has reasserted itself forcefully since Vladimir V. Putin took power 16 years ago.

Before becoming president, Mr. Putin played a prominent role in a particularly successful kompromat operation. As head of the F.S.B. in 1997, he won the trust of President Boris Yeltsin by helping destroy the career of Russia's prosecutor general, Yury Skuratov. After starting an investigation into Kremlin corruption, the prosecutor was disgraced on national television by the broadcast of a video that showed a man who looked like him in bed with two young women.

Mr. Putin certified in public that the man in the video, widely believed to have been arranged and then filmed by the F.S.B., was indeed the prosecutor general. Mr. Skuratov resigned, the corruption investigation ended and a grateful Mr. Yeltsin named Mr. Putin prime minister, clearing his path to the presidency.

Unlike entirely fabricated reports of criminal or simply embarrassing behavior, kompromat is generally true, though photographs and videos are sometimes tinkered with to heighten the embarrassment. This makes it a particularly blunt and dangerous weapon that can easily backfire.

Mark Galeotti, an expert on Russia's security services at the Institute of International Relations in Prague, said that the unverified strategy suggested by the British spy was "very risky" and that it would be nonsensical for Russia to blackmail Mr. Trump.

"If the Russians ever released such a video, they would be declaring war on Trump," he said. "And that is definitely not something Putin would want to do."

For Mr. Putin's opponents in Russia's opposition, kompromat, including surreptitiously recorded

sex videos, has become a serious problem.

The release of embarrassing material has had devastating effects on the families and careers of some activists, leaving scars lasting years. But the release of such material can also be a badge of honor, indicating that the target did not succumb to blackmail.

Ilya V. Yashin, a young activist and ally of the slain opposition leader Boris Nemtsov, was among the targets of a "honey trap" operation that involved a woman who went by the nickname Mumu and managed to seduce at least three journalists and members of the Russian opposition. She had access to an apartment wired for surveillance and stocked with cocaine and sex toys, according to Mr. Yashin, who spoke in an interview about his experience.

Mr. Yashin, 25 at the time and unmarried, said Mumu had contacted him online. They dated for a few weeks. One evening, she called and asked him to come over for a "surprise" that turned out to be a second woman who wanted to engage in a ménage à trois.

"What startled me when I came over is how the two girls basically attacked me sexually once I came inside the door," Mr. Yashin said. He did not resist, he said. "Later, I became more suspicious when one of them took out a big bag of sex toys. Katya got a whip and started whipping me. I told her to put it and all other toys away." Soon, the women also produced cocaine.

Mr. Yashin said he suspected a trap and "told the girls that I needed to go and began to get dressed."

No video of the encounter was ever made public; Mr. Yashin said this was probably because he had not been filmed with the sex toys or cocaine. Other videos filmed in the same apartment were released in 2010.

The tactic did not always succeed. "Some people didn't buy it at all," Mr. Yashin said. Mumu had invited Dmitri Oreshkin, a political analyst, to her apartment. Instead, Mr. Yashin said, Mr. Oreshkin invited her to his home, "where she was greeted by his wife."

Daniel Henninger

Jan. 11, 2017 7:08 p.m. ET

A standard journalistic defense for publishing, or reporting on, the sort of thing BuzzFeed put on the web Tuesday night about Donald Trump's alleged compromise by the Russians is that "the people" ultimately will sort it all out. You could say the same thing about tornadoes.

Conventional wisdom after the election held that the media had been chastened by its coverage of the campaign, that it had learned to be more careful about separating facts from the media bubble.

The past week's news, if one still can call it that, was bookended by two Trump files. The first was the intelligence community report that Russia's hack of the presidential election favored Mr. Trump. The second was a salacious opposition-research file on Mr. Trump published by BuzzFeed, which says it is about "trending buzz." Below the site's Trump-in-Russia stories Wednesday sat, "Lauren Conrad Just Posted The Most Adorable Photo Of Her Baby Bump."

No one has learned anything.

When people played on real pinball machines, everyone knew that if you banged on the machine too hard, it would lock up. It would "tilt." Because so many once-respected institutions are behaving so badly, the American system is getting close to tilt.

**The
Washington
Post**

Russia says it doesn't gather dirt on others, but history of 'kompromat' says otherwise

<https://www.facebook.com/roth.andrew?fref=ts>

MOSCOW — The Kremlin on Wednesday dismissed as "a total fake" allegations that Russian intelligence agencies collected compromising information about President-elect Donald Trump — a denial that was echoed by much of Russia's establishment.

But when President Vladimir Putin's spokesman went further — saying the Kremlin "does not engage in compromising material" — it was widely greeted by the rolling of Russian eyes.

Gathering "kompromat," the Russian word for potentially embarrassing information that can offer leverage, has a long history reaching back to Soviet days.

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

The interregnum between the election result and next week's inauguration has become a wild, destructive circus, damaging the reputation and public standing of everyone performing in it, including Donald Trump.

Trumpians will resist that thought, but they should be concerned at their diminishing numbers. Quinnipiac's poll this week puts Mr. Trump's approval rating at 37%. Building in even an expansive margin for error, this is an astonishing low for a president-elect.

Mr. Trump routinely mocks the "dishonest media." He has a point, but dishonesty isn't the problem. The internet, media's addictive drug, is the problem. Whatever publication standards existed before the web are eroding.

Any person getting a significant federal job undergoes an FBI background check. These "raw" FBI files—a mix of falsity, half-truths and facts—are never published.

The BuzzFeed story about Donald Trump in Russia is a raw FBI file, or worse. Once it went online, every major U.S. news outlet prominently published long accounts of the story, filled with grave analysis and pro forma caveats about "unverifiable," as if this is an exemption for recycling sludge.

This isn't news as normally understood. It's something else.

Before web-driven media, follow-up stories on anything as fact-free as

BuzzFeed's piece would go on page A15. No more. Now all such stories—in newspapers, on TV or online—run at the same unmitigated intensity because that's the only level the web knows. These recurring political media storms have become self-feeding wildfires, and they aren't going to stop. Everyone near them gets burned.

The intelligence community used to know how to keep important secrets. That collapsed in 2011 when the Obama White House poured out operational details of the Osama bin Laden raid within 48 hours. Now the intelligence community, whether the FBI's James Comey, the CIA or NSA, have become public players in a media environment looking more like Mad Max chasing gasoline than all the news that's fit to print.

The intelligence community's report on Russia's hacking of the election purported to disavow politics even as it said Vladimir Putin stopped praising Mr. Trump in June because he "probably" feared it would backfire. Or "Putin most likely wanted to discredit Secretary Clinton." We need three intelligence agencies for "probably" and "most likely"?

The intel report burned as another Trump bonfire for days with little notice given to its page-after-page detail on Mr. Putin's broad, intense and malign effort to undermine the West's belief in itself. Our election was the tip of the Putin propaganda iceberg. But that's barely a story.

everyone, like a vacuum, picking up anything and everything."

(Bastien Inzaurrealde/The Washington Post)

The Post's Rosalind S. Helderman explains the questions around the unconfirmed claims Russia has compromising information on Trump. The Post's Rosalind S. Helderman explains the questions around the unconfirmed claims Russia has compromising information on Trump. (Bastien Inzaurrealde/The Washington Post)

This in itself does not confirm the allegations, summarized in a classified report U.S. officials said was delivered to President Obama and Trump last week, that Russian intelligence services have compromising material and information on Trump's personal life and finances.

[Trump and Obama briefed on unconfirmed claims Russia has

Mr. Putin has to be grinning at how easy it is to manipulate the U.S. political system into chaos with a Gmail hack and disinformation. Our web-fueled flameouts are doing his work for him.

Which brings us to Donald Trump, the next president.

The New York Times posted this early Wednesday: "From the moment the unsubstantiated but explosive intelligence report hit the internet, the questions arose: When and what would Mr. Trump tweet?"

That is the Gray Lady reducing U.S. politics from something formerly serious to the level of a videogame app—abetted by Mr. Trump, who tweeted that the oppo-research report was "Nazi Germany."

The fantastic, unsubstantiated memo on the Russians controlling Donald Trump got elevation, in part, because of Mr. Trump's extensive pro-Putin tweets and comments. Absent more than a 140-character rationale from the Trump camp, the darkest explanation bubbled to the top of the web fever swamp.

Our primary political institutions, including the presidency, are disappearing into a thrill-filled world of their own making that is beyond that of normal, onlooking Americans. None seem to know how to stop banging on the system.

Tilt.

Write henninger@wsj.com.

compromising information on president-elect]

But the deep roots of kompromat add another layer to the probes into the credibility of the reports about a Trump dossier.

Trump himself rejected the allegations, first in tweets and then during a news conference in New York. "It's all fake news," he told reporters. "It's phony stuff. It did not happen."

Russia's strong denials are directly at odds with the report and were reminiscent of previous Kremlin rebuttals after U.S. intelligence agencies said Russia had a hand in hacking Web accounts of the Democratic Party and top campaign figures for Hillary Clinton. Russia, however, has made no attempt to hide its support for Trump, whom many Russian leaders see as less adversarial than Clinton.

At the news conference, Trump acknowledged for the first time that he thinks Russia was responsible for hacking the Democratic National Committee. In Washington, Trump's pick for secretary of state, former ExxonMobil chief Rex Tillerson, called the intelligence findings of Russian interference in the U.S. presidential election "troubling." But Tillerson said he has not yet seen the classified information on the alleged compromising material.

Nikolai Kovalyov, a current legislator and former director of the Federal Security Service, said that agents would not have collected material on Trump while he was visiting Moscow in 2013 to help run a Miss Universe pageant.

"Who is interested in gathering compromising material on a man who came here to organize a beauty contest?" Kovalyov said. "I

can tell you from my professional experience that Russia does not have such practices."

[Trump: Good relations with Putin "an asset"]

Gudkov disagreed. If Trump stayed in a hotel room equipped with surveillance equipment — "a plus room," Gudkov said spy agencies call them — "there is every reason to believe his actions could have been recorded," he said.

Jonathan Eyal, director of international security studies at the London-based think tank Royal United Services Institute, said that it would be "inconceivable that Russian intelligence wouldn't try to gather information on Trump if he came there."

Among the allegations contained in the report is that surveillance

captured Trump in a hotel room with prostitutes. This has not been confirmed.

Before the trip to Russia in 2013 mentioned in the report, Trump said: "I told many people: Be careful, because you don't want to see yourself on television, cameras all over the place. Not just Russia, all over. Does anyone believe that story? I'm also very much of a germaphobe, by the way. Believe me."

Sex tapes, and their use as leverage, have a long history in Russian politics.

In 2010, hidden-camera videos of opposition politicians and journalists having sex or using cocaine in various hotel rooms were leaked online. The targets included opposition politician Ilya Yashin,

satirist Viktor Shenderovich and others.

Yashin blamed the Kremlin.

Last year, five months before parliamentary elections, a tape emerged with opposition politician Mikhail Kasyanov, leader of the RPR Parnas party, having sex with a woman who was not his wife. The video helped lead to a schism in the party from which it did not recover.

"It's the ABCs of the work of any secret service, to get information which is important for operations, including political ones," said Alexei Kondaurov, a former lawmaker and major general in the Soviet-era KGB.

Karla Adam contributed to this report from London. Natalya Abbakumova contributed from Moscow.



Trump says he has 'nothing to do with Russia.' The past 30 years show otherwise.

Kranish

By Michael

President-elect Donald Trump tweeted Wednesday that he has "NOTHING TO DO WITH RUSSIA - NO DEALS, NO LOANS, NO NOTHING!"

Trump, however, has a long history with Russia, trying repeatedly to build luxury properties in Moscow, holding a beauty pageant there and benefiting from heavy investments from Russians in his properties around the world.

It is not possible to verify whether Trump does not have current deals or loans with Russian entities because he has refused to release his tax returns. But a look at Trump's record since the 1980s shows that he and his family long have been interested in trying to do business there. The connection became a matter of curiosity during the 2016 presidential race. A Russian official was quoted saying his government had been in contact with Trump's campaign, and the candidate repeatedly praised Russian President Vladimir Putin while urging the country's leaders to hack into his opponent's emails.

The connections go back 30 years.

Trump first visited Moscow in 1987 in an effort to make real estate deals. As he told it in a Playboy interview, two Russian fighter planes accompanied his jet to the airport, and he had insisted on having two Russian colonels fly with him. He stayed at the National Hotel, overlooking the Kremlin, and said that the Soviets wanted him to build two luxury hotels. The Soviet

ambassador had visited Trump in New York City and said his daughter had "adored" Trump Tower and suggested a Moscow version, according to a Newsweek account of the visit published at the time. Trump visited a number of potential sites around Moscow.

(Sarah Parnass, Glenn Kessler/The Washington Post)

Washington Post Fact Checker Glenn Kessler assesses five moments from President-elect Donald Trump's Jan. 11 question-and-answer session with reporters. Washington Post Fact Checker Glenn Kessler assesses five moments from President-elect Donald Trump's Jan. 11 question-and-answer session with reporters. (Video: Sarah Parnass, Glenn Kessler/Photo: Jabin Botsford/The Washington Post)

Trump said he told Soviet officials that he did not know how to arrange financing because the government owned the land. Trump said he was told: "No problem, Mr. Trump. We will work out lease arrangements."

Trump said he responded, "I want ownership, not leases." The Soviets said they would create a committee of seven government representatives and three Trump associates to resolve problems.

Trump said in the 1990 interview that he was "very unimpressed" with the Soviet system, which he called "a disaster." "What you will see there soon is a revolution," he added. He said his "problem" with then-Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev was that he was "not a firm enough hand."

Trump did not wind up making a deal, but he soon tried again.

In 1996, Trump sought to build luxury condominiums in Moscow, but the deal never happened. Trump tried again in 2005, signing a deal for a possible Trump building in a converted pencil factory, but this also failed to materialize.

The Trumps were undaunted. Donald Trump Jr. traveled to Russia six times in an 18-month period, starting around 2006, to try to make deals. His father seemed convinced it would happen.

"Russia is one of the hottest places in the world for investment," the senior Trump said in 2007. "We will be in Moscow at some point."

The following year, Trump Jr. appeared at a real estate conference in which he said the company had tried to invest in Russia. He acknowledged that "Russians make up a pretty disproportionate cross-section of a lot of our assets. We see a lot of money pouring in from Russia."

The Trump company sold condos to Russian investors, and the senior Trump received \$95 million for a Palm Beach mansion in 2008 from Russian oligarch Dmitry Rybolovlev, more than twice the \$41 million of Trump's original purchase price, according to property records.

"The closest I came to Russia, I bought a house a number of years ago in Palm Beach, Florida," Trump said in July. "Palm Beach is a very expensive place. There was a man who went bankrupt, and I bought the house for \$40 million, and I sold

it to a Russian for \$100 million including brokerage commissions... I guess probably I sell condos to Russians, okay?"

Trump's ambition to build in Russia was still unfulfilled, and he made another effort in 2013. He traveled that year to Moscow for his Miss Universe pageant at the 7,300-seat Crocus City Hall. Trump sent a tweet in search of Russia's leader: "Do you think Putin will be going to The Miss Universe Pageant in November in Moscow -if so, will he become my new best friend?"

Putin did not attend the pageant, but Trump used the occasion to visit with Russian officials and seek out real estate opportunities. He spoke with a developer named Aras Agalarov, who said he talked with Trump about developing adjoining towers in Moscow. Trump sounded sure he would strike a deal, tweeting: "TRUMP TOWER-MOSCOW is next."

During his time promoting the pageant in Moscow, Trump lavished praise on Putin, and the Russian leader responded with a "friendly letter" to him, Agalarov told The Washington Post last year. Agalarov's son, Emin, visited Trump in New York after the businessman announced his presidential bid, and he said Trump criticized the U.S. government "for not being able to be friends with Russia."

Trump's friendly view toward Russia escalated during the campaign. In July, Trump encouraged Russia to hack Hillary Clinton's emails. "I will tell you this, Russia: If you're listening, I hope you're able to find

the 30,000 emails that are missing," Trump said. "I think you will probably be rewarded mightily by our press."

U.S. intelligence agencies subsequently said that Russia, under Putin's direction, was behind the hacking of Democratic National Committee emails as part of an effort to undermine Clinton and help Trump. The emails of Clinton campaign chairman John Podesta were also hacked and released, much to Clinton's embarrassment. Podesta wrote in The Post that he believed he was the "direct target of Russian hacking."

In September, Trump again praised Putin, saying he is "a leader far more than our president has been." Asked to explain, Trump said, "He does have an 82 percent approval rating... I think

when he calls me brilliant, I'll take it as a compliment, okay?"

Trump's statements highlighted his tendency to value those who stroke his ego and his admiration for leaders who project power — two attributes of which Moscow seemed to be well aware.

Evening Edition newsletter

The day's most important stories.

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Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov told the state-run Interfax news agency that his country had "contacts" with Trump's campaign. "Obviously, we know most of the people from his entourage," Ryabkov said. The campaign denied such talks.

Ryabkov did not say who Russia talked to. Trump's former campaign

manager Paul Manafort managed an investment fund for a Putin ally, and he was cited in a corruption probe in Ukraine, where investigators were looking into illegal payments from a pro-Russian party that had hired Manafort when he was a political consultant. Manafort denied wrongdoing and said that he had not received improper payments. He also said he had nothing to do with weakening of the Republican Party platform language that suggested U.S. military support for Ukraine.

Trump's national security adviser, retired Army Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn — who led "lock her up" chants about Clinton — sat next to Putin at a 2015 dinner. Flynn told The Post last year that he gave a paid speech at an anniversary party for the RT television network in Moscow, a network on which Trump later appeared.

Trump stood by his warm words for Putin and Russia at his Wednesday news conference, even as he acknowledged that "I think it was Russia" that hacked the DNC emails. Addressing an unverified memo that said Russia had collected compromising material about him — which he called "fake news" — Trump said he believed Russian denials that they had not collected such information. He followed that by welcoming Putin's friendship.

"If Putin likes Donald Trump, guess what, folks? That's called an asset, not a liability," Trump said.

**The
New York
Times**

Trump Under Fire for Invoking Nazis in Criticism of U.S. Intelligence

Mark Landler

President-elect Donald J. Trump at Trump Tower in Manhattan on Wednesday. Sam Hodgson for The New York Times

WASHINGTON — President-elect Donald J. Trump, in venting his fury about the disclosure of unsubstantiated reports that Russia had collected compromising personal information about him, reached for a familiar but fraught historical metaphor: Nazi Germany.

Now, Mr. Trump is under fire from Jewish groups, who say the analogy was erroneous, offensive and denigrating to Holocaust survivors. They are demanding that he apologize for it.

The tempest erupted on Wednesday morning after Mr. Trump posted a tweet accusing the nation's intelligence agencies of allowing the leak of what he called "fake news" about his links to Russia.

Not only was he comparing himself to the victims of Nazi persecution, but he was also, in effect, calling American intelligence agencies Nazis.

