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FRANCE – EUROPE

Emmanuel Macron Steps Into France's Political Void (online)

**The
New York
Times**

Adam Nossiter

But perhaps the only thing more improbable for France than

electing Ms. Le Pen would be to elect Mr. Macron.

Despite Ms. Le Pen's best efforts to remake her party, the National Front has traditionally been too toxic for a majority of French to embrace. So even though she currently leads in the polls, hardly anyone expects her to make it through the second round of the country's two-stage voting this spring to become president.

Yet Mr. Macron has never been elected to anything. He served two largely unsuccessful years directing France's vast but sluggish economy, with scant accomplishment in his wake. He is not a member of either major party, or of any party, and is disliked by many of the Socialists in whose government he served. He claims to transcend the parties.

While he has pushed a message that includes doses from left, right and center — maintain France's social protections, keep the country in the European Union and lighten the burden on business — it is a strategy that has also made him the candidate offering something just about everyone can hate.

Or, perhaps more damning in France, it has risked making him into a mannequin candidate who stands for nothing.

"Emmanuel Macron doesn't want to define himself, and it's becoming a problem," Jean-Christophe Cambadélis, a Socialist heavyweight and the party's secretary, said recently. "Meanwhile, it's all a little bit hollow."

When Mr. Macron started his campaign, snickers about his new

movement's name — "En Marche," or, "On Our Way" — all but drowned out whatever message the young minister was trying to project. "On our way — to what?" the skeptics asked.

That questions remains largely unanswered even as he now gains traction.

A small stream of Socialist members of Parliament have signed on, despite threats of excommunication from the party, as well as some business and political leaders.

Mr. Macron is married to his former high school drama teacher — this fascinates his countrymen — who is 24 years his senior, and he caused a scandal in his provincial hometown, Amiens, by wooing her. He is a former investment banker with Rothschild & Company, low on the list of most admired professions.

Yet Mr. Macron and his wife, Brigitte, have been on the cover of Paris Match four times in the last year. The glossy magazine has published photographs of the minister giving a bottle to his wife's grandchildren.

On Monday, he brought the gay rumors into the open, joking about them in a speech, to the surprise of French media: "It's disagreeable for Brigitte," Mr. Macron said. "She's asking how I pull this off, physically. She shares my life from morning to night — and I've never paid her for it," he added, slyly evoking the nepotism scandal engulfing Mr. Fillon for having kept his wife on the public payroll for no detectable work.

Overflow crowds and packed rallies in recent weeks have surprised commentators. In Lyon last weekend 8,000 people packed into the sports stadium to hear him, forcing thousands more out on to

the grounds to watch Mr. Macron on giant screens.

He spoke for nearly two hours, his face turned up in a kind of rapture, frequently addressing the crowd as his friends.

There were many vague promises of hope and unity, and above all, delight in the huge crowd that had come out. "Your presence, this wall of presences around me, this is living proof that we really are here," Mr. Macron said, beaming.

"It's a demonstration of desire," he told the crowd, "the desire to picture a new future," he continued, in a literary language he says was imbibed early during a studious childhood, in his new campaign book — commentators have mocked the grandeur of the title — "Revolution."

In his speech Mr. Macron claimed the mantle of left, right, center, Charles de Gaulle, and other factions, as well as writers like Émile Zola, Charles Péguy and René Char, all under the floating aegis of a "will to assemble" and "reconciliation."

"And the Gaullists," he said, "did they not carry in their genes this will to assemble, this will not to capitulate to any faction, this incompatibility with conservatism, hatred of the other, and of division?"

The crowd erupted in cheers of "Macron, President!"

He spoke of lowering taxes on companies, restraining capitalism, swiped at the "obscurantism" of Trump's America and denounced the National Front for "betraying fraternity because it detests those faces that don't resemble it."

Mostly, it wasn't concise or specific, but the crowd had not come for that.

In contrast to Ms. Le Pen, Mr. Macron has been mocked for being the darling of the "bourgeois bohemians," and for his awkwardness among the working classes. He was egged in a communist suburb last year and admonished a young man to get a job to pay for a suit.

But those who braved the cold in Lyon — doctors, professors, self-described "company heads," civil servants and many young people — appeared seduced by his high-flown rhetoric.

"Liberty, equality, fraternity: I don't know any other candidate who understands it so well," said Pierre-Alexandre Le Guerm, a 35-year-old town planner. "He's got a lot of courage, in a world where ideologies are dividing people. With his candidacy, we can have some hope."