The Anti-Defamation League and the Anne Frank Center for Mutual Respect both condemned Mr. Trump for what they characterized as trivializing one of the singular horrors of the 20th century to score a political point.

"Has he no sense of shame?" said Steven Goldstein, executive director of the Anne Frank Center, the American chapter of an international group that fights prejudice to honor the legacy of Anne Frank, the teenage diarist who perished in the Holocaust in 1945.

"The president-elect has shown the grossest possible insensitivity to survivors of the Holocaust before he even takes office," Mr. Goldstein said. "Either he is completely callous in attacking U.S. intelligence, or he is so ignorant of history that you would never want this man to be president."

Jonathan A. Greenblatt, the chief executive of the Anti-Defamation League, said that Mr. Trump's analogy was "not only an inappropriate comparison on the merits, but it also coarsens our discourse."

"We have a long record of speaking out when both Democrats and Republicans engage in such overheated rhetoric," he said. "It would be helpful for the president-elect to explain his intentions or apologize for the remark."

On Wednesday, however, Mr. Trump defended the reference in his news conference. Repeating his criticism of the intelligence agencies for allowing the release of what he said was erroneous information about him, he said, "I think it's a disgrace, and I say that — and I say that, and that's something that Nazi

Germany would have done and did do."

While there is no disputing the brutality of Nazi Germany's secret police, the Gestapo, Mr. Trump arguably invoked the wrong Germany. Communist East Germany's ministry for state security, commonly known as the Stasi, became legendary among intelligence agencies for its pervasive network of informants and totalitarian surveillance activities.

Jared Kushner, Donald J. Trump's son-in-law and an Orthodox Jew, has defended him against accusations of anti-Semitism. Sam Hodgson for The New York Times

It is not the first time Mr. Trump has gotten into trouble with Jewish groups while making a political point. Last July, during the heat of the campaign, he posted a tweet with a photo of his Democratic opponent, Hillary Clinton, next to an image of the Star of David and a background of \$100 bills. The text read, "Most Corrupt Candidate Ever!"

Critics accused Mr. Trump of playing to Jewish stereotypes — charges that intensified after it emerged that the Star of David imagery had previously appeared on a message board known for anti-Semitism and white supremacy, and on a Twitter account with a history of racially charged comments.

Defenders said that the criticism of Mr. Trump was unfair since the six-pointed star was also used as a

symbol by many sheriff's departments. Among Mr. Trump's most prominent defenders was his son-in-law and now senior adviser, Jared Kushner, an Orthodox Jew who wrote in his newspaper, The New York Observer, that "Donald Trump is not anti-Semitic and he's not a racist."

As evidence of his standing to make such a judgment, Mr. Kushner noted that he was a grandson of Holocaust survivors. He recounted a harrowing story of his grandmother's sister being dragged out of hiding in a Jewish ghetto in Novogrudok, now in Belarus, in 1941 and later killed by the Nazis.

That family history, Mr. Kushner wrote, enabled him to distinguish between "actual dangerous intolerance versus these labels that get tossed around in an effort to score political points." Mr. Trump, he added, embraced his daughter's conversion to Judaism before they were married.

To critics, however, Mr. Kushner's background made Mr. Trump's reference even more inexplicable.

"How the president-elect could invoke Nazi Germany and denigrate family members of his own son-in-law is beyond the decency of anything we have seen in American politics," Mr. Goldstein said.

**The
New York
Times**

Trump, a New Style of Fighter, Takes the Ring (UNE)

Glenn Thrush

WASHINGTON — President-elect Donald J. Trump's aides often cite his appearances at professional wrestling matches as an inspiration for his outsize political speaking style, and his buoyantly belligerent news conference in New York on Wednesday proved he has no plans to betray his brawler's roots in the service of seeming more presidential.

Mr. Trump delivered a stream-of-consciousness survey of his transition to the presidency and an update on the state of his psyche, holding forth on his being a "germaphobe," his belief that many foreign governments secretly videotape Americans in "the strangest places" inside hotel rooms, and his low opinion of BuzzFeed, which published an unsubstantiated report prepared by the intelligence community that Russia had collected compromising information on him.

With Hillary Clinton vanquished, Mr. Trump trained his ire on the ripest adversary at hand, the "left-wing" news media. The news conference began with Sean Spicer, who will soon occupy the dual roles of White House press secretary and communications director, acting as an angry M.C., berating the news media for following up on the unverified report. Then Mr. Trump shouted down a CNN correspondent, accusing the network of broadcasting the same "fake news."

The fact that Mr. Trump's performance was midrange for him doesn't mean it is normal behavior for a president. "It's absolutely without precedent, and even Republicans are really going to notice the absence of Obama, who was deeply concerned about elevating the reputation of the office," the presidential historian Douglas Brinkley said.

Barack Obama 49:55 President Obama's Farewell Speech

Video

President Obama's Farewell Speech

President Obama delivers his farewell address at McCormick Place, Chicago.

Publish Date January 10, 2017. Photo by Doug Mills/The New York Times. Watch in Times Video »

The inauguration is still eight days away, but Wednesday may be remembered as the day that ushered in the Trump era. The way was cleared by President Obama, who, in Chicago 14 hours before Mr. Trump's news conference, gave what was billed as the final word on his presidency. And seldom has the

contrast between a departing president and his successor been so stark.

Mr. Obama delivered a solemn farewell, modeled, his aides said, on George Washington's 1796 call for national unity. The way Mr. Trump stepped into the spotlight in the lobby of Trump Tower — taking turns onstage with aides, alternatively enraged and solicitous, and clearly loving the attention — owed more to the WrestleMania spectacles staged by Mr. Trump's friend Vince K. McMahon, the World Wrestling Entertainment founder.

Not surprisingly, aides to Mr. Trump and Mr. Obama had conflicting interpretations of the stylistic contrast.

"To me, the irony of the split screen is that the guy who is leaving actually represents the future, and the guy who is replacing him represents the past," said Dan Pfeiffer, Mr. Obama's former communications director.

Trump News Conference

President-elect Donald J. Trump holds a news conference in Manhattan.

January 11, 2017. Photo by Sam Hodgson for The New York Times. Watch in Times Video »

Kellyanne Conway, who was Mr. Trump's campaign manager and will be a counselor to the president, said the president-elect's critics "just don't get it" and are missing his appeal to voters who are fed up with Washington. "Mr. Trump is going to do what he was elected to do, which is to challenge the establishment," she said.

Mr. Obama also rode into town on a wave of disgust with the status quo in 2008, although his support came from a Democratic Party rebelling against the Iraq war and the social conservatism of President George W. Bush. But his political style was bookish, austere and far more subdued than Mr. Trump's.

At his first news conference in the White House, in the middle of the economic collapse, Mr. Obama issued a terse and sober assessment of the national situation that included a detailed discussion of his recovery plans and a comparison of the Great Recession to the situations that President Franklin D. Roosevelt faced in the 1930s and that Japanese policy makers dealt with during their crisis in the 1990s.

Mr. Obama's criticisms of Mr. Bush's low-tax economic policies were pointed, but respectful.

Mr. Trump's election hasn't tempered his tongue when it comes

to adversaries. On Wednesday, he mocked Mrs. Clinton by name when he was pressed on his dealings with Russia and its president, Vladimir V. Putin. "Do you honestly believe that Hillary would be tougher on Putin than me?" he asked reporters. "Does anybody in this room really believe that? Give me a break."

Rex W. Tillerson, the nominee for secretary of state, arrived for his confirmation hearing in Washington on Wednesday. Stephen Crowley/The New York Times

He was even more contemptuous of Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, a marginal opponent during the Republican presidential primary contests who is prodding the president-elect to tighten sanctions on Moscow. "He is going to crack that 1 percent barrier one day," Mr. Trump joked, a reference to Mr. Graham's low poll numbers when he was a candidate.

Mr. Obama, like his successor, hasn't been afraid to criticize the news media. But his attacks tend to be selective and based on his belief that journalists can be too obsessed with clicks to do their job responsibly. Last month at his final news conference, he singled out the reporting on the hacked emails of the Clinton adviser John D. Podesta. "You guys wrote about it every day," Mr. Obama said. "Every single leak, including John Podesta's risotto recipe."

Mr. Trump has been far less restrained and has made bashing the news media a defining characteristic of his politics. On Wednesday, he tore into BuzzFeed and other outlets that published articles on the Russia report. "There's been such a concerted effort by some in the mainstream media to delegitimize this election and to demean our incoming administration," he said.

Mr. Trump's approach is less madness than method, underscoring his toughness and subjecting reporters to a fusillade of verbiage that makes it hard to focus the public on any single controversy, in this case, the allegations against Russia.

But there were more tangible signs of the new era beyond Mr. Trump's news conference.

The Trump White House vaulted from abstraction to reality this week with the start of contentious hearings on the nominations of Senator Jeff Sessions of Alabama for attorney general and Rex W. Tillerson for secretary of state. In the middle of his news conference, almost as an afterthought, Mr. Trump announced that he was naming his latest cabinet appointee,

Dr. David J. Shulkin, to be secretary of veterans affairs.

The biggest problem Mr. Trump confronted in the news conference, and the one that threatens to spill into the first months of his presidency, involves the allegations that Russia not only tried to influence the election in his favor, but also gathered compromising intelligence on him.

Before Mr. Trump answered a single question on Wednesday, he and his team rolled out a seemingly prescribed 30-minute denial of the unsubstantiated allegations involving him from his spokesman, Mr. Spicer. Next came a more muted statement by Vice President-elect Mike Pence and a forceful statement by Mr. Trump, who railed against leaks by intelligence agencies.

But delving into policy and answering questions about his behavior aren't the only goals of Mr. Trump's periodic sparring sessions with the news media. Unlike Mr. Obama, who prides himself on his participation in the drafting of speeches, Mr. Trump cares far more about visual imagery and likes to use props.

Ten years ago, nearly to the day, Mr. Trump dumped tens of thousands of dollars on delighted fans at a WWE fan appreciation night, bragging that he had upstaged Mr. McMahon.

His Trump Tower appearance on Wednesday featured a less flashy theatrical flourish: A table near his lectern was heaped with paper-filled manila folders intended to illustrate his commitment to disentangling himself from his businesses.

The former journalist and the former spy, according to people who know them, had similarly dark views of President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia, a former K.G.B. officer, and the varied tactics he and his intelligence operatives used to smear, blackmail or bribe their targets.

As a former spy who had carried out espionage inside Russia, Mr. Steele was in no position to travel to Moscow to study Mr. Trump's connections there. Instead, he hired native Russian speakers to call informants inside Russia and made surreptitious contact with his own connections in the country as well.

Mr. Steele wrote up his findings in a series of memos, each a few pages long, that he began to deliver to Fusion GPS in June and continued at least until December. By then, the election was over, and neither Mr. Steele nor Mr. Simpson was being paid by a client, but they did not stop what they believed to be

very important work. (Mr. Simpson declined to comment for this article, and Mr. Steele did not immediately reply to a request for comment.)

The memos described two different Russian operations. The first was a yearslong effort to find a way to influence Mr. Trump, perhaps because he had contacts with Russian oligarchs whom Mr. Putin wanted to keep track of. According to Mr. Steele's memos, it used an array of familiar tactics: the gathering of "kompromat," compromising material such as alleged tapes of Mr. Trump with prostitutes in a Moscow hotel, and proposals for business deals attractive to Mr. Trump.

The goal would probably never have been to make Mr. Trump a knowing agent of Russia, but to make him a source who might provide information to friendly Russian contacts. But if Mr. Putin and his agents wanted to entangle Mr. Trump using business deals, they did not do it very successfully. Mr. Trump has said he has no major properties there, though one of his sons said at a real estate conference in 2008 that "a lot of money" was "pouring in from Russia."

The second Russian operation described was recent: a series of contacts with Mr. Trump's representatives during the

campaign, in part to discuss the hacking of the Democratic National Committee and Mrs. Clinton's campaign chairman, John D. Podesta. According to Mr. Steele's sources, it involved, among other things, a late-summer meeting in Prague between Michael Cohen, a lawyer for Mr. Trump, and Oleg Solodukhin, a Russian official who works for Rossotrudnichestvo, an organization that promotes Russia's interests abroad.

By all accounts, Mr. Steele has an excellent reputation with American and British intelligence colleagues and had done work for the F.B.I. on the investigation of bribery at FIFA, soccer's global governing body. Colleagues say he was acutely aware of the danger he and his associates were being fed Russian disinformation. Russian intelligence had mounted a complex hacking operation to damage Mrs. Clinton, and a similar operation against Mr. Trump was possible.

But much of what he was told, and passed on to Fusion GPS, was very difficult to check. And some of the claims that can be checked seem problematic. Mr. Cohen, for instance, said on Twitter on Tuesday night that he has never been in Prague; Mr. Solodukhin, his purported Russian contact, denied in a telephone interview that he had ever met Mr. Cohen or anyone associated with Mr. Trump. The

president-elect on Wednesday cited news reports that a different Michael Cohen with no Trump ties may have visited Prague and that the two Cohens might have been mixed up in Mr. Steele's reports.

But word of a dossier had begun to spread through political circles. Rick Wilson, a Republican political operative who was working for a super PAC supporting Marco Rubio, said he heard about it in July, when an investigative reporter for a major news network called him to ask what he knew.

By early fall, some of Mr. Steele's memos had been given to the F.B.I., which was already investigating Mr. Trump's Russian ties, and to journalists. An MI6 official, whose job does not permit him to be quoted by name, said that in late summer or early fall, Mr. Steele also passed the reports he had prepared on Mr. Trump and Russia to British intelligence. Mr. Steele was concerned about what he was hearing about Mr. Trump, and he thought that the information should not be solely in the hands of people looking to win a political contest.

After the election, the memos, still being supplemented by his inquiries, became one of Washington's worst-kept secrets, as reporters — including from The New

York Times — scrambled to confirm or disprove them.

Word also reached Capitol Hill. Senator John McCain, Republican of Arizona, heard about the dossier and obtained a copy in December from David J. Kramer, a former top State Department official who works for the McCain Institute at Arizona State University. Mr. McCain passed the information to James B. Comey, the F.B.I. director.

Remarkably for Washington, many reporters for competing news organizations had the salacious and damning memos, but they did not leak, because their contents could not be confirmed. That changed only this week, after the heads of the C.I.A., the F.B.I. and the National Security Agency added a summary of the memos, along with information gathered from other intelligence sources, to their report on the Russian cyberattack on the election.

Now, after the most contentious of elections, Americans are divided and confused about what to believe about the incoming president. And there is no prospect soon for full clarity on the veracity of the claims made against him.

"It is a remarkable moment in history," said Mr. Wilson, the Florida political operative. "What world did I wake up in?"

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Trump Finds Controversy, Attacks It—and Moves On

Gerald F. Seib

Updated Jan. 11, 2017 4:30 p.m. ET

One of Donald Trump's most valuable assets as a candidate was his ability to bluntly acknowledge and then simply walk past controversies and crises that would submerge other political figures.

It remains to be seen whether he will do the same as president—but he certainly did so as president-elect on Wednesday.

The main controversies at his one and only transition news conference centered, of course, on Russia. First, there was the intelligence community report that President Vladimir Putin had used Russian hacking efforts to try to benefit Mr. Trump during the presidential campaign, followed by new reports that Russian agents were in contact with his campaign and may possess compromising personal information on him.

So how did President-elect Trump handle it? With the same combination of frontal attacks and quick sidesteps that worked so well for him through all of 2016.

First, he dismissed the dossier containing the allegations of Russian influence as "fake news, phony stuff." He directly attacked the news organizations that disclosed the dossier, while praising those that chose earlier not to do so. He also attacked the intelligence community for perhaps, maybe probably, being the reason the disclosure came about.

He then shifted to dismiss one of the principal claims in the dossier by saying he was too wise in the ways of the world to be caught in a compromising situation in a Russian hotel room—and was too much of a "germaphobe" to do so anyway. And he firmly and specifically rebutted as false the one detail he knew he could disprove, an assertion that his own lawyer had traveled to Prague to meet Russian representatives to discuss hacking of Democrats.

After the smoke had cleared, he had managed to shift much of the focus from the mysterious dossier itself to BuzzFeed and CNN, the news organizations that first disclosed its existence, and to the intelligence community that chose to take it seriously.

Less noticed was the fact that along the way he had changed course on a key point: He essentially agreed with the intelligence community's assessment that Russia appears to have been behind the hacking of political sites during the 2016 campaign, something he had declined to say previously.

Also little noticed was his sidestepping of a question about whether anybody else in his orbit had met with Russian representatives during the campaign, as well as a question on whether he would keep in place the sanctions President Barack Obama imposed on Russia to punish it for election-season hacking activities.

Finally, in classic Trump style, he offered one simple, withering declaration to rebut the suggestion he might be beholden to Mr. Putin: "Do you honestly believe that Hillary [Clinton] would be tougher on Putin than me? Does anybody in this room really believe that? Give me a break."

In short, the news conference was a prime example of the confounding yet successful communications strategy Mr. Trump deployed

throughout the presidential campaign. He doesn't run from controversy but seems drawn to it—almost to relish it. He doesn't fear chaos but seems to use it as an opportunity to disorient his foes.

As a result, conventions continue to fall when it comes to President-elect Trump, just as they did when he was Candidate Trump. Some previous presidents were wary of sounding too self-aggrandizing; George H.W. Bush often talked about how uncomfortable he was using the word "I." Mr. Trump, by contrast, declared Wednesday: "I will be the greatest job producer that God ever created."

Some presidents have been reluctant to pick fights with the nation's powerful spy community, or with leaders of their own party in Congress. Mr. Trump did both, first with his criticism of the intelligence agencies and then with a mocking reference to Sen. Lindsey Graham, who is arguing for more sanctions on Russia.

While others are queasy about discussing their personal business dealings, Mr. Trump proudly declared he had just been offered,

and had turned down, \$2 billion from a business associate to do a deal in the Middle East.

In the process, one thing everybody learned is that while Mr. Trump has gone from candidate to president-elect, his style hasn't changed.

Wednesday's event suggests there is little reason to think it will go forward.

Write to Gerald F. Seib at jerry.seib@wsj.com



Trump outlines plan to shift assets, give up management of his company (UNE)

<https://www.facebook.com/drewharwell>

President-elect Donald Trump will retain ownership of his company while shifting assets into a trust managed by his sons, a step that Trump and his advisers said will eliminate potential conflicts of interest between his public duties and private business.

The move, announced Wednesday in Trump's first news conference since July, followed weeks of criticism from ethics experts and congressional Democrats who have said his financial entanglements could improperly steer his presidential decision-making.

The announcement included a pledge from a Trump lawyer that the company would make "no new foreign deals whatsoever" during Trump's presidency, and that any new domestic deals would undergo vigorous review, including approval by an independent ethics adviser.

In addition, Trump is giving up his position as an officer at the company, the Trump Organization, ceding all management responsibilities and agreeing to what his lawyers described as strict limits on communications with company executives beyond receiving regular profit-and-loss statements.