"With him, all the ideas are coming up from the base," said Monique Janin, 78, who was there with her husband, Raymond, 80, who had worked in the chemical industry. "He's just much more dynamic," she said of Mr. Macron. "It's about much more than simply criticizing others."

"He's got clear ideas, and he's not a divider," said Geneviève Kepenekian, 70, a retired doctor. "And he's a realist. His idea is, get the money from different sources."

"He's open. He's new. He's bringing people together. And he goes off the beaten path," said Thomas Buy, 37, who said he had a string of beauty salons in the Lyon area.

"It was pretty general," Mr. Buy conceded. "We'll have to wait a little longer to see. But one senses a real fervor."



Emmanuel Who? French Front-Runner Still to Convince in Provinces

Mark Deen
@MarkJDeen

by and

13 février 2017 à 00:00 UTC-5

- Polls show Macron's vote is less solid than mainstream rivals

- Macron's campaign visits rural France to broaden his base

More stories by Mark Deen

The news that Emmanuel Macron is supposed to be the favorite for the French election has not yet reached the Ardennes.

Macron's technocratic polish doesn't convince quite so readily in the northeastern region of farms and forests as it does in Paris, where everyone from corporate bosses to tech geeks knows him well and many are rooting for a candidate they see as one of their own.

Emmanuel Macron

Photographer: Marlene Awaad/Bloomberg

"Monsieur Macron?" asked Christiane Devie, a 58-year-old pharmacist's assistant in the Ardennes village of Liart, population 547. "I don't know much about him -- I don't know what he wants, I don't know what he does. I do know the other candidates though."

The challenge for the 39-year-old former economy minister is to find enough votes in places like Liart to bolster his support from the professionals in France's major cities as he seeks to complete the leap from presidential adviser to president in less than three years.

Although he's ahead in the polls and favorite with the bookmakers, retaining his lead won't be easy.

The 2017 race has already seen one ex-president drop out, while the incumbent Francois Hollande opted not to run and former Prime Minister Alain Juppe was rated France's most popular politician for over a

year before he was rejected by his own party in November's primary.

Party Machine

What's more, Macron has none of the safety apparatus that accompanies more conventional front-runners. He abandoned Hollande's Socialist government last year to run as an independent, so there's no party machine to shield him from the rough and tumble of the campaign and there's no traditional base of support.

Though about 21 percent of voters are currently planning to back Macron in the first round of balloting, they are less loyal than the supporters of any other major candidate, Ifop polling shows. Only 48 percent say they're sure of their choice, compared with 81 percent for National Front leader Marine Le Pen and 65 percent for the Republican Francois Fillon.

"Macron's support has bubbled up from nothing, it didn't exist four months ago and that is precisely why it's fragile," Ifop's Jerome Fourquet said in an interview. "His rise has been spectacular. But his support is weak."

Fillon himself was an outsider back in November in the run-up to the Republican primary, the third candidate in a two-horse race between Juppe and former President Nicolas Sarkozy. After Republican supporters opted for Fillon's more hardline brand of reform, their nominee led the polls

briefly before becoming embroiled in a financial scandal in late January.

Read more: an explainer on the Fillon affair

While France's 2017 election has been more fluid than most, such dramatic movements aren't unprecedented. In January 1995, Prime Minister Edouard Balladur was the favorite on 30 percent in the polls and Jacques Chirac had barely half that. By May, Chirac was president and Balladur's days in office were behind him.

"A lot can happen before the first round," said Antonio Barroso, a political analyst at Teneo Intelligence in London, wrote in a Feb. 1 note to clients.

Part of Macron's challenge is to convince ordinary voters that he can relate to their concerns. Traveling to visit a farming community in the Loire Valley on Feb. 10, he tweeted "en route to discover the project farms of the future."

Holding a Pig

While Macron has the support of 26 percent of executives, professionals, and middle managers, only 9 percent of workers back him, Ifop says. Among people with only secondary education, just 15 percent choose Macron but 29 percent of those with more than two years of university education do.

"I wonder if he's really someone who can be a president," Devie said on a freezing February afternoon as she packaged up a prescription in Liart,

where average incomes are almost 20 percent below the national average and unemployment is more than 3 percentage points higher.

Macron holds a piglet for a photograph on Jan. 17.

Photographer: Fred Tanneau/AFP via Getty Images

Still, Macron