Sheri Dillon, a tax adviser at global law firm Morgan Lewis, said Trump has sought to isolate himself from the business that will be managed by Trump's sons Donald Jr. and Eric and company executive Allen Weisselberg.

Trump, she said, "will only know of a deal if he sees it in the paper or on TV." She added that Trump also terminated all pending international deals.

But Trump's continued financial stake in a global real estate and branding company is likely to remain a point of contention between the president-elect and federal ethics officials, who have said that full divestiture remains the only way to prevent conflicts.

Dillon, who also wrote a widely shared letter last year that asserted Trump's tax returns were under audit, argued that taking steps recommended by some vocal ethics experts would trigger additional

problems. A sell-off would have created additional conflicts, she said, while a blind trust would have been unrealistic for a real estate company with high-profile assets.

"President Trump can't unknow he owns Trump Tower," Dillon said, and he "should not be expected to destroy the company he built."

The announcement inspired an unusual, and highly critical, response from the top federal official at the agency that works closely with presidential transition teams to ensure they abide by ethics requirements.

Walter Shaub, director of the Office of Government Ethics, took the stage at a Wednesday event for the Brookings Institution think tank to say that Trump's decision "doesn't meet the standards ... that every president of the past four decades has met."

Shaub, appointed by President Obama in 2013, said the trust "adds nothing to the equation" because it's "not even close" to a blind trust, and called other Trump provisions "wholly inadequate."

Shaub, whose agency administers financial disclosure filings and advises executive branch officials on avoiding conflicts of interest, does not have the power to force Trump's hand. The director said he spoke out in hopes the president-elect would fully divest.

Some ethics experts also expressed alarm Wednesday that the changes leave plenty of room for foreign interests and others to enrich the president and affect U.S. policy.

Richard Painter, who was ethics counsel in the George W. Bush White House, said the setup will not prevent Trump from knowing his business' sources of revenue or block him from receiving income from the trust. Trump Tower projects still stand, for instance, in the Philippines, Turkey, Uruguay and other hot spots where foreign buyers or governments could still lavish money on the Trump brand.

"He still has businesses all over the world, and we still do not know who is financing those businesses and who he's indebted to," Painter said.

Referring to the yet-unnamed expert who would be hired to sign off on new deals, Painter added: "That

ethics adviser is going to have a lot of work to do. Sounds like he'll need air support."

Trump also retained his ownership share of the luxury hotel he opened last year in the Old Post Office Pavilion down the street from the White House, despite criticism that foreign leaders might try to curry favor with the administration by doing business there and at his other hotels, possibly violating the Constitution's "emoluments clause."

The clause has never been tested in the courts, but it is upheld by threat of impeachment, and some scholars say Trump risks violating it the day he's sworn into office. The Washington hotel, of which Trump owns 76 percent, has been frequented by foreign diplomats since the election. Trump himself has signed for hundreds of millions of dollars in corporate loans from foreign banks and is currently involved in deals with foreign investors across several continents.

Dillon, Trump's attorney, dismissed the suggestion of a problem, saying the clause would not apply to "arms-length transactions the president-elect has nothing to do with," such as hotel stays for foreign diplomats.

Nevertheless, Dillon said, the hotel would donate "all profits from foreign government payments" from the Trump International Hotel to the U.S. Treasury.

In his news conference Wednesday at Trump Tower in Manhattan, Trump showcased his signature theatrics. He stood by several stacks of what he said were legal papers related to the Trump Organization changes. He noted repeatedly that the president is not covered by any conflict-of-interest laws, and that he was sure he could do a good job leading both the company and the country if he so chose.

"I could actually run my business and run government at the same time," he said. But, he added later, "I don't want to take advantage of something. I have something that others don't have."

And if his sons "do a bad job," Trump added, he will tell them his catchphrase from "The Apprentice": "You're fired."

Trump said his commitment to focus on the presidency has already cost him business, adding he had in recent days turned down \$2 billion to do "a number of deals" in Dubai with Hussain Sajwani, the billionaire chairman of the Damac Properties development firm and a man Trump has called a friend.

A Damac executive said the company "confirms that the discussions took place as stated in the media briefing but the proposals were declined by the Trump Organization," and that the proposals "were for a variety of different property deals."

Trump's plan will also include tapping a "chief compliance counsel" at the Trump Organization who will monitor the Trump businesses for "any actions that could be perceived as exploiting the office of the presidency," Dillon said.

Neither Trump nor Dillon said who would fill the position, and requests to speak with company representatives were not immediately returned.

The Trump Organization is a vast, worldwide collection of golf courses, hotels, condo towers and other commercial holdings spread across more than 500 business interests, financial filings show.

Much of the company's revenue stems from deals with real estate developers and merchandisers, who pay the company millions of dollars to use Trump's name and image.

Presidents are exempt from conflict-of-interest laws that force virtually all other executive-branch officials to sell off their business interests, as well as recuse themselves from public decision-making that could benefit their private finances. The president must still abide by bribery, fraud and corruption laws that could arise from potential financial conflicts.

Modern presidents have followed a tradition of selling potentially problematic assets or sequestering them into a blind trust, overseen by an independent manager with unassailable control.

The trust agreement outlined Wednesday will not be truly blind, critics said, due to Trump's family relationship to its leaders, his sons.

Trump's daughter Ivanka will also step down from management of the Trump Organization and her name-brand fashion, jewelry and licensing companies, lawyers said. She will also restructure her involvement in potentially profitable Trump Organization deals and, instead, receive fixed payments from the revenue of what lawyers called a "diversified pool" of unidentified projects.

Fixed-income agreements are common approaches to addressing conflicts for spouses of those stepping into government. But, like her father, Ivanka Trump has not committed to selling off her

**The
New York
Times**

Gail Collins : Trump, Sex and Lots of Whining

Gail Collins

President-elect Donald Trump at a news conference on Wednesday in New York. Damon Winter/The New York Times

Finally, Donald Trump held a press conference. I know you want to hear the sex-in-Russia part.

The world learned this week about memos from a retired British intelligence officer on relations between the Trump campaign and the Russians. They included some speculation about whether there were compromising videos of Trump cavorting in a Russian hotel that might explain his enthusiastic support for Vladimir Putin.

The report wasn't prepared by our intelligence agencies — it was opposition research done on contract for some other campaigns. It had been bouncing around Washington for a while. You didn't hear about it because nobody could confirm any of the allegations.

But a summary of the memos showed up in the briefing Trump got from the intelligence agencies last week. Wouldn't you have liked to be there to see the reaction?

Then a version of the report showed up online, and naturally it came up Wednesday at Trump's press conference.

About that press conference. Here are some of the

**The
New York
Times**

Editorial : Donald Trump's Made-for-TV Promises

The Editorial Board

Doug Chayka; Photo by Damon Winter/The New York Times

If anyone still held out hope that the awesome responsibilities and dignity of the presidency might temper or even humble Donald Trump, there was a shock from his

ownership stake, leaving one of her largest conflicts unresolved.

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Ivanka Trump's husband, Jared Kushner, who Trump will name as a White House adviser, will sell off much of his New York real estate and media fortune and resign from the family business to avoid conflicts, his lawyers said this week.

Many questions remain. Trump has not released his income tax returns,

things we learned:

■ The reason he hasn't shown up to answer questions from reporters since July is "inaccurate news."

■ The Russians don't have any secret tapes of him behaving badly in a hotel room because every time he goes to hotels abroad, he warns everybody: "Be very careful, because in your hotel rooms and no matter where you go, you're gonna probably have cameras." Of everything Trump said during the press conference, this was perhaps the most convincing.

■ He is not going to divest himself of his businesses, but his two adult sons will be running them. He was just doing this out of his ethical heart, since there are no conflict-of-interest rules for the president. ("... as president I could run the Trump Organization — great, great company. And I could run the company, the country. I'd do a very good job, but I don't want to do that.")

■ He'll release his taxes once the audit is finished. (You remember that audit. Its friends call it Godot.)

■ The inauguration is going to be "a beautiful event" because "we have great talent." (Military bands were mentioned.)

■ "If Putin likes Donald Trump I consider that an asset, not a liability."

first news conference as president-elect, on Wednesday. Bombastic, vain and slippery, Mr. Trump played the same small-screen character he has offered the viewing public for years.

Presenting himself as the leader of "a movement like the world has never seen before," he offered no olive branch to the majority of

which would give the most precise look yet at Trump's holdings, business interests and foreign accounts. Trump has blamed several years of Internal Revenue Service audits, among other factors, for his reluctance to release the returns. Presidents, by law, are audited every year and not required to release their returns.

Trump's sons, too, have already run into the minefield of potential conflicts awaiting the president's family. Eric Trump said recently that he will leave his foundation, following worries that donors could receive special access or favors from the Trump administration.

■ "Over the weekend I was offered \$2 billion to do a deal in Dubai."

He was all over the place. It was, in a way, a great strategy. We've been waiting for a long time to hear how Trump would deal with his businesses, and his refusal to divest drove ethics watchdogs crazy. But on Wednesday, the whole topic got drowned in the hubbub over the leaked report. And Trump's relationship with Vladimir Putin. And his theory on hotel cameras.

This kind of rapid-fire diversion could be the work of a political genius, but in fact it's just how our next president's mind naturally seems to operate. It bounces hither and yon. The only ongoing focus is what it all means to Trump. Did he look good? How was the crowd? Did anyone betray him?

He was definitely playing the victim when it came to the leaked report. He blamed the intelligence services, which he compared, with great originality and careful choice of words, to Nazis.

Keep in mind that although government investigators have been looking into these allegations for a long time, they never became public during the campaign. "I would never comment on investigations — whether we have one or not, in an open forum like this," F.B.I. Director James Comey said during one of the multitudinous Senate hearings this week.

American voters who opposed him. He displayed only petulance and braggadocio in response to issues that dogged him during the campaign.

On suggestions that he had business dealings with Russia: "I tweeted out that I have no dealings with Russia." He ducked and dodged when reporters asked

Congressional Democrats on Monday introduced a law that would force Trump and future presidents to divest their business interests and other potential conflicts. But their Republican counterparts have largely stayed silent on Trump's entanglements, or said they trust his judgment, drawing the law's success into question.

Jonathan O'Connell contributed to this report.

This is, of course, the same guy who told Congress — 11 days before the election — that the F.B.I. was investigating Hillary Clinton emails that wound up on a laptop owned by Anthony Weiner, a.k.a. "Carlos Danger," estranged husband of her aide and world-famous sex texter.

The F.B.I. later announced it had found nothing. Meanwhile, people who were already voting in some states had been reminded to connect Clinton with a guy who sent pictures of his private parts to strange women. Clinton thinks it cost her the election. There's no way to tell. She got nearly three million more votes than Trump, but by the rules we live under, she lost. End of story.

Trump is never going to admit his win was anything but a record-shattering triumph. But his preening, and his whining about being persecuted by the intelligence services, really twists the knife.

Since the election, the media and many Democratic politicians have wrung their hands over their failure to pay attention to the legitimate anger in the Trump-tilting parts of the country. And good for them.

But it's time to remember that there are about 66 million Clinton voters who have a right to be angry, too.

whether he or members of his staff colluded with Russia before the election — one of the most explosive of the charges swirling around him.

On his promise to reveal his tax returns, which could prove he has no financial or business ties to Russia: "I'm not releasing the tax returns because as you know,

they're under audit." He added, "You know, the only one that cares about my tax returns are the reporters, O.K.?"

On whether he would maintain sanctions on Russia, for its hacking of the presidential election: "If Putin likes Donald Trump, guess what, folks? That's called an asset."

On the economy: "I will be the greatest jobs producer that God ever created."

On congressional Republicans' effort to repeal Obamacare: "So we're gonna do repeal and replace, very complicated stuff. And we're gonna get a health bill passed, we're gonna get health care taken care of in this country." This would happen, he said, "almost simultaneously."

Mr. Trump seemed unaware that Republicans themselves have not settled on a replacement yet, even

as they push for repeal. Tom Price, Mr. Trump's nominee for health and human services secretary, has proposed a plan that would make health insurance unaffordable for millions of Americans, especially working-class people and those with prior medical conditions.

Mr. Trump spoke while standing next to piles of manila folders, props representing his decision to turn management of his business interests over to his adult sons. That half measure will not dispel suspicions about his hidden conflicts as president. By not divesting his businesses, Mr. Trump invites corruption by signaling that corporations and foreign actors have many ways to curry favor with him and his administration through his family.

He emphasized that, in his view, he wasn't legally required to do a thing, presenting his largely symbolic measures as a high-minded

sacrifice to the public interest. He bragged that over the weekend he had been offered \$2 billion "to do a deal in Dubai," adding, "I didn't have to turn it down, because as you know, I have a no-conflict situation because I'm president, which is — I didn't know about that until about three months ago, but it's a nice thing to have."

Mr. Trump's lawyer, Sheri Dillon, said that the Trump Organization would do no more new foreign deals, and that domestic deals would "go through a vigorous vetting process" by an as yet-unnamed "ethics adviser." This leaves in place problematic deals Mr. Trump has with politically connected business people in India, the Philippines, Turkey and elsewhere. She did not explain how the ethics adviser would remain free of coercion, or escape firing if he or she rejected any agreements.

Ms. Dillon also said the Trump hotel would donate "profits" from foreign governments to the Treasury. This arrangement is a fig leaf that fails to address numerous potential violations by Trump-branded real estate developments, golf courses and other businesses. It, like the rest of Mr. Trump's plan, ignores what government ethics officials told Mr. Trump's lawyers: The only way to avoid conflict-of-interest charges is to sell off his businesses and put the proceeds into a blind trust.

Mr. Trump closed the news conference with his best "Celebrity Apprentice" scowl. Of his sons, he said, "If they do a bad job, I'll say, 'You're fired.'" His staff and supporters applauded, and the show was over.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Trump Takes Aim at Media Outlets for 'Fake News'

Lukas I. Alpert

Jan. 11, 2017 2:38 p.m. ET

President-elect Donald Trump on Wednesday unleashed blistering criticism of BuzzFeed and CNN for reporting on an intelligence document containing explosive but unsubstantiated information about his alleged activities in Russia, dismissing the news organizations as purveyors of "fake news."

At the same time, Mr. Trump praised other news organizations that were aware of the dossier but didn't report on it.

CNN on Tuesday reported that intelligence agencies had included a two-page summary of a 35-page dossier on Mr. Trump in materials that were part of a recent briefing given to the president-elect and President Barack Obama.

The news network reported that the documents presented in the briefings included claims that Russian operatives obtained "compromising personal and financial information about Mr. Trump," but didn't go into details of the claims or publish the documents.

BuzzFeed subsequently published the entire 35-page dossier of what it acknowledged were unverified claims, a decision that triggered criticism in some corners of the media world.

Mr. Trump, addressing the issue in his first news conference as president-elect, said the information in the dossier was "fake news," adding, "It's phony stuff. It didn't happen."

"As far as BuzzFeed, which is a failing pile of garbage, writing it, I think they're going to suffer the consequences, which they already are," Mr. Trump said.

He then refused to take a question from CNN reporter Jim Acosta, telling him in a testy exchange that "you're fake news. Your organization is terrible." Mr. Acosta later said on the air that he was warned before the event that Mr. Trump wouldn't take questions from him and that press secretary Sean Spicer said he would "be thrown out of this press conference" if he continued to try to ask questions.

A spokeswoman for BuzzFeed said the site stood by its decision to publish the dossier in full, which editor in chief Ben Smith had

argued in a memo to staff on Tuesday was done in order allow Americans to "make up their own minds about allegations about the president-elect that have circulated at the highest levels of the U.S. government."

In a statement, CNN said its "decision to publish carefully sourced reporting about the operations of our government is vastly different than BuzzFeed's decision to publish unsubstantiated memos."

"The Trump team knows this," the CNN statement continued. "They are using BuzzFeed's decision to deflect from CNN's reporting."

Subsequent to the CNN and BuzzFeed reports, other news organizations, including The Wall Street Journal, reported on various elements of the intelligence document, including the unverified claims that Mr. Trump's aides had contact with Russian operatives during the campaign and that Mr. Trump engaged in sexual acts with prostitutes at a Moscow hotel.

Mr. Trump said the information in the classified documents about his Russia activities is false.

Mr. Trump said he has no intention of making reforms aimed at the news media. "I don't recommend reforms. I recommend people that have some moral compass," he said.

He said he has "great respect for freedom of the press" and noted that some news organizations were "so professional" in not publishing material on the intelligence dossier.

At the beginning of the news conference, Mr. Spicer accused the two news organizations of publishing their stories in "a sad effort to get clicks."

Mr. Trump also leveled a criticism on the intelligence community, suggesting it might be responsible for leaking information that appeared in the news reports. "It would be a tremendous blot on their record if they did that," Mr. Trump said. The intelligence document had been reviewed by several U.S. elected officials and intelligence personnel, according to the news reports.

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the Atlantic

How Trump Manhandled the Media

McKay Coppins

NEW YORK—Donald Trump's first press conference as president-elect was still hours away, but the scene at Trump Tower was already turning hostile.

Hundreds of journalists had crammed into the too-small atrium Wednesday morning, and many were grumpily jockeying for position and power-outlet access. Coiffed TV correspondents elbowed notebook-toting scribblers out of their live shots; producers grumbled about CNN unjustly colonizing a

swath of prime seating up front; camera operators barked at each other on the risers. The atmosphere at Trump's press events often has a zoo-like quality. At this one it felt like the animals had been starved, hunted, and turned against each other.

Indeed, the press corps Trump faced Wednesday seemed more divided and less sure of itself than the one that grilled him six months ago, when he last held a formal press conference. With his surprise victory last November, Trump didn't just beat and embarrass his foes in the political press—he burned down

their villages, defiled their temples, and danced on the graves of their dead. In the months that followed, news outlets entered into prolonged periods of soul-searching and self-flagellation while Trump took victory laps. Some of the same reporters and pundits who once laughed off his chances at victory were reduced to aggregating his tweets, pleading for access, and posing for chummy group photos at Mar-a-Lago.

At the dawn of the Trump presidency, America's political press corps is feeling anxious, territorial, threatened—and the president-elect showed Wednesday that he's ready to take advantage.

In the 18 hours leading up to Trump's news conference, the press had been busy obsessing over *BuzzFeed's* controversial publication of a dossier containing salacious, and unverified, claims about his relationship with Russia. Knowing they would field questions about the story, Trump and his team came prepared with a divide-and-conquer strategy—seizing on the intra-industry ethics debate surrounding the report to drive a wedge between their media adversaries.

Incoming White House press secretary Sean Spicer kicked things off with a belligerent statement blasting *BuzzFeed* as a “left-wing blog” that was engaged in a “sad and pathetic

attempt to get clicks.” Next up was Mike Pence, who adopted a deeply-troubled-and-saddened tone as he delivered a brief sermon on the Fourth Estate. “You know, I have long been a supporter of a free and independent press and I always will be,” Pence intoned. “But with freedom comes responsibility.”

When Trump finally arrived at the podium, he was in good-cop mode, heaping praise on the journalists who had criticized *BuzzFeed's* choice to publish the dossier. “I just want to compliment many of the people in the room,” he said. “I have great respect for the news and great respect for freedom of the press and all of that. But I will tell you, there were some news organizations with all that was just said that were so professional—so incredibly professional, that I've just gone up a notch as to what I think of you, OK?”

At the dawn of the Trump presidency, America's political press corps is feeling anxious, territorial, threatened.

Trump spent the rest of the news conference demonstrating his newfound respect for members of the press by taunting them, chiding them, and happily hurling insults at them.

When NBC's Hallie Jackson asked Trump if he would release his tax returns—as he once promised—the

president-elect practically scoffed at the audacity of the request.

“You know,” Trump said, “the only one that cares about my tax returns are the reporters, OK? They're the only who ask.”

“You don't think the American public is concerned about it?” Jackson asked.

“No, I don't think so,” came the response. “I won.”

Aides and supporters in the atrium burst into gleeful applause, and Trump pushed on to the next question.

Later, when CNN's Jim Acosta—whose network first reported that intelligence officials had briefed Trump on the existence of the controversial dossier—tried to ask a question, Trump swiftly shot him down. “Not you,” the president-elect snapped. “Your organization is terrible ... You are fake news.” (On Wednesday night, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper issued a statement verifying the essentials of CNN's report.)

Supporters cheered again, drowning out Acosta's protests, and Trump called on another reporter.

The long-awaited news conference proceeded generally along the same lines, with Trump easily manhandling the press corps while access-starved correspondents

competed to get their questions answered on camera.

Afterward, the media infighting continued. CNN's Jake Tapper went on air accusing *BuzzFeed*—which Trump had just finished calling a “failing pile of garbage”—of “irresponsible” behavior. Asked to respond, *BuzzFeed's* editor Ben Smith said they were “not going to participate in an attempt to divide the media against each other.”

Of course, the American press is not a special interest group, and it isn't meant to operate like one. Competition elevates journalism; disagreements, debates, and Twitter feuds are inevitable. In this particular case, as my colleague David Graham wrote, there is serious reason to question *BuzzFeed's* decision to publish such explosive allegations without verifying them.

But it's also true that when a politician succeeds in pitting members of the press corps against each other, it's usually the politician who wins. And on Wednesday, Donald Trump seemed less interested in parsing the finer points of journalistic ethics than in pursuing his own feud with the media, and encouraging its members to feud with each other.

The New York Times

Donald Trump's News Session Starts War With and Within Media

Michael M. Grynbaum

into a deft and unrelenting attack on the journalists who reported it.

He deemed *BuzzFeed News* “a failing pile of garbage,” mocked an inquiry about his tax returns — “Gee, I've never heard that one before” — and, in an unheard-of moment for a presidential news conference, shouted down questions from a CNN reporter, declaring, with some menace, “Not you.”

“Your organization is terrible,” said President-elect Donald J. Trump, his voice rising as Jim Acosta of CNN tried to interject. “No, I'm not going to give you a question. I'm not going to give you a question.”

“You,” the president-elect said, as Mr. Acosta and other stunned journalists looked on, “are fake news.”

Any hope that Mr. Trump would temper his attacks on the news media after the campaign seemed to dissipate in the marble atrium of Trump Tower on Wednesday, as the president-elect, holding his first news conference since July, turned a controversy over his ties to Russia

It was a spectacle that attracted nearly 300 reporters to Midtown Manhattan — the news conference was carried live in Australia, England and Germany — and it came against an extraordinary backdrop: reports that intelligence officials had briefed Mr. Trump on a document alleging collusion between the Russian government and his campaign.

CNN broke the news on Tuesday but declined to publish specific allegations, saying its reporters could not verify them. *BuzzFeed News* published the unverified claims in full, a move that prompted an ethical debate in journalistic circles — and offered Mr. Trump an opening.

“The fact that *BuzzFeed* and CNN made the decision to run with this unsubstantiated claim is a sad and pathetic attempt to get clicks,” the incoming White House press secretary, Sean Spicer, said, inaccurately lumping the two news organizations together.

But the result was classic Trump: Not only did he break the norms of presidential engagement with the news media, snubbing organizations because of an unflattering story, but he also had elements of a frustrated political press corps warring with one another.

Immediately after the news conference, CNN defended its reporting and drew a sharp distinction between its news story and “*BuzzFeed's* decision to publish unsubstantiated memos.” On a broadcast, the CNN anchor Jake Tapper said that *BuzzFeed's* move “hurts us all.”

“It's irresponsible to put uncorroborated information on the internet,” Mr. Tapper said. “I can understand why President-elect Trump would be upset about that; I would be upset about it, too.”

Later, Chuck Todd, the NBC News moderator, repeatedly pressed *BuzzFeed's* editor in chief, Ben Smith, on why unverified claims did not amount to “fake news.”

Highlights of Trump's News Conference

President-elect Donald J. Trump on Wednesday in New York held a news conference for the first time in six months.

By THE NEW YORK TIMES on January 11, 2017. Photo by Damon Winter/The New York Times. Watch in Times Video »

Mr. Smith, for his part, said he was “not going to participate in an attempt to divide the media against each other.” (In a memo on Wednesday, *BuzzFeed's* chief executive, Jonah H. Peretti, defended the move. “We are going to keep doing what we do best, which is deliver impactful journalism,” he wrote.)

Still, by the time the news conference finished — with Omarosa Manigault, the “Apprentice” star and future member of the White House staff, heckling Mr. Acosta, shouting, “Cut it out!” — Mr. Trump had bobbed and weaved his way through nearly an hour of interrogation, offering vague answers to critical questions about his administration.

Yet the conduct of the news media, a familiar foil from Mr. Trump's

campaign days, remained at the center of the day's story.

The treatment of Mr. Acosta raised alarms among news media advocates and his fellow journalists, particularly after Mr. Acosta described a threat by Mr. Spicer to eject him from the news conference when he persisted in trying to ask the president-elect a question.

Harsh words between reporters and press secretaries happen. But an anchor for a rival network, Shepard Smith of Fox News, later came to Mr. Acosta's defense, saying that no "journalists should be subjected to belittling and delegitimizing by the

president-elect of the United States."

The National Press Club also lamented Mr. Trump's behavior, saying in a statement: "Presidents shouldn't get to pick and choose which reporters' questions they will answer based on what news outlet for which they work."

Mr. Trump, who ultimately took one question from a CNN reporter, also called on journalists from two right-leaning organizations: BreitbartNews and One America News. Matthew Boyle, the Breitbart reporter, asked the president-elect for his ideas on how to reform the news media.

Mostly, however, Mr. Trump took questions from journalists at the major television networks, with John Roberts of Fox News going first. A Greek chorus of sorts — mostly Trump supporters and aides, including Ms. Manigault — watched from the side, applauding Mr. Trump and jeering questions from reporters they deemed unpleasant.

A man who prides himself on finding an opponent's weakness, Mr. Trump at one point zeroed in on an existential question that has lingered in many newsrooms since his surprise victory: How much does the traditional news media still matter in a polarized age?

When Hallie Jackson, an NBC News correspondent, asked the president-elect if he would finally release his tax returns, to verify his claim that he has no financial dealings in Russia, Mr. Trump scoffed.

"You know, the only one that cares about my tax returns are the reporters, O.K.?" the president-elect said. "They're the only ones who ask."

"You don't think the American public is concerned about it?" Ms. Jackson asked.

"I don't think so," Mr. Trump replied, before laying down the political equivalent of a mike-drop: "I won."



Gabriel Schoenfeld : Trump vs. 'lying, disgusting' media

Gabriel Schoenfeld

Published 3:59 p.m. ET Jan. 11, 2017 | Updated 17 hours ago

President-elect Donald Trump holds a news conference in New York on Jan. 11, 2017. (Photo: Justin Lane, epa)

"I would never kill them, but I do hate them. And some of them are such lying, disgusting people." Thus spoke Donald Trump about journalists at one of his campaign rallies.

He was only slightly warmer Wednesday at his first news conference as president-elect, referring to some "very, very dishonest people" right in front of him as "fake news" purveyors — his characterization of CNN and BuzzFeed reporting on allegations that Russia had been collecting compromising financial and personal information on Trump for years.

It is, of course, reassuring that Trump has promised not to kill journalists. But a more realistic question that might soon come before us is: Would he throw them in jail?

During the campaign, Trump promised to "open up" libel laws so that when journalists "write purposely negative and horrible and false articles, we can sue them and win lots of money." The threat of having to pay damages for libel would no doubt chill journalism. There are, however, no federal defamation laws for him to open up. In issuing threats on this score, he has been blowing smoke.

But there is another open secret that Trump might soon learn. There are statutes on the books concerning the publication of national security secrets that,

employed aggressively, could cripple American journalism.

Even before he takes the oath of office, Trump has been calling for leak investigations. When NBC News obtained information from sources within the intelligence community about Russian hacking of our elections, Trump demanded that the House and Senate Intelligence committees investigate. Once he is president, Trump can set in motion the Justice Department and the FBI to do exactly that.

The Espionage Act of 1917, which punishes, among other things, the unauthorized possession or disclosure of national defense secrets, is the pertinent statute prosecutors would dust off. In the past, and particularly under the Obama administration, the Justice Department has employed it to go after leakers who illicitly convey sensitive government secrets to journalists.

The same law — notoriously poorly drafted — can be pointed at the news media itself. In the ordinary course of covering national security affairs, reporters gain possession of sensitive government secrets every day of the week. If we are well-informed about what our government is doing around the world, it is thanks to that fact. But it is thanks to the same fact that two top legal scholars have called the Espionage Act "a loaded gun pointed at newspapers and reporters who publish foreign policy and defense secrets."

To be sure, that gun has seldom been fired at journalists, and never successfully. Prosecutors confront a high hurdle because, according to the statute's terms, they need to demonstrate that offenders had a malignant state of mind, that they had intended to injure the United

States. That is an obstacle almost impossible to overcome. Journalists can claim — truthfully — that in gathering secrets they are simply trying to inform the public.

But that is not the end of the matter. There are specialized statutes that protect narrow categories of secrets, such as the COMINT Act, which guards the ultrasensitive realm of communications intelligence. The COMINT Act not only criminalizes the unauthorized possession or disclosure of such secrets, but also explicitly punishes their publication. Under its terms, and unusual in America law, the state of mind of the perpetrator is irrelevant. The action itself is the crime no matter the intent of the actor.

This publication clause has never been deployed against journalists, and some observers have concluded that it has effectively become a dead letter. Of course, if prosecutors ever did decide to resurrect it, they'd run headlong into a political firestorm. They'd also run headlong into a constitutional question of great moment: Does prosecution of a news organization for publishing government secrets violate the First Amendment guarantee of freedom of the press?

The Supreme Court has never had occasion to rule directly on the matter. The single most important precedent is the Pentagon Papers case. It suggests that the First Amendment would not bar such a prosecution. A majority of the justices indicated, in non-binding remarks, that they might well have upheld an Espionage Act conviction against *The New York Times* if one had come before them. But the Nixon administration, though it tried to stop the newspaper's presses, never charged the *Times* with any crime.

POLICING THE USA: A look at race, justice, media

Trump, who appears to loathe the news media more ferociously than even Nixon, might well decide to go where his disgraced predecessor declined to tread. If so, *The Washington Post* is a possible first target. Already during the campaign, Trump was threatening *The Post's* owner, Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, on account of the newspaper's aggressive reporting about his past. "Believe me," Trump said of Amazon on one occasion, tying it to *The Post's* unfavorable coverage, "if I become president, oh, do they have problems. They're going to have such problems."

Not to give Trump ideas, but if he wants to follow through on that unseemly threat, he might well find an opening in a Jan. 5 *Post* story headlined "U.S. intercepts capture senior Russian officials celebrating Trump win." The article detailed the presumably super secret fact that U.S. intelligence has been eavesdropping on high-ranking Kremlin officials. On its face, publication of such information is a blatant violation of the COMINT Act (though, as always in espionage matters, there could conceivably be exculpatory facts of which the public is unaware).

If the journalists at *The Post* are charged, tried and convicted of such a crime, the case would certainly rise to the Supreme Court. How the justices would rule is unknown. What is known — and frightening to contemplate — is that even as our secrecy laws are necessary for our security, they can readily be misused. The men who clumsily drafted our espionage statutes in 1917 failed to anticipate the possibility of a U.S. president issuing fascistic threats against journalists and journalistic institutions.

In other words, like everyone else before and after, they failed to anticipate the possibility of a President Trump.

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E.J. Dionne : Obama's moving farewell, Trump's terrifying hello

<http://www.facebook.com/ejdionne>

Opinion writer January 11 at 7:17 PM

Sen. Ben Cardin used one of the oldest saws in politics to lay out an imperative for the coming Trump era. "It cannot be business as usual," Cardin said.

He was talking primarily about Russia, but his statement stands on its own. Under the 45th president, it cannot be business as usual for the media, for Congress or for any citizen who values our liberties. We are in for a very dangerous national ride.

Cardin, a Maryland Democrat who is one of the least partisan voices in Congress, spoke at the opening of Senate hearings on Donald Trump's nomination of Rex Tillerson — a man with close ties to Vladimir Putin — for secretary of state. The hearing began against the backdrop of shocking allegations that Russian intelligence services have compromising material on Trump's personal life and finances. There are also reports of collusion between Trump's political operatives and Russia's spies and cyber-thieves.

Let it be said that the word "allegations" is key. A lot of what has been released has not been verified. It could turn out to be a mixture of truth and enough that's not true to allow Trump to push it all aside, as he did at his news conference Wednesday. "It's all fake news," he said. "It's phony stuff. It didn't happen."

But given Trump's relentless public praise for Putin and the derision he has directed at those who mistrust Russia and its intentions (our president-elect called those who disagree with his Russia policies "stupid"), the accusations need to be dealt with very seriously and investigated meticulously. If we have learned nothing else, we know that Trump's denials can never be believed until they are independently confirmed. The new standard for presidential statements must be: "Mistrust and verify."

(Sarah Parnass/The Washington Post)

For the first time since he was elected, President-elect Donald Trump held a news conference Jan. 11. Here are key revelations from his question-and-answer session with reporters in New York. Key moments from President-elect Donald Trump's question-and-answer session with reporters (Video: Sarah Parnass/Photo: Jabin Botsford/The Washington Post)

And so much else in Trump's often nasty encounter with reporters was, quite simply, petrifying. He slid toward admitting that the hacking of the Democratic National Committee was Russia's work — "I think it was Russia." But he immediately played down the import of what he had said by adding: "We also get hacked by other countries and other people."

He laid more blame on the Democrats for doing "a very poor job" of defending themselves against hacking than he did on Russia, and praised the hackers for the fruits of their theft: "Look at what was learned from that hacking."

He denounced news organizations by name and imperiously refused to allow their reporters to ask questions. He declined to make a clean break with his business holdings or to promise wide disclosure, which all but guarantees conflicts of interest.

And he continued to hug Putin close. "If Putin likes Donald Trump," he said, "I consider that an asset, not a liability." It's hard to escape the idea that the autocrat Putin must have very much liked the Donald Trump on display nine days before his inauguration.

So although it was not his intention, Trump brought home the importance of the central forward-looking theme of President Obama's moving farewell address in Chicago on Tuesday night. At heart, Obama's speech was a warning and a plea: an alert about the dangers our democracy confronts and a call for Americans to be active and vigilant in protecting our liberties.

"Our Constitution is a remarkable, beautiful gift," Obama declared in what may prove to be its most important passage. "But it's really just a piece of parchment. It has no power on its own. We, the people, give it power. We, the people, give it meaning — with our participation, and with the choices that we make and the alliances that we forge."

"Whether or not we stand up for our freedoms, whether or not we respect and enforce the rule of law, that's up to us," he continued. "America is no fragile thing. But the gains of our long journey to freedom are not assured."

Act Four newsletter

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President Obama delivered his farewell address to the nation at McCormick Place in Chicago on Tuesday. President Obama delivered his farewell remarks at McCormick Place in Chicago. (Victoria Walker/The Washington Post)

(Victoria Walker/The Washington Post)

That last line was ominous, and so were Obama's other warnings — that "democracy can buckle when it gives in to fear," that terrorists cannot defeat the United States "unless we betray our Constitution and our principles in the fight," that rivals "like Russia or China cannot match our influence around the world unless we give up what we stand for, and turn ourselves into just another big country that bullies smaller neighbors."

And Obama presented the country with this marching order: "We must guard against a weakening of the values that make us who we are."

Obama never mentioned Trump in this context. Alas for us all, he didn't have to.

Read more from E.J. Dionne's archive, follow him on Twitter or subscribe to his updates on Facebook.



Trump's Plans on Businesses May Fall Short (UNE)

Susanne Craig and Eric Lipton

President-elect Donald J. Trump said Wednesday that he would place his vast business empire in a trust controlled by his two oldest sons and take other steps in an attempt to remove any suggestion of a conflict of interest with his decisions as president. But he said he would not sell his holdings.

Hours later, the government's top ethics monitor said the plan was wholly inadequate and would leave the president vulnerable to "suspicions of corruption."

The unusual public criticism from Walter M. Shaub Jr., director of the Office of Government Ethics, followed Mr. Trump's most detailed explanation yet of his plans to distance himself from the global business operations of the Trump

Organization. No modern president has entered the White House with such a complicated array of holdings.

The steps Mr. Trump outlined include turning over to the United States Treasury any profits received at his hotels from foreign government clients. An ethics officer and, separately, a chief compliance counsel will be appointed at the Trump Organization to watch its

operations and ensure that it is not receiving special terms, payment or favors as a result of its ties to Mr. Trump, even as the organization is managed by a trust controlled by his two oldest sons and a longtime legal associate.

Sheri A. Dillon, a longtime lawyer for the Trump Organization, said that many of the alternatives ethics lawyers have advocated, such as selling off Mr. Trump's business

assets entirely or putting them in a blind trust that would be managed by an independent party, were not practical. Pointing out flaws in a blind trust, she said, "President Trump can't unknow he owns Trump Tower, and the press will make sure that any new developments at the Trump Organization are well publicized."

In addition, she said, the price of a sale of assets would draw scrutiny, and Mr. Trump would still be owed royalties.

The president-elect, speaking at a news conference Wednesday in Trump Tower, repeated his view, expressed shortly after his election, that as president, he will be exempt from conflict of interest laws that apply to all other federal employees except the vice president. But he and his legal team said he would still take voluntary steps to avoid even a perception of a conflict, such as the appearance that a decision he made as president might benefit one of his business ventures.

But Mr. Trump and his advisers would not release basic information about this plan. Mr. Trump has filed information with the federal government that indicates he is worth at least \$1.5 billion, but that information has not been independently verified, and the value of the assets being transferred into the trust is not known.

Mr. Trump's representatives also would not release the names of people who stand to benefit from any profits the trust generates, or say whether Mr. Trump would be able to reverse the transaction. On Wednesday, Mr. Trump rebuffed a renewed call to release his tax returns, which presidents have done for decades and which would show how much profit he makes from his business endeavors, including golf courses, marketing deals and commercial office space.

Mr. Shaub, who was appointed by President Obama, said that he did not believe selling assets was too high a price to pay to be president, and that Mr. Trump must divest them in order to avoid conflicts of interest.

"We can't risk creating the perception that government leaders would use their

official positions for profit," said Mr. Shaub, whose office establishes ethical standards for 2.7 million civilian employees in the White House and more than 130 executive branch agencies. "I appreciate that divestiture can be costly. But the president-elect would not be alone in making that sacrifice."

He criticized Mr. Trump's decision to put his assets into a trust instead of under the far stricter control of an independent manager, known as a blind trust.

"The only thing this has in common with a blind trust is the label, 'trust,'" Mr. Shaub said during an unusual news conference Wednesday at the Brookings Institution, a policy research center in Washington. "His sons are still running the businesses, and, of course, he knows what he owns."

Even some Republican ethics experts questioned how far Mr. Trump had gone to confront the many ethical issues he faces. They noted, for example, that Mr. Trump had not promised to prohibit communication between federal employees and anyone at the Trump Organization, or his current or future business partners.

"If you don't have a real firewall, outsiders will view doing business with the Trump Organization as a way to gain access to the administration or to influence it," said Matthew T. Sanderson, a Washington lawyer who worked on the Republican presidential campaigns of John McCain, Rand Paul and Rick Perry.

In fact, Mr. Trump and his legal advisers seemed on Wednesday to revise a promise that the president-elect had made on Twitter in December: that there would be "no new deals" by his company while he was in the White House.

Now, his legal team said, this standard will apply only to foreign deals. Ms. Dillon said the Trump Organization had canceled about 30 pending deals, costing it millions of dollars. But the company will continue to look for new business opportunities — be it hotels, golf courses or other ventures — within the United States at a time when the Trump Organization brand has an unrivaled profile.

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Instead, the Trump enterprise will clear new transactions with an ethics adviser to be named by the president-elect in the coming days. That person will vet the deals for potential conflicts, using a standard that Mr. Trump's advisers said had not yet been determined. A spokeswoman for Mr. Trump said he had always intended the "no new deals" promise to apply only to foreign deals.

The influence Mr. Trump will have over foreign and domestic policy as president has raised questions about whether American policy could affect his bottom line. For instance, he will oversee the regulation of banks, some of which lend money to his company, and he will have frequent contact with foreign heads of state, including some who run countries where the Trump Organization does business.

He has consistently used his position to showcase his real estate properties, inviting dignitaries and cabinet hopefuls to visit him at his golf club in Westchester County, N.Y., and his Mar-a-Lago resort in Palm Beach, Fla.

And the business offers have been flowing in, Mr. Trump says. His lawyers said his company had canceled 30 deals as he prepares to take office, and last weekend, Mr. Trump said he had turned down a \$2 billion deal in Dubai.

"I don't want to take advantage of something," Mr. Trump said.

The Dubai offer came from Damac, a major developer in the Persian Gulf region that is building the Trump International Golf Club, Dubai, and an adjacent luxury housing development.

Mr. Trump and his legal team appeared to be particularly sensitive to the suggestion that Mr. Trump might violate the so-called emoluments clause of the Constitution, which prohibits federal employees from taking any "present, emolument, office or title, of any kind whatever, from any king, prince or foreign state."

Ms. Dillon, the Trump Organization lawyer, who works for the Washington firm Morgan Lewis, said the clause, in her view, did not apply to market-value transactions such as a foreign government's paying a hotel bill. But to address the issue, the organization plans to donate to the federal government the "profits" derived from any payments from foreign governments to hotels it owns. Representatives of the organization did not reply when asked how this calculation would be made or whether a public accounting of the payments would be provided.

But Trump Organization officials said this agreement would not apply to golf courses or other businesses. That means Mr. Trump could still benefit from payments by foreign governments, critics said.

Erwin Chemerinsky, dean of the University of California, Irvine School of Law, also said the plan to turn over profits from foreign government payments to Mr. Trump's hotels was not sufficient to eliminate the constitutional issue.

"As soon as he receives the payment, he will have benefited, even if he later decides to give it away," Mr. Chemerinsky said. "This will mean he will have violated a provision of the Constitution."

Separately, Mr. Trump's daughter Ivanka said on her Facebook page that she was both separating herself from the Trump Organization and turning over management of her brand of handbags, jewelry, shoes and other accessories to another executive.

But ethics experts said the family might have figured out a way to accelerate the growth of their business while taking modest steps to separate themselves from the day-to-day operations.

"It's hard to imagine anything she could do to help the brand more than simply being a part of the White House apparatus," Robert Weissman, president of Public Citizen, a liberal nonprofit, said of Ivanka Trump. "The only solution for all of this is for them to divest — and that does not include handing it to another family member."



Why Most Economists Are So Worried About Trump

Justin Wolfers

If the November election was intended as a rejection of elites, of expertise and of the sort of technocratic advice that economists often give, it's a punch that has landed.

In somber analyses, huddled hallway conversations and pointed asides during endless panel sessions at the annual conference of economists last weekend in Chicago, the major theme was a sense of anxiety about the incoming Trump administration. This

foreboding was evident in roughly equal measure among conservative and liberal economists. But it is in direct contrast with the feelings of small-business owners and Wall Street traders.

Most of my fellow economists remain convinced that university-trained economists can offer useful insight to the new administration. Few believe it will matter. The life force that animates the econ tribe — that what they're doing matters — has been drained away.

Few see useful channels for influence. Partly this reflects President-elect Donald J. Trump's legislative plans. On issues like restricting trade, directly intervening to assist specific industries or corporations, targeting tax cuts to the wealthy, his agenda stands as a rejection of the advice that mainstream economists have typically offered.

And partly this reflects Mr. Trump's appointments. Few of his key economic advisers have any economics training, and the only official who identifies as an economist — Peter Navarro, who earned a Harvard Ph.D. in economics and will head up the newly formed National Trade Council — stands so far outside the mainstream that he endorses few of the key tenets of the profession.

Concern about the role of economic advice translated into concern about the economy. Over three days of intense discussions, I didn't encounter a single economist who expressed optimism that Mr. Trump's administration would be good for the economy. The optimists were those who thought Mr. Trump would not have the energy to actually implement his agenda; the pessimists' thoughts

veered toward disaster.

The mood among economists in a meeting in Chicago was as dreary as one of the city's winter days. Peter Thompson for The New York Times

I feared that I might have been talking with an unrepresentative group until I stumbled upon a recent survey of leading academic economists showing a similar pattern. Of the 31 respondents to the University of Chicago's IGM Economic Experts Panel, 28 disagreed with the claim that the "seven actions to protect American workers" in Mr. Trump's 100-day plan would improve the economic prospects of middle-class Americans. The dissenters were two economists who were uncertain, and one who had no opinion.

The pervasive pessimism among professional economists stands in stark contrast with the judgment of financial markets, which rose strongly in the wake of Mr. Trump's election, and have remained buoyant since.

It also puts economists at odds with the judgments of small-business owners. According to the latest survey from the National Federation of Independent Businesses, the

balance of members who expect general business conditions to improve has moved drastically. In October, the pessimists who saw business conditions as likely to worsen outnumbered the optimists by seven percentage points; the latest survey from December shows that the optimists now outnumber the pessimists by 50 percentage points. It's an extraordinary shift — one the association described as "stratospheric."

I'm not quite sure how to reconcile these conflicting signals. One possibility is that Mr. Trump remains something of an unknown, and each group is filling in the blanks differently. Small businesses, pleased to see a businessman in the White House, might be tempted to believe the best. By contrast, there's a reason that economics is called the dismal science, and few economists trust politicians — of either stripe — to get things right. Greater uncertainty gives economists a broader canvas upon which to project their pessimism.

But it may also be that these groups are describing different things. Businesses and markets care about profits. Economists focus on workers as well as the businesses they work for, on buyers as well as sellers, and on new firms as much as existing firms. Mr. Trump's anti-

regulatory zeal may help businesses but hurt workers; his anti-trade agenda could help sellers but hurt buyers; and his instincts to protect existing jobs may advantage existing businesses at the expense of the next generation of entrepreneurs.

Or perhaps the optimism of small-business owners is about what they think is most likely to happen, particularly in the short run. My conversations with economists revealed them to be more focused on the long run, particularly on the risk of really bad outcomes. By this view, the short-term optimism may be well placed, but should be juxtaposed with the possibility of a trade war, a catastrophic economic decision like defaulting on the national debt or a foreign policy disaster. Nearly every economist I spoke with said the risk of these left-tail events had risen.

Perhaps this fear makes sense: It's the double whammy that worries economists, that Mr. Trump's populist pose assigns less value to economic expertise, while also creating the conditions under which it's most likely to be needed.

POLITICO Trump's Obamacare impatience challenges GOP

By Rich Lowry

A quick repeal and replace of Obamacare on the scale the president-elect outlined is complex and arduous.

Donald Trump on Wednesday called for a quick and nearly simultaneous repeal and replacement of Obamacare — a task that's technically almost impossible.

Republicans can repeal much of the law on a party line vote under fast-track budget rules. But replacement require at least a handful of Senate Democrats to help dismantle President Barack Obama's historic achievement that's covering 20 million Americans. And the Republicans have to agree among themselves on a specific detailed bill, an agreement that has so far been elusive.

Story Continued Below

Republican leadership aides were quick to say after Trump's news conference that they're all on the same page, even though they had earlier planned for a swift vote on repeal (although delayed until sometime in the future) and then an extended debate over the replacement.

But a quick repeal and replace of Obamacare on the scale the president-elect outlined is complex and arduous — and politically rife for accusations that Republicans are recklessly repealing a law with scant time for debate.

On top of that, Trump indicated that his administration would introduce its own health care plan — which could either speed up the process of coalescing around a bill or drive a wedge between the Hill and the new White House. Trump didn't spell out what his plan would include.

"We're going to be submitting as soon as our secretary is approved, almost simultaneously, shortly thereafter, a plan," Trump said in his first press conference since July. "It will be repeal and replace. It will be various segments, you understand, but will most likely be on the same day or the same week, but probably the same day. Could be the same hour."

His chosen HHS secretary, Rep. Tom Price, hasn't had his confirmation hearing yet. The Senate Finance Committee hasn't even scheduled it. Price testifies before the Senate HELP committee next Wednesday, but Finance is the one that votes on the nomination.

The GOP currently has several different health bills and plans, and though they have some common features, lawmakers have not yet rallied around one. It's possible that Trump's proposal could be the impetus for the GOP to coalesce, said a lawmaker who didn't want to be named. But it's not a guarantee.

Price himself is the author of one of the more detailed proposals on the Hill. It's a conservative, market-oriented plan unlikely to win over Democrats.

"Our new secretary of HHS has had a plan in his pocket now for the last three years," said Rep. Chris Collins (R-N.Y.), who is acting as a liaison between Trump and the Hill. "If they did present an actual specific plan, that would be a much easier starting point than taking six plans or no plan and trying to start with that. ... I think that would speed the process up incredibly."

"Everyone wants to say the Republicans don't have a plan," said Rep. Buddy Carter (R-Ga.) "The problem is we have too many plans, and we've got to coalesce around one, and we're going to."

Trump hasn't given details of his vision for a new health law, but he has stressed such ideas as allowing

people to buy insurance across state lines. He didn't say — and wasn't asked — at the news conference how long it should take to transition from Obamacare to the new plan. Many Hill Republicans have called for a two- or three-year transition.

If Republicans pursue the simultaneous repeal and replace plan, a repeal vote is unlikely to happen for at least several weeks — later than Republicans outlined as recently as a few weeks ago.

The idea of a Trump health care plan took some Republican lawmakers by surprise.

"I would welcome a plan from anybody," said Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.). "I would consider any plan."

John Cornyn (R-Texas), the No. 2 Republican in the Senate, suggested that the Hill is talking with Trump officials on the idea.

"There is already consultation with the incoming administration," he said, calling for quick confirmation of Price "so we can interact officially. Right now, given the confirmation process, its more back channel."

Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) is skeptical that even Trump can move

legislation quite as fast as he wants.

“He needs to call [Majority Leader] Mitch McConnell,” he said with a

laugh when asked if Trump’s timeline is plausible.



The Senate Moves Quickly Against Obamacare

Andrew Taylor / AP

TIME Politics Congress

(WASHINGTON) — The Senate early Thursday passed a measure to take the first step forward on dismantling President Barack Obama’s health care law, responding to pressure to move quickly even as Republicans and President-elect Trump grapple with what to replace it with.

The nearly party-line 51-48 vote came on a nonbinding Republican-backed budget measure that eases the way for action on subsequent repeal legislation as soon as next month.

“We must act quickly to bring relief to the American people,” said Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky.

The House is slated to vote on the measure on Friday, though some Republicans there have misgivings about setting the repeal effort in motion without a better idea of the replacement plan.

Trump oozed confidence at a news conference on Tuesday, promising his incoming administration would soon reveal a plan to both repeal so-called Obamacare and replace it with legislation to “get health care taken care of in this country.”

“We’re going to do repeal and replace, very complicated stuff,” Trump told reporters, adding that both elements would pass virtually at the same time. That promise, however, will be almost impossible to achieve in the complicated web of Congress, where GOP leaders

must navigate complex Senate rules, united Democratic opposition and substantive policy disagreements among Republicans.

Read More: *President Obama Wants to Help Democrats Save Obamacare From Donald Trump*

Passage of Thursday’s measure would permit follow-up legislation to escape the threat of a filibuster by Senate Democrats. Republicans are not close to agreement among themselves on what any “Obamacare” replacement would look like, however.

Republicans plan to get legislation voiding Obama’s law and replacing parts of it to Trump by the end of February, House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., said Wednesday on “The Hugh Hewitt Show,” a conservative radio program. Other Republicans have said they expect the process to take longer.

The 2010 law extended health insurance to some 20 million Americans, prevented insurers from denying coverage for pre-existing conditions and steered billions of dollars to states for the Medicaid health program for the poor. Republicans fought the effort tooth and nail and voter opposition to Obamacare helped carry the party to impressive wins in 2010, 2014, and last year.

Thursday’s Senate procedural vote will set up special budget rules that will allow the repeal vote to take place with a simple majority in the 100-member Senate, instead of the 60 votes required to move most legislation.

Read More: *What You Should Do Today If You Have Obamacare*

That means Republicans, who control 52 seats, can push through repeal legislation without Democratic cooperation. They’re also discussing whether there are some elements of a replacement bill that could get through at the same time with a simple majority. But for many elements of a new health care law, Republicans are likely to need 60 votes and Democratic support, and at this point the two parties aren’t even talking.

Increasing numbers of Republicans have expressed anxiety over obliterating the law without a replacement to show voters.

Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, said she wants to at least see “a detailed framework” of a GOP alternative health care plan before voting on repeal. She said Republicans would risk “people falling through the cracks or causing turmoil in insurance markets” if lawmakers voided Obama’s statute without a replacement in hand.

Collins was among a handful of Republicans to occasionally break ranks to support some Democratic messaging amendments aimed at supporting such things as rural hospitals and a mandate to cover patients with pre-existing medical conditions. They were all shot down by majority Republicans anyway.

House leaders planned a Friday vote on the budget, though Republicans in that chamber also had misgivings.

Read More: *Rand Paul: Why I Will Vote to Repeal Obamacare*

Many members of the conservative House Freedom Caucus were insisting on first learning details about what a GOP substitute would look like — or putting some elements of the replacement measure in the repeal bill.

“We need to be voting for a replacement plan at the same time that we vote for repeal,” said Rep. Mark Meadows, R-N.C., an influential conservative.

Some GOP senators have discussed a phase-in of three years or longer to give lawmakers more time to replace Obama’s overhaul and make sure people now covered by that law can adjust to a new program.

Some more moderate House Republicans were unhappy, too, including Rep. Tom MacArthur, R-N.J., a leader of GOP centrists in the House Tuesday Group. He said he would oppose the budget because there was too little information about the replacement, including whether people receiving expanded Medicaid coverage or health care subsidies under the existing law would be protected.

“We’re loading a gun here,” MacArthur said. “I want to know where it’s pointed before we start the process.”

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After an aggressive news conference, questions linger about Trump’s readiness (UNE)

<https://www.facebook.com/danbalzwapo>

(Sarah Parnass/The Washington Post)

For the first time since he was elected, President-elect Donald Trump held a news conference Jan. 11. Here are key revelations from his question-and-answer session with reporters in New York. Key moments from President-elect Donald Trump’s question-and-answer session with reporters (Video: Sarah Parnass/Photo: Jabin Botsford/The Washington Post)

President-elect Donald Trump’s first news conference in six months was

a vintage performance. He was self-assured, aggressive, combative, at times willing to offend and at times trying to sound conciliatory. What it added up to was a reminder of the challenges he will face in gaining and maintaining full public trust once he is sworn in as president.

No president in memory has come to the brink of his inauguration with such a smorgasbord of potential problems and unanswered questions, or with the level of public doubts that exist around his leadership. Though he dealt with the issues directly on Wednesday, what he could not answer — what he cannot answer until he is in the

Oval Office — is whether he can avoid having these kinds of questions plague and possibly debilitate his presidency over the next four years.

Trump and his advisers have dismissed much of the pre-inaugural controversy as part of an effort to delegitimize his election victory and undermine his presidency even before he takes office. Still, the questions swirling around him as he came to the lobby of Trump Tower were an unprecedented mixture of the personal, the financial and the substantive.

Has he been compromised by the Russians, the most explosive and newest of allegations? (He denied all as fake news.) Are he and his party in conflict over U.S.-Russia relations? Will he truly separate himself from his sprawling business empire in a way that avoids conflicts of interest? Can he and Congress find common ground on repealing and replacing the Affordable Care Act? Will he live up to the promises he made as a candidate?

The news conference put on display everything the country has come to recognize in Trump from the presidential campaign. For those who responded to his message

from the start, for those who came to his side later in the campaign and for those who didn't but are prepared to give him some benefit of the doubt, it was a performance that no doubt went down well.

President-elect Donald Trump found himself in "familiar territory" addressing reporters at his first news conference since winning the election, calling CNN "fake news" and Buzzfeed a "failing pile of garbage." President-elect Donald Trump found himself in "familiar territory" addressing reporters at his first news conference since winning the election, calling CNN "fake news" and Buzzfeed a "failing pile of garbage." (The Washington Post)

(The Washington Post)

Right from the start, he swung back hard against salacious and unsubstantiated claims of personal misbehavior contained in a document prepared by a former Western intelligence officer and now in the hands of the federal government. He aggressively chastised BuzzFeed for publishing the entire document online and CNN for promoting the story about its existence (though CNN did not publish the document).

On the business side, he introduced Sheri Dillon, a tax attorney with the firm Morgan Lewis, to walk reporters through the steps he is taking to try to assure the public that he will serve its interests as president and not those of the Trump Organization — and to explain why many of the ideas proposed by outsiders arguing for taking bigger steps were impractical and likely to create their own potential conflicts.

He said he is confident that he can keep his pledge to have Mexico pay for the border wall he intends to build, even if

taxpayers initially foot the bill. He put Congress on notice that replacing Obamacare should go hand-in-glove with votes to repeal it. No easy task. He put drug manufacturers on notice that they cannot expect to do business as usual when he is in office. He offered the same message to companies that move production out of the country.

On those matters, Trump's performance was at once giving no quarter to his tormentors, reminding his core supporters that he will make good on his campaign promises no matter what the skeptics may say, and at the same time trying to offer some reassurance to critics who worry about the possibilities for ethical abuses by the businessman turned president.

In other ways, Trump also seemed eager to show that he has been hearing the criticisms of how he has handled the transition. For weeks he has been dismissive of intelligence findings that the Russians mounted a comprehensive campaign to meddle in the election and did so with the expressed aim of undermining Hillary Clinton and thereby aiding Trump.

For the first time, he gave ground on that question, saying that he believed the Russians were behind the hacking of the Democratic National Committee and the private emails of John Podesta, Hillary Clinton's campaign chairman. He also warned Russian President Vladimir Putin not to engage in such activities when he is president.

But with each step in that direction, he quickly walked back the other way. While he said the Russians were behind the hacking, he said the United States gets hacked all

the time by foreign entities. Critics worry that he would cozy up to Putin. He said that "if Putin likes Donald Trump, I consider that an asset, not a liability."

He declared flatly that he has no business dealings with the Russians, but again held out against greater transparency about his business. He dismissed calls to release his tax returns, a posture that puts him at odds with past presidents who have routinely done so. He claims that more can be learned by examining his financial disclosure statements, but financial tax experts disagree.

While he was willing to accept the intelligence findings that the Russians did the hacking during the election, he still appears far from calling a truce in what has been an ongoing war with the intelligence community. He as much as accused senior intelligence officials of leaking to the public. That fraught relationship ought to be a matter of grave concern — to Trump, to the intelligence community and most important to all Americans.

Politics newsletter

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Despite his six-month hiatus from meeting with reporters, Trump appeared anything but rusty. He came to the lobby of Trump Tower ready to go on offense against his critics and his questioners. Yet remarkably, he offered kind words for news organizations — namely those that refrained from publishing the details of what it is claimed the Russians have gathered to compromise him. He recalled how much he had enjoyed the give-and-take in the campaign, which he said

he stopped "because we were getting quite a bit of inaccurate news."

In eight days, Trump will take the oath of office. He will do so with the public far from confident that he is up to the job ahead. Gallup measured him on several questions asked about other presidents as they were entering office. Trump's scores were notably low.

Not quite half of those surveyed said they have confidence he can handle an international crisis. That compares with 7 in 10 who expressed confidence in President Obama, former presidents George W. Bush and Bill Clinton in the weeks before their inaugurations. Just over half said they believe he can manage the executive branch effectively. For Obama and Bush, it was in the neighborhood of 8 in 10. And on whether Trump can prevent major scandals, just 44 percent said they were confident that he could do so, compared with 74 percent for Obama and 77 percent for Bush.

All presidents come to the Oval Office with questions about their ability to handle the complexities of the job. Obama arrived with limited experience on the national stage. George W. Bush took the oath after a contentious recount and controversial Supreme Court decision. Trump makes those situations look mild in comparison.

Public trust is the currency that all president must have to succeed. Trump might well have helped himself with his performance Wednesday, but there are enough challenges and questions surrounding him to make what is already an enormously difficult job all that much harder.



Tillerson calls U.S. intelligence findings on Russian interference in election 'troubling' (UNE)

<https://www.facebook.com/anne.gearan>

(Peter Stevenson/The Washington Post)

Rex Tillerson, President-elect Trump's nominee for secretary of state, had a rocky first day facing members of the Senate during his confirmation hearing on Jan. 11 at the Capitol. The most important moments from Rex Tillerson's Senate confirmation hearing (Video: Peter Stevenson/Photo: Melina Mara/The Washington Post/The Washington Post)

Secretary of state nominee Rex Tillerson called U.S. intelligence

findings of Russian interference in the presidential election "troubling" Wednesday but said he has not yet seen classified information about allegations that Russia intended to help President-elect Donald Trump.

Tillerson, the former top executive at ExxonMobil, also declined to strongly denounce Russian military actions in Syria that have led to civilian deaths or to broadly condemn alleged human rights abuses in Saudi Arabia and the Philippines. He conceded that climate change is man-made and needs to be addressed by world powers — but also that there's very little he can do to control the

potential global fallout of Trump's tweeting.

Tillerson's hearing was the marquee event on a busy day amid a consequential week for the incoming Trump administration as the president-elect's top Cabinet picks begin the confirmation process. As Tillerson testified, Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.), Trump's choice for attorney general, was sitting for his second day of hearings with the Judiciary Committee and Elaine L. Chao, Trump's choice for transportation secretary, testified before the Senate commerce panel.

Lawmakers were also keeping tabs on Trump's long-anticipated news conference in New York, his first since winning the presidency, where he conceded that Russia had meddled in the U.S. election.

Tillerson's sometimes testy confirmation hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee gave the 64-year-old Texan his first chance to address concerns that ExxonMobil put profits ahead of human rights, environmental and policy concerns, and to explain his relationship with Russia.

What lies ahead for Trump's nominees, and how Democrats helped smooth the way

"I understand full well the responsibilities and the seriousness" of the job, Tillerson said. "I don't view this as a game in any way," he said, rejecting a characterization that he might view problems and policies as transactional.

Sharp inquiries by senators in both parties signaled that Democrats and Republicans are still skeptical about whether Tillerson is suited to be the chief U.S. diplomat alongside a president with no government experience, particularly at a time of increasingly strained relations between the United States and Russia.

With his smooth baritone voice, he assured senators that he would set aside a profit-driven worldview born of 41 years as an oil executive and would recuse himself from decisions involving his former employer, the world's largest oil company. Tillerson retired Dec. 31 and has pledged to sell his remaining ExxonMobil stock.

But Tillerson seemed constrained and at times reluctant in answering questions about some of the most controversial positions adopted by Trump during the presidential campaign. In some cases he said he does not yet have sufficient information to comment in detail, as with the Russian presidential hacking allegations clouding Trump's ascension to the presidency now, and in other cases he said the incoming administration has not yet settled on its views.

"In my conversations with him on the subjects we have discussed, he's been very open and inviting of my views and respectful of those views," Tillerson said of Trump. "My sense is that were going to have all the views presented on the table."

Tillerson called himself a pragmatist about Russia, which he said is not a friend of the United States but can be a partner. Moscow has been emboldened in Ukraine and elsewhere by a void in strong U.S. leadership, Tillerson said, and he pledged a tough stance with both Russia and China over territorial ambitions.

"We have stumbled," he said. "In recent decades, we have cast American leadership into doubt."

Here are the people Trump has chosen for his Cabinet

He was most critical of foreign policy decisions made by President Obama, but he also found fault with the Iraq War launched by Republican President George W. Bush.

He declined to label Russian President Vladimir Putin a war criminal or to condemn Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte over human rights abuses the leader himself claims he committed.

He seemed to stun some senators by saying he had not yet discussed Russian action in Aleppo, Syria, with Trump. He frustrated others by appearing to stonewall questions about ExxonMobil lobbying against economic sanctions, especially concerning Russia, where the company does extensive business.

Tillerson said he never lobbied on the issue and fumbled over whether ExxonMobil ever had. At one point he said that to the best of his memory, ExxonMobil had not done that.

Democrats on the committee produced lobbying records that show ExxonMobil had said it was lobbying over various economic sanctions measures, including tough sanctions on Iran in 2010 and more recently over sanctions on Russia for its annexation of Crimea.

Under questioning by Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), a 2016 GOP presidential candidate, Tillerson did not dispute intelligence officials' findings on Russia, saying that he had reviewed the unclassified report that U.S. agencies released last week on Russian interference in the election. More detailed classified versions of that report were presented to Trump and to President Obama.

"That report clearly is troubling and indicates that all of the actions you just described were undertaken," Tillerson said.

Rubio is the only Republican on the committee who has suggested he might oppose Tillerson — a move that could imperil the former executive's nomination. Any GOP

resistance could endanger the nomination in the Senate, which Republicans hold with 52 seats.

As the hearing concluded, Rubio signaled he has not made up his mind.

"I have to make sure I'm 100 percent behind whatever decision that I make, because when I make it, it isn't going to change," he told reporters.

Late Wednesday the committee's top Democrat, Sen. Ben Cardin of Maryland, said he would need more time and research before he could vote for Tillerson. He called the nominee's answers on sanctions and human rights issues troubling and confusing and said Tillerson seemed unwilling to fully separate himself from his former employer.

Rubio has become a proxy for other GOP senators voicing similar concerns about Tillerson's views on Putin and Russia. Sens. John McCain (R-Ariz.) and Lindsey O. Graham (R-S.C.), who do not sit on the panel, have indicated reluctance to vote for Tillerson, as have others. McCain said Tuesday that he had no plans to attend the proceedings but that he intended to send Tillerson written questions regarding Russia "and other matters."

Concerns with Tillerson's ties to Russia include that he accepted an Order of Friendship award given personally by Putin in 2013 and because he has met with the Russian leader and other senior government officials numerous times.

[What is the Russian Order of Friendship, and why does Rex Tillerson have one?]

Tillerson appeared to break with Trump over the whether Russia was justified in annexing the Crimea region of Ukraine, the value of an international climate agreement and the wisdom of expanding the number of countries that possess nuclear weapons, among other issues.

He also appeared to depart from the president he would serve in support for the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal and rejection of any "blanket" ban on Muslim immigration or registry.

Tillerson hedged on his views on the human role in climate change and the extent of the threat it poses, although he did say he thinks the United States is better served by remaining a party to the international agreement on climate change brokered under the Obama administration.

Trump has vowed to "cancel" U.S. participation in the accord, in which hundreds of countries collectively agreed to slash carbon emissions to help mitigate the effects of global warming.

Under clipped questioning about Trump's business dealings and Exxon's views on climate science from Sen. Tim Kaine (D-Va.), who was the Democratic nominee for vice president in the 2016 election, Tillerson repeatedly answered "I have no knowledge."

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Kaine asked whether the response came from a lack of knowledge or a refusal to answer; Tillerson said with a smile, "a little of both."

Tillerson flashed his blunt style again when asked by Sen. Todd C. Young (R-Ind.) how he might urge Trump to check his prolific tweeting to preserve foreign relations.

"I don't think I'm going to be telling the boss how he ought to communicate with the American people. That's going to be his choice," Tillerson said, adding that he expects to be in sync with Trump on world affairs.

If there's any disagreement, "I have his cellphone number," Tillerson added. "And he's promised me he'll answer — and he does."

Karoun Demirjian, Karen DeYoung and Steven Mufson contributed to this report.

**The
New York
Times**

Flegenheimer

WASHINGTON — Rex W. Tillerson on Wednesday told a Senate committee weighing his nomination as secretary of state that he would

In Rocky Hearing, Rex Tillerson Tries to Separate From Trump

David E. Sanger
and Matt

push back hard against President Vladimir V. Putin's effort to expand Russian influence from Ukraine to Syria to cyberspace. But in a rocky all-day hearing, Mr. Tillerson also found himself on the defensive when it came to Exxon Mobil's lobbying activities and his

reluctance to declare that some dictators were violators of human rights.

One especially skeptical Republican was Senator Marco Rubio of Florida, whose vote on the Foreign Relations Committee might well

decide the fate of Mr. Tillerson, the former chief executive of Exxon.

In one contentious exchange with Mr. Rubio, who ran against President-elect Donald J. Trump last year for the Republican nomination, Mr. Tillerson rebuffed

an effort to get him to describe Mr. Putin as a war criminal for ordering the bombing of civilians in Chechnya. "I would not use that term," he said.

By the end of the day, Mr. Rubio would not commit to supporting Mr. Tillerson, saying he was "prepared to do what's right," even if it meant siding with Democrats, which would most likely result in a 11-to-10 committee vote against the nomination. Even so, the committee could still send it to the full Senate, where Mr. Tillerson's chances would be tenuous.

On issue after issue — the dangers of letting Japan and South Korea obtain nuclear weapons, his opposition to a ban on Muslim immigration, the need to push back hard against Mr. Putin's efforts to expand Russian influence — Mr. Tillerson showed considerable independence from Mr. Trump, separating himself from many of the president-elect's campaign pronouncements. While Mr. Trump described an America that would defend allies only if they paid their fair share, Mr. Tillerson repeatedly emphasized fulfilling alliance commitments.

Mr. Tillerson came to the hearing acutely aware that his first task was to allay concerns that his four decades at Exxon had left him too close to Mr. Putin and dictators around the world. So he staked out his turf early in the hearing, arguing that if he had been in office when Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, he would have recommended that the United States provide arms and intelligence support to the government of Ukraine, even though it is not a member of NATO.

"What the Russian leadership would have understood is a powerful response," he said, casting the Obama administration's reaction as too weak. His message to the Russian leadership, he said, would be, "Yes, you took Crimea, but this stops right here."

But Mr. Tillerson dodged a series of questions about whether Exxon Mobil, under his

leadership, had lobbied against the sanctions imposed on Russia, which prevented the company from fulfilling huge contracts for oil exploration on Russian territory.

On climate change, Mr. Tillerson said he did not view it as the imminent national security threat that some others did. Although he surprised many in the oil business by acknowledging the dangers of global warming and even embracing carbon taxes, as he did again on Wednesday, he said that much of the literature on the issue remained "inconclusive," despite the overwhelming consensus of the scientific community about the role of humans.

Mr. Tillerson showed a deep familiarity with many of the most contentious issues in American foreign policy, including the rules governing transactions with the Cuban government and the outlines of the Iran nuclear deal. It was on Iran that he tried to strike a middle ground between Republicans who said the deal should be scrapped — including Vice President-elect Mike Pence — and those who simply call for tougher enforcement of its provisions.

He promised a "comprehensive review" that would include confidential side agreements, largely between Iran and international nuclear inspectors, that have long been a subject of Republican suspicions. But his real complaint about the 2015 accord is that its key restrictions on Iran expire in 2030, and he said he feared Iran would "go back to where they were," trying to build a nuclear weapon.

At one point Mr. Tillerson complained that there was no provision to keep Iran from buying a nuclear weapon, though later, after a break, he corrected himself to acknowledge that both the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and the Iran agreement itself contain prohibitions on any acquisition of a nuclear device.

Protesters shouted out regularly, interrupting Mr. Tillerson, and he did

not look at them, pausing expressionless as they were removed. He told the committee repeatedly that he would not act on human rights abuses, such as the summary executions underway in the Philippines, until he received corroboration, presumably from American intelligence agencies. That inflamed Mr. Rubio, who charged that Mr. Tillerson was ignoring easily verifiable news reports. It also angered Human Rights Watch, the nongovernmental organization that monitors such violations.

Rex W. Tillerson, center, the chief executive of Exxon Mobil and Mr. Trump's choice for secretary of state, before the start of his confirmation hearing. Doug Mills/The New York Times

"Rex Tillerson's reluctance to acknowledge human rights abuses by Russia, Saudi Arabia and the Philippines raises serious questions about whether he can effectively serve as secretary of state," the group said in a statement. "Numerous independent observers, U.N. investigators, media, and humanitarian and human rights groups have published extensive and detailed reporting about the Russian government's highly problematic domestic human rights record and war crimes in Syria," and the killing in the Philippines of "6,200 suspected drug users in the last six months."

Mr. Tillerson said he simply had an engineer's view of the need for evidence.

Some of the day's most fascinating moments came as Mr. Tillerson tried to weave a fairly conventional, hard-power view of American influence into a tapestry that clearly rejected some of Mr. Trump's views. Although the president-elect has said that he doubted the usefulness of the United States-led sanctions against Russia for its incursion into Ukraine, Mr. Tillerson took the opposite view. He said he looked forward to working with the Senate "particularly on the construct of new sanctions" against Moscow in an

effort "to cause modifications in Russia's positions."

At the same time, in a tense series of exchanges, Mr. Tillerson said he could not say whether Exxon had lobbied against Russia sanctions after the annexation of Crimea, even though the company had submitted filings saying that it was lobbying on the topic. "Let's be clear," the company said on Twitter on Wednesday afternoon. "We engage with lawmakers to discuss sanction impacts, not whether or not sanctions should be imposed."

There were other attempts to separate from positions Mr. Trump took last year. Mr. Tillerson indicated that President Bashar al-Assad of Syria would ultimately have to leave power — and assailed Mr. Assad's bombing of civilians. Mr. Trump had talked about allying with Mr. Assad and Russia to fight the Islamic State, even while acknowledging the Syrian leader is "a bad guy."

Pressed on Mr. Trump's calls for a national registry of Muslims, Mr. Tillerson said he "would need to have a lot more information around how such an approach would even be constructed."

Democrats questioned Mr. Tillerson on whether his 41 years at the world's largest oil company would affect his view of American national interests. Senator Benjamin L. Cardin of Maryland, the ranking Democrat on the Foreign Relations Committee, got to the Democrats' key critique of Mr. Tillerson, arguing that "having a view from the C-suite at Exxon is not at all the same as the view from the seventh floor of the Department of State," Mr. Cardin said, referring to where the secretary's office is.

"And those who suggest that anyone who can run a successful business can, of course, run a government agency do a profound disservice to both," he said.

The Washington Post

Jennifer Rubin : Was Tillerson not prepared properly?

By Jennifer Rubin

Rex Tillerson, President-elect Trump's nominee for secretary of state, had a rocky first day facing members of the Senate during his confirmation hearing on Jan. 11 at the Capitol. The most important moments from Rex Tillerson's Senate confirmation hearing (Video: Peter Stevenson/Photo: Melina Mara/The Washington Post/The Washington Post)

Rex Tillerson, President-elect Trump's nominee for secretary of state, faced members of the Senate during his confirmation hearing on Jan. 11 at the Capitol. (Peter Stevenson/The Washington Post)

Rex Tillerson, President-elect Donald Trump's nominee for secretary of state, has no government experience and has never been nominated for any government post. That was a risk the Trump team undertook when

nominating him. The Trump foreign policy briefers owed Tillerson preparation that would give him the best possible chance of success. Either Tillerson stubbornly did not take that advice, or those who briefed him committed political malpractice by suggesting weaving, ducking and evading was a good way to get the critical votes he will need to succeed. In the afternoon session, Tillerson repeatedly stumbled by getting into arguments

with committee members that surely he could have avoided and by refusing to be definitive on easily answered questions.

Earlier in the day, Tillerson denied that he or ExxonMobil had lobbied on sanctions. Sen. Bob Menendez (D-N.J.), armed with lobbying documents, pressed him to acknowledge that he had lobbied against sanctions. Tillerson wouldn't go there, suggesting Exxon could have been lobbying for sanctions.

Menendez was incredulous and obviously annoyed that Tillerson would, in effect, insult his and everyone else's intelligence. Tillerson inexplicably would not come clean on the issue. It hurt him.

Then, in response to Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), who was none too pleased with Tillerson's testimony earlier in the day, Tillerson wouldn't acknowledge Saudi Arabia as a human rights violator. He declared, "When you designate someone or label someone, is that the most effective way to have progress be able to be made in Saudi Arabia or any other country?" Wasn't Tillerson told that the State Department itself compiles human rights reports. The 2015 report on Saudi Arabia read, "There were reports of arbitrary arrest and detention. During the year authorities detained without charge security suspects, persons who publicly criticized the government, Shia religious leaders, and persons who violated religious standards." It also found:

There were reports from human rights activists of governmental monitoring or blocking mobile telephone or Internet usage before

planned demonstrations. The government strictly monitored politically related activities and took punitive actions, including arrest and detention, against persons engaged in certain political activities, such as direct public criticism of senior members of the royal family by name, forming a political party, or organizing a demonstration. Customs officials reportedly routinely opened mail and shipments to search for contraband. In some areas, Ministry of Interior informants allegedly reported "seditious ideas," "antigovernment activity," or "behavior contrary to Islam" in their neighborhoods.

The report further noted, "Civil law does not protect human rights, including freedoms of speech and of the press; only local interpretation and the practice of sharia protect these rights. There were frequent reports of restrictions on free speech."

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In other words, factually speaking, Saudi Arabia is a human rights violator and the U.S. government has been frank about it. Tillerson's response was that of an oil executive, not a representative of American values or interests. That is precisely the concern Rubio and others have raised about him.

Rubio also pressed Tillerson on a spate of killings in the Philippines related to the government's war on drugs. Tillerson refused to condemn the acts, saying the United States had a long relationship with the Philippines. When Tillerson said he would need more information, Rubio pointed to President Rodrigo Duterte's bragging about thousands of deaths and a report in the Los Angeles Times. Insisting he didn't rely on newspapers, Tillerson still did not budge.

And, as if that were not bad enough, Tillerson was asked an easy question: Would he support a Muslim registry? He responded that he "would need a lot more information." That is about as bad an answer as can be from a constitutional, human rights and/or foreign policy perspective. Does Tillerson not feel confident, or did

his preparation team stupidly tell him to duck questions that most senators, even the one nominated for attorney general, would answer definitively: "No."

Rejecting a nominee is a rare occurrence, in part because nominees facing defeat often withdraw their names. We cannot tell at this stage whether Tillerson is in danger. A Democratic aide told me, "There's a general sentiment that he has been composed and reasonably thoughtful, but his very misleading answer on Exxon's lobbying on sanctions and his wishy-washy responses to specific, alarming issues like the proposed Muslim ban and Duterte's extrajudicial killings in the Philippines are raising eyebrows and more questions."

Suffice it to say, Tillerson could have done a lot better. Perhaps the conclusion is that it is better to nominate experienced pros; alternatively, perhaps Trump's team underestimated the committee's skepticism and the degree to which hedging would frustrate the senators and thereby harm Tillerson's chances.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Trump Nominee Rex Tillerson Suggests Tough Line on Russia, But Won't Commit on Sanctions (UNE)

Felicia Schwartz, Jay Solomon and Paul Sonne

Updated Jan. 11, 2017 7:03 p.m. ET

WASHINGTON—President-elect Donald Trump's pick for secretary of state, Rex Tillerson, said the U.S. needs to aggressively confront Russian President Vladimir Putin while also negotiating with his government, but in his Senate confirmation hearing Wednesday refused to commit the Trump administration to maintaining or significantly ratcheting up sanctions on Russia.

Mr. Tillerson, the former chief executive of Exxon Mobil Corp., signaled a surprisingly hawkish line toward Russia in some instances, pledging, for example, to provide lethal weaponry to Ukraine so it can defend itself against Russian forces that have moved to annex territory on the country's eastern border.

In another break from Mr. Trump, he said mutual protections as agreed among members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization should not be used as leverage to encourage allies to spend more on defense.

But the 64-year-old former energy executive drew the ire of some U.S.

senators by refusing to commit on sanctions against Russia in retaliation for its destabilizing regional activities and its alleged hacking of U.S. institutions during the recent presidential election.

Lawmakers questioned whether Mr. Tillerson's past business dealings with Russia while at Exxon Mobil—Mr. Putin awarded him Russia's Order of Friendship in 2013—undercut his willingness to target Moscow's finances, particularly in the energy sector. The long-serving executive said the Trump administration needs to review the efficacy of the sanctions and judge whether there might be better ways to try to constrain, or potentially woo, the Kremlin.

"Sanctions, in order to be implemented, do impact American business interests," Mr. Tillerson said in response to questioning. "In protecting American interests...sanctions are a powerful tool. Let's design them well...Let's ensure those sanctions are applied equally."

Sen. Marco Rubio (R., Fla.), a former Republican presidential candidate, was among senators who pressed for a pledge from Mr. Tillerson to maintain long-term economic pressure on Russia. Mr.

Tillerson declined repeatedly, citing the need to review the policy.

"Rex Tillerson's hearing is troubling," tweeted Sen. Chuck Schumer of New York, the Democratic Party's leader in the Senate. "He declined to commit to maintaining the existing sanctions regime against Russia or to new sanctions."

During hours of testimony, Mr. Tillerson took a hard line on China, warning that Beijing needed to do much more to help the U.S. roll back North Korea's nuclear weapons program.

The nominee also said the administration would review the landmark nuclear agreement that the U.S. and world powers reached with Iran in 2015 to constrain its nuclear program. He questioned whether Tehran should be allowed to continue producing nuclear fuel as part of the agreement, a key concession Iran won during the negotiations that it has said it won't renegotiate.

"What comes at the end of this agreement must be a mechanism that does in fact deny Iran the ability to develop a nuclear weapon and that means no uranium enrichment in Iran, no nuclear materials stored in Iran," Mr. Tillerson said.

Mr. Tillerson questioned another landmark foreign policy achievement of the Obama administration: the normalization of relations with Cuba. The Texas native said the Trump administration would also review this policy, and suggested President Barack Obama didn't push for enough political and economic change in Havana.

"Our recent engagement with the government of Cuba was not accompanied by any significant concessions on human rights," Mr. Tillerson said. "We have not held them accountable for their conduct."

Mr. Tillerson also drew questions on climate change, telling Sen. Tom Udall (D., N.M.) that while Mr. Trump has invited his views on the subject, "Ultimately, I'll carry out his policies."

Mr. Trump has said he would withdraw the U.S. from the 2016 Paris climate agreement that calls for all countries to enact domestic policies to cut greenhouse-gas emissions. Mr. Tillerson as CEO of Exxon has backed the deal.

Still, Mr. Tillerson rated climate change low among national security threats. "I don't see it as the imminent national security threat as perhaps others do," he said.

But issues related to Russia dominated the hearing in the wake of the charges last week by the U.S. intelligence community that Mr. Putin ordered the hacking of American political institutions during the election, likely to help defeat Hillary Clinton.

The issue of Russia became even more explosive this week due to the publication of a privately financed report containing unsubstantiated allegations that the Trump campaign conspired with the Kremlin to defeat Hillary Clinton.

Mr. Trump denied the allegations raised in the report. U.S. intelligence officials said they haven't been able to corroborate any of the claims, but the issue was raised during the hearing.

Mr. Tillerson repeatedly said the U.S. needs to take a balanced approach toward the Kremlin, cooperating where it can but also preparing to push back. He charged the Obama administration with fueling the conflict with Moscow by failing to establish and firmly enforce

boundaries to manage Russian actions.

"I found the Russians to be very strategic in their thinking, very calculated. The government of Russia has a plan. It's a geographic plan," Mr. Tillerson said. "If Russia doesn't receive an adequate response, they will continue with that plan."

Mr. Tillerson said that, subject to consultation with other national security officials in the incoming administration, he would support calls to give defensive weapons to Ukraine so the country can protect itself against any further Russian aggression.

The Obama administration has stopped short of providing lethal weaponry to Ukraine, instead choosing to provide the country primarily with nonlethal military aid and extensive training.

"I think it's important for us to support them in their ability to defend themselves," Mr. Tillerson said.

The New York Times Editorial : Rex Tillerson Sheds Little Light on His Boss

The Editorial Board

Rex Tillerson during his confirmation hearing on Wednesday. Doug Mills/The New York Times

Wondering how Donald Trump might actually change American foreign policy? You didn't get any clarity from the Senate confirmation hearing on Wednesday for his secretary of state nominee, Rex Tillerson, the chief executive officer of Exxon Mobil. Mr. Tillerson said he and Mr. Trump had not even discussed Russia, the main topic of interest to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. "That has not occurred yet," he said.

Mr. Tillerson did not explain how he plans to overcome the challenges, ethical and strategic, of dealing with an authoritarian leader, Vladimir Putin, with whom his company has done many billions of dollars worth of business. And some of his policy assertions put him at odds with positions the president-elect has taken in the past (never a sure guide with Mr. Trump).



As Congress begins the confirmation hearings for President-elect Donald Trump's nominees, a paradox emerges. Trump refuses to

Under grilling by both Democratic and Republican senators, Mr. Tillerson tried to assuage concerns about how he would deal with an increasingly assertive Russia by taking a tougher line than he had before. He acknowledged that Russia "poses a danger," that its bombing in Syria is "not acceptable behavior," that it does not have a legal claim to annex Crimea and has not complied with the Minsk agreement intended to resolve its conflict with Ukraine. He also said it was a "fair assumption" that Mr. Putin authorized the hacking used to disrupt the election, as American intelligence agencies have concluded.

At his news conference on Wednesday, Mr. Trump finally conceded that Russia had carried out the election-related cyberattacks. But he has yet to condemn Mr. Putin for invading Ukraine or bombing Syria — two important issues where his views and Mr. Tillerson's could collide.

There were limits, however, to how far Mr. Tillerson would go. Despite a fierce interrogation by several senators, Mr. Tillerson refused to

Mr. Tillerson contradicted Mr. Trump's view, expressed last year, that the U.S. should consider recognizing Crimea as part of Russia. In an interview with ABC News last summer, Mr. Trump said he would "take a look at it," noting that "the people of Crimea, from what I heard, would rather be with Russia than where they were."

Mr. Rubio pressed Mr. Tillerson on whether he believed Russia has committed war crimes in Syria. Secretary of State John Kerry and the United Nations have suggested this may be the case due to Moscow's indiscriminate bombing of civilians in the Syrian city of Aleppo.

"I don't have sufficient information to make that claim," Mr. Tillerson said.

After leaving the hearing, Mr. Rubio said he remained undecided about Mr. Tillerson after hours of questions and tense back-and-forths between the two men.

"Many of his answers were concerning to me," Mr. Rubio said. "I don't want to see us move toward a foreign policy in which human

rights only matters when nothing else matters, when something more important isn't standing in the way."

Republicans hold a one-seat advantage on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. If just one Republican votes against Mr. Tillerson in committee and all the Democrats vote on party lines, he will fail to win a positive recommendation from the committee—but he could still be voted on by the full Senate. On the Senate floor, Mr. Tillerson can lose no more than two Republican votes if all the Democrats vote against him as a bloc.

—Byron Tau contributed to this article.

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say if the new administration would renew sanctions imposed on Russia by President Obama over the election interference. And he seemed to suggest that the sanctions imposed on Russia by the United States concerning Ukraine — sanctions opposed by Mr. Tillerson as head of Exxon — might be lifted after a review.

Mr. Tillerson's opening remarks, which mentioned his involvement with the Boy Scouts, stressed the importance of honesty and moral leadership. He seemed to fall short on both counts when he denied that Exxon had lobbied against a bill that would have enacted the sanctions into law. But records show the company lobbied repeatedly on the Ukraine sanctions bill in 2014, according to the Center for Responsive Politics. And while Mr. Tillerson promised to comply with a legal requirement that he must recuse himself from issues related to Exxon Mobil for one year, he would not commit to recusals for his entire tenure, needed to provide plausible assurances that he will make decisions at the State Department based on national, rather than corporate, interests.

On the global climate change agreement that was one of Mr. Obama's top achievements, Mr. Tillerson was not reassuring. While he said the "risk of climate change does exist," he said he did not view it as an imminent national security threat, as Mr. Obama had, and did not commit to try to persuade Mr. Trump, who has called climate change a "hoax," to stick with the agreement. He said the administration would do a "fulsome review."

Mr. Tillerson was more reassuring on several longstanding tenets of American foreign policy that Mr. Trump has disparaged. He said he saw value in durable alliances and expressed support for NATO's commitment to defend an ally that is attacked. But until the world hears the same sentiments from Mr. Trump himself, it is hard to know how much Mr. Tillerson's reassurances mean.

Eli Lake: Trump Shakes Things Up. His Nominees Calm Things Down.

Eli Lake

bow to official Washington, but his future cabinet echoes official Washington's policy mantras.

Trump tweets that the intelligence community -- accused of leaking

that senior U.S. officials were briefed on allegations about his sexual conduct in Russia -- is akin to the Gestapo. He tells a CNN reporter that his network is "fake news," for reporting that. He claims

that no one except the press cares about his tax returns. He proposes a commission on childhood vaccinations after meeting with someone who believes the unproven theory that they cause

autism. The next president rocks the boat.

So far, his nominees don't. Take retired general Michael Flynn, Trump's incoming national security adviser. He has earned a reputation as a maverick inside the intelligence community, and its mandarins whisper to the press that he has a wicked temper. At the U.S. Institute of Peace on Tuesday, Flynn defied that perception. He spoke about the importance of alliances and the incoming administration's deep faith in American exceptionalism. He asked the audience of establishment foreign policy experts to clap for his predecessor, Susan Rice, and he singled out Bill Clinton's secretary of state, Madeleine Albright, for praise.

It was hard to believe this was the same guy who joined in with the crowd at the Republican convention this summer in chants of "lock her up." On Tuesday, Flynn sounded like he was about to be inducted into the Charlie Rose hall of fame.

It wasn't just Flynn. John Kelly, the retired Marine general who is Trump's choice to be the next secretary of homeland security, sounded like someone Barack Obama would have nominated. He told senators that he agreed with the conclusions of the FBI, the CIA and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence that Russia tried to influence November's election by hacking the e-mails of

leading Democrats. Trump had not conceded this until Wednesday at his press conference.

Kelly also said he disagreed with the idea of registering anyone based on their religion or ethnicity. Progressives and civil liberties groups have urged the president-elect not to make good on a campaign promise to instate a "Muslim registry" for screening visa applicants.

Even former Exxon Mobil CEO Rex Tillerson, who hit some road blocks Wednesday in his confirmation hearings because he repeatedly failed to acknowledge his company's lobbying against sanctions, expressed a preference for middle-of-the-road policies for the most part. For example, he said that if other NATO members did not pay their dues, he wouldn't recommend threatening to withdraw U.S. commitments for mutual self-defense. Over the summer, Trump suggested such an approach in an interview with the New York Times.

On Russia, Tillerson at times lost his footing. That's important because Exxon forged energy exploration deals with Russia during Tillerson's tenure. In a bruising exchange with Senator Marco Rubio, Tillerson declined to call Vladimir Putin a war criminal. It should be said that the Obama administration does not refer to Putin this way either -- though Secretary of State John Kerry called

for a war crimes investigation into Russia and Syria after a humanitarian convoy to Aleppo was bombed this fall.

On Tillerson's overall approach to Russia however, he was very much in line with establishment thinking. He said he would not favor acknowledging any Russian claim to Crimea, the territory Putin's government annexed in 2014, unless it was part of a deal that was acceptable to Ukraine's government. He also said that for now he would recommend keeping existing sanctions on Russia in place until the new administration formulated its policy and met with counterparts in Moscow.

Senator Jeff Sessions, Trump's pick for attorney general, has generated so far the most controversy among the next president's nominees. On Wednesday, Democrat Cory Booker became the first sitting senator to testify against a fellow senator at a confirmation hearing, claiming Sessions was hostile to civil rights. But even Sessions is striking moderate notes. He said on Tuesday that if he were confirmed to lead the Justice Department, he would not authorize waterboarding or other kinds of torture of detainees because such techniques were illegal. Trump famously said during the campaign that he would bring back waterboarding and worse, but he softened that stance after the election following his conversations with James Mattis, the retired

Marine general nominated for secretary of defense.

In some ways this is to be expected. During the campaign, Ohio Governor John Kasich said Donald Trump Jr. called one of his aides to offer the vice presidential slot on the ticket. Kasich said he was promised he would be in charge of both domestic and foreign policy. When asked what the president would do, the son answered he would be making America great again. So who will be running the country in Kasich's absence?

Trump chose as his running mate the conservative governor of Indiana, Mike Pence, a man who is less controversial than the Golf Channel. Pence is the chairman of the transition committee, which presents Trump with candidates for appointments to lead his government. So far the cabinet, unlike the next president, reflects a steady conventionality.

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Dana Milbank : Tillerson's foreign policy: Russia first

<https://www.facebook.com/danamilbank>

In New York on Wednesday, President-elect Donald Trump dismissed as "crap" the intelligence reports suggesting Russia has compromising information on him.

Trump knows this because, as he tweeted, Russia called it "A COMPLETE AND TOTAL FABRICATION." And if Vladimir Putin's government says something, it must be true.

But whether or not Russia has such blackmail potential may be beside the point. Trump and his incoming administration are already doing exactly what Putin wants.

As Trump was giving his first post-election news conference in Trump Tower, his nominee to be secretary of state was testifying in Washington — and Rex Tillerson, the former ExxonMobil chief, showed why he earned Putin's Order of Friendship award.

It was early in the nine-hour hearing when Tillerson said he might recommend revoking President Obama's actions punishing Russia for its cyberattack during the American election, which Tillerson acknowledged was probably approved by Putin.

(Reuters)

Sen. Marco Rubio had a tense exchange with secretary of state nominee Rex Tillerson during Tillerson's confirmation hearing on Jan. 11 at the Capitol. Rex Tillerson's full exchange with Sen. Marco Rubio (Photo: Matt McClain/The Washington Post/Reuters)

Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) followed that with a blunt question: "Is Vladimir Putin a war criminal?"

"I would not use that term," the Russian Order of Friendship laureate replied.

Rubio offered to "help" Tillerson reach that conclusion, describing his targeting of schools and markets in Syria that have killed thousands

of civilians, and his earlier attacks on Chechnya, where he killed 300,000 civilians using cluster munitions and bombs that kill by asphyxiation. "You are still not prepared to say that Vladimir Putin and his military ... have conducted war crimes?"

"I would want to have much more information before reaching a conclusion," the nominee replied.

Rubio went on to ask about the broadly held view that Putin has approved the killing of "countless" opponents, dissidents and journalists.

"I do not have sufficient information to make that claim," Tillerson replied.

"Do you think that was coincidental?" Rubio pressed.

Tillerson said "these things happen" to "people who speak up for freedom," but he would need to know more.

Rubio was angry. "None of this is classified, Mr. Tillerson," he said. "These people are dead."

It was a big moment for the man Trump called Lii' Marco. But it's ominous that there aren't more like him and John McCain speaking up now.

Putin has managed to achieve in a few months of cyberwarfare what his Soviet predecessors failed to do in 45 years of the Cold War: creating a pliable American government, willing to overlook human rights abuses in the interest of commerce.

Trump on Wednesday tweeted that the leaked intelligence report was "one last shot at me" and asked: "Are we living in Nazi Germany?" But his liaison with Russia feels more Eastern Bloc than Third Reich. Trump has a slate of pro-Russia advisers talking about a more conciliatory approach to Putin, and their statements have echoed Kremlin statements. Trump acknowledged that "I think it was Russia" that did the election hacking, but rather than regard it as an act of war, he praised the outcome: "It shouldn't be done," he

said, but “look at what was learned from that hacking.”

Tillerson offered a few welcome departures from his would-be boss's positions: He embraced the Magnitsky law punishing human rights abuses and said Russia's annexation of Crimea would not be recognized. He was more supportive of NATO than Trump has been.

But Tillerson didn't mention the election hacking in his opening statement, and, in response to Rubio, he said he would “have concerns” with legislation imposing mandatory sanctions on those who commit cyberattacks on the United States.

The New York Times Affairs

Dave Philipps

In a move that left many veterans groups breathing a sigh of relief, President-elect Donald J. Trump on Wednesday selected the current head of the nation's sprawling veterans health care system, Dr. David J. Shulkin, an appointee of President Obama's, to become secretary of veterans affairs.

If confirmed, he will be the first secretary to lead the department who is not a veteran.

While Mr. Trump's chosen cabinet is largely made up of Washington outsiders, Dr. Shulkin, 57, is a relative insider. He has helped lead several private health care systems, including Beth Israel Medical Center in New York and the University of Pennsylvania Health System. In 2015, he was appointed under secretary for health by Mr. Obama and told to cut wait times in the troubled health care system, which includes 1,700 hospitals and clinics that serve nearly nine million veterans.

In that time, Dr. Shulkin has nearly doubled the amount of health care that veterans receive through private doctors. But he has also rejected calls for broader privatization, saying that it would cost untold billions and undermine the hospital system — a stance that puts him at odds with Mr. Trump.

While campaigning, the president-elect regularly criticized the department as hopelessly corrupt and incompetent, and said he would allow all veterans to choose to go to private doctors. But the selection of Dr. Shulkin may signal that Mr.

Other responses were equally unnerving. Tillerson told Sen. Robert Menendez (D-N.J.) that he had not yet discussed Russia with Trump, and he asserted that “to my knowledge, Exxon never directly lobbied against sanctions.” Congressional lobbying records show Exxon lobbied on many Russia sanctions bills.

Asked by Sen. Todd Young (R-Ind.) about how he would avoid being undermined as chief diplomat by the president's “quickly drafted, not vetted” tweets on world affairs, Tillerson replied, “I have his cellphone number.”

Trump plans to take a more measured approach.

“The Trump campaign made a big deal of what a sucking chest wound the V.A. was,” said Phillip Carter, an Iraq veteran who studies the records for the Center for a New American Security, a research organization that focuses on the military and veterans. “Then they realized how hard it would be to turn around, and decided they needed to continue with the reforms that are already taking effect.”

Mr. Carter, who advised Hillary Clinton's campaign on veterans issues, called Dr. Shulkin a smart choice, saying he was among a very small group with the expertise to run a large, complicated health care system.

“He knows the V.A. but he is not of the V.A.,” Mr. Carter said. “He comes from the private sector and knows how to blend private and public care.”

Mr. Trump praised Dr. Shulkin on Wednesday, saying in a statement, “I have no doubt Dr. Shulkin will be able to lead the turnaround.”

The pick came after weeks of scrambling by the Trump transition team, which the president-elect said had considered “at least 100” candidates to lead the troubled agency. Names under consideration included former vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin and former Senator Scott Brown of Massachusetts, as well as a few generals and admirals.

Three weeks ago, the team settled on Toby Cosgrove, the chief

“We'll hope for the best there — unless you have anything else to add,” Young said. Tillerson didn't.

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The nominee didn't rule out the creation of a registry of Muslims. He declined to say that China is one of the world's worst human rights violators. He wouldn't criticize drug raids in the Philippines that have killed 6,200. And he said he couldn't make a “true determination” whether Saudi Arabia violates human rights.

It was grim to see an incoming American secretary of state avert his gaze from human rights abuses in Russia and across the globe. Rubio said it “demoralizes” billions of people. “That cannot be who we are in the 21st century,” Rubio told Tillerson.

But apparently it already is.

Twitter: @Milbank

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executive of the Cleveland Clinic and a former Air Force surgeon, but he turned down the offer, according to a person close to the transition team who was not authorized to speak publicly.

That left the team divided. Some favored one of the few remaining candidates, Pete Hegseth, an Iraq veteran and Fox News commentator. But others saw him as too extreme because for years he ran Concerned Veterans for America, a small advocacy group financed by the Koch brothers' network that seeks to discredit and privatize the veterans health care system.

Who Trump Wants in His Cabinet

A look at four of President-elect Donald J. Trump's picks for his cabinet, which stands to be the wealthiest in United States history.

By SHANE O'NEILL on January 11, 2017. Photo by Doug Mills/The New York Times. Watch in Times Video »

Many veterans groups vigorously opposed Mr. Hegseth, leaving the transition team with no obvious alternative. So, although Mr. Trump had vilified the department's leadership for months on the campaign trail, he ended up picking one of its top officials.

The news, announced by Mr. Trump at a news conference on Wednesday, left many veterans groups bewildered but pleased.

“This is a very surprising pick, but he is the best out of all the candidates,” Paul Rieckhoff, the

executive director of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, said of Dr. Shulkin. The group's membership would have preferred a veteran, Mr. Rieckhoff said, but added that Dr. Shulkin was well respected. “We know him, we trust him and we can work with him,” he said.

Dr. Shulkin will inherit a thicket of challenges in the aging and overburdened veterans health care system. Its hospitals often do not pay enough to attract new staff members, even as demand rises. Waits for appointments have not fallen since a scandal over the delays in 2014 prompted Eric Shinseki to resign as secretary.

The department's computerized records system is obsolete and unable to communicate with outside doctors. And though its buildings are on average more than 50 years old, closing underused centers is often politically impossible.

“The system is changing for the better, but the transformation could take many years, and it will be difficult,” said Nancy Schlichting, who retired recently as chief executive of the Henry Ford Health System and was chairwoman of a commission that studied overhauling the system.

“Someone new coming in could take a year just to understand the issues,” she said. “Someone like David Shulkin really provides continuity that can get reforms moving forward.”

Kellyanne Conway, Who Managed Trump to Win, Will Speak at Anti-Abortion March

Sheryl Gay Stolberg

Kellyanne Conway on Monday at Trump Tower in New York. She could soon become the first sitting White House official to address the annual Washington anti-abortion march in person. Kevin Hagen for The New York Times

WASHINGTON — In a sign of abortion opponents' newfound clout in the capital, Kellyanne Conway, the Republican strategist who led Donald J. Trump to victory and will serve as his White House counselor, will speak at a major anti-abortion march here the week after his inaugural.

Ms. Conway, 49, made history in November as the first woman to manage a successful presidential campaign. She has long been an outspoken foe of abortion, and she could become the first sitting White House official to address the annual march in person, though both Mr. Trump and Vice President-elect Mike Pence have been invited.

"It's an incredible gesture for pro-life Americans," said Marilyn Musgrave, a Republican former congresswoman from Colorado, now the top lobbyist for Susan B. Anthony List, an anti-abortion group here. Kristan Hawkins, president of Students for Life of America, said of Ms. Conway: "She's one of us."

This will be the 44th year of the march, which organizers say is

typically attended by tens of thousands of anti-abortion activists. The annual event, often held on Jan. 22 but pushed back to Jan. 27 this year because of the inaugural, marks the anniversary of Roe v. Wade, the 1973 Supreme Court decision establishing a national right to abortion.

Neither Ms. Conway nor Trump transition officials responded to requests for comment on Wednesday. But Jeanne Mancini, the March for Life president, hinted in an interview Wednesday that Mr. Trump or Mr. Pence, or both, might attend.

"Stay tuned," she said.

No president or vice president has attended the march, though Ronald Reagan sent a video in 1988, and George W. Bush addressed marchers from the East Room of the White House in 2008.

Quick-witted, confident and comfortable on television, Ms. Conway, a mother of four, was a powerful force in driving women to vote for Mr. Trump; in one election surprise, 53 percent of white women did, according to exit polls. As the highest-ranking woman in the new administration, she holds powerful appeal for Republicans in general, and women especially.

"I don't think it can be underestimated how significant her presence on the Trump campaign

was in terms of motivating and mobilizing the pro-life vote," said Charmaine Yoest, a longtime anti-abortion advocate here, in an interview.

Abortion foes are looking to make big policy gains in Washington under Mr. Trump, who as a candidate signed a letter agreeing to four of the movement's central demands, including appointing conservative Supreme Court justices and enacting a permanent ban on taxpayer-financed abortions. Already, states like Ohio are rolling back abortion rights.

Ilyse Hogue, the president of Nara Pro-Choice America, said in a recent interview that abortion rights advocates see themselves "standing on the edge of a very dark time." Ms. Musgrave happily agreed; she said she spent Wednesday on Capitol Hill, at a closed-door conference with Republican leaders who are planning strategy, including stripping funding from Planned Parenthood.

"It's a great time to be pro-life," Ms. Musgrave said.

Ms. Conway will not be the only speaker. Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan, archbishop of New York, is also scheduled to attend, as is Benjamin Watson, a tight end for the Baltimore Ravens, Karyme Lozano, a Mexican TV star and Abby Johnson, a former clinic

director at Planned Parenthood who later became an anti-abortion activist.

But, short of Mr. Trump or Mr. Pence, Ms. Conway is the march's biggest "get." She is a well-known figure here in Washington who tends to arouse the ire of liberal women who consider themselves feminists — and has been caricatured on "Saturday Night Live" — which is one reason anti-abortion women like Ms. Yoest find her both sympathetic and effective.

During the 2012 presidential primary season, while advising Newt Gingrich, the former House speaker then running for the Republican nomination, she ripped into Mitt Romney, who eventually became the party's nominee, for waffling on the issue, saying in an interview that he did not "seem comfortable in his own skin."

At the time, Mr. Romney, the former governor of Massachusetts, was promising a "pro-life presidency." But in 1994, while running for Senate, he said he thought abortion should be "safe and legal," and in 2002, as a candidate for governor, he had sought the backing of abortion rights advocates. Ms. Conway wasted little time in calling him out on the inconsistencies.

"The emperor has no policy clothes," she warned, "and it's costing him on this issue."

Charles Blow : Ode to Obama

Charles M. Blow

The dark clouds of the coming administration rolled in this week with a fury, producing a flood of strange and worrisome news.

There was the utterly terrifying confirmation hearing of Jeff Sessions as our next attorney general, at which he signaled in no uncertain terms his hostility to the protective posture that the Justice Department has taken to safeguard vulnerable populations over the last eight years.

There was the long-awaited news conference conducted by the president-elect that, predictably, turned into a circus of boasting, hubris, hostility, distraction and deflection.

And then there was the release of the unsubstantiated intelligence report, with its nausea-inducing

claims, which I don't know what to do with.

But there was a calm in the midst of the storm, a rock of familiarity and stability and strength: On Tuesday night, President Obama delivered his farewell address in his adopted hometown, Chicago, as a forlorn crowd looked on, realizing the magnitude of the moment, realizing the profundity of its loss.

As the old saying goes: You don't know what you've got till it's gone.

Whether you have approved of the Obama presidency as a matter of policy or not, it is impossible to argue that Obama was not a man of principle. Whether you agree with individual decisions or the content of his rhetoric, it is impossible to argue that he did not conduct himself with dignity and respect and that he did not lead the country with those values as a guiding light.

I have not always agreed with the president's positions or tactics, and this feels normal to me. Freethinking people are bound to disagree occasionally, even if a vast majority of their values align.

I was particularly frustrated with what I believed was his misreading and underestimation of the intensity of the opposition he faced, and his approach of being a gentleman soldier in a guerrilla war. I was harsh in my critique; some would say too harsh. In 2009, I wrote: "The president wears outrage like another man's suit. It doesn't quite fit." In 2011, I called him "a robotic Sustainer-in-Chief."

But none of those differences in opinions about strategy injured in any way my profound respect for the characteristics of the man we came to take for granted: bracingly smart, exceptionally well educated, literate in the grand tradition of the great men of letters. He was

scholarly, erudite, well read and an adroit writer.

And he was an orator for the ages. We got so used to elegant, sometimes masterly speechifying, that I will admit I sometimes tuned it out. We had an abundance of riches in that regard.

But listening to the president's farewell address, I was hit with the force of a brawler that the decency and dignity, the solemnity and splendor, the loftiness and literacy that Obama brought to the office was extraordinary and anomalous, the kind of thing that each generation may only hope to have in a president.

In a way, it was the small things, the way he made reference to Atticus Finch from "To Kill a Mockingbird" in his discussion of race relations in this country. It was the ease of confidence that comes from having

read the book and not just the speechwriter's script.

That made me think of the two presidents who will bracket Obama: George W. Bush, who Karl Rove claims was a voracious reader, but whose articulation and disposition betrayed a man struggling for intellectual adequacy, and Donald Trump, a man who comes across as possessing more anger than acumen and whose ghostwriter said of him: "I seriously doubt that Trump has ever read a book straight

through in his adult life."

Even more impressive is Obama's skill for raising and parsing delicate issues like race, so that all of the people involved feel respected and represented, so that all participants in the debate feel that they have been truly heard and seen.

He hasn't always gotten this right. No human being has always gotten everything right. Holding him to that impossible standard hardly seems fair. But he started from a very strong and respectable position and

has grown even more steady and sure from there.

So as the end of his presidency draws close, America is confronted with the reality of what is being lost. It is no wonder that a Quinnipiac University Poll released Tuesday found that "American voters approve 55–39 percent of the job President Barack Obama is doing, his best approval rating in seven years." For comparison, Trump's approval rating as the president-elect is only 37 percent.

Obama wasn't perfect, but neither is anyone — you or I — and neither was any other president. But Obama is a good man and a good president. Some would argue that he was great on both counts.

We will remember that — and miss it — when Trump's whirlwind of scandal, conflict, crudeness, boorishness and vindictiveness barrels into Washington.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Richard Benedetto : How Can We Miss a President Who Won't Go Away?

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Why did President Obama deliver his farewell address in Chicago? Maybe because he has no plans to leave Washington. He'll stick around at least until his younger daughter, 15-year-old Sasha, finishes high school in 2½ years. He's leasing an 8,200-square-foot, eight-bedroom gray stone mansion in the posh Kalorama neighborhood, about 2 miles from the White House.

Most former presidents return to where they came from and fade into the background, re-emerging in the capital mostly for ceremonial occasions. If they've served two full terms, the norm is to express relief, at least publicly, at the lifting of the office's great burdens after eight long years.

George Washington put it this way in his 1796 Farewell Address: "Not unconscious in the outset of the inferiority of my qualifications . . . every day the increasing weight of years admonishes me more and more that the shade of retirement is as necessary to me as it will be welcome."

Mr. Obama is different. If the Constitution allowed it, he most certainly would have sought a third term. In a year-end interview with his former aide David Axelrod, the president said he thought he would have beaten Donald Trump. At the top of his Tuesday farewell speech,

the audience chanted "Four more years! Four more years!" His response: "I can't do that"—not *eight is enough*. Almost an hour later, near the end of his soliloquy, Mr. Obama declared: "I won't stop. In fact, I will be right there with you, as a citizen, for all my remaining days."

OPINION: President Obama's legacy

If Mr. Obama is not at peace, his worries are well-founded. The achievement he considers most important, ObamaCare, is likely to be dismantled by a Republican-led Congress that never voted for it and has no stake in it, with the consent of a new president who has already signaled he'll make some changes right away through executive action.

Mr. Obama also fears his aggressive climate-change policies are in danger. His education reforms, trade and defense policies, nuclear pact with Iran, and management of wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria—or lack thereof—are all about to face severe scrutiny and serious revision.

So while the explanation for his staying in Washington is Sasha's schooling, the real reason is probably to fight for the preservation of his legacy. And there is no more effective way of doing so than to remain on the battlefield and position himself not only as the de facto head of the Democratic Party,

but also the main media voice of opposition to the policies of Mr. Trump.

His presence in Washington will invite news reporters to seek his commentary and criticism of every move Mr. Trump makes. True, he told Mr. Axelrod he agreed with President Washington "that at a certain point, you make room for new voices and fresh legs."

But he added a huge qualification: "Now, that doesn't mean that if a year from now or a year and a half from now or two years from now, there is an issue of such moment, such import, that isn't just a debate about a particular tax bill or a particular policy, but goes to some foundational issues about our democracy that I might not weigh in."

It's a safe bet that many of the challenges the Trump administration presents to the Obama legacy will come under Mr. Obama's heading of "foundational issues of our democracy." His presence in Washington, not some faraway place like Chicago, will make it difficult to remain above the fray even if he wanted to. As his party's most admired and most skilled politician, he will receive calls to join the battle early and often.

One must go back nearly a century, to Woodrow Wilson, to find another president who stayed in Washington after leaving office. But Wilson was too ill to become a political force.

In recent years, Dwight Eisenhower, a career Army officer, retired to his farm in Gettysburg, Pa. Ronald Reagan went back to California, and George W. Bush returned to Texas. Even defeated one-termers didn't stay around: Jimmy Carter returned to Plains, Ga., and George H.W. Bush to Houston and Kennebunkport, Maine. Richard Nixon fled to San Clemente, Calif., after resigning in 1974. Lyndon Johnson took to his ranch on Texas' Pedernales River. Harry Truman went home to Missouri.

Bill Clinton, of course, was an exception because his wife entered politics and had presidential aspirations of her own. But even as Hillary Clinton served in Washington, Mr. Clinton spent, and continues to spend, most of his time in the New York area, where he maintains his postpresidential office and oversees his family's charitable foundation.

Every former president probably believes in his heart that he can do the job better than the guy in there now. But living in Washington, Mr. Obama is likely to think those thoughts more often than his distant counterparts have. That's why it is unlikely he will stay silent for long once he departs the White House on next week.

—Mr. Benedetto, a retired USA Today White House correspondent, teaches politics and journalism at American and George Mason universities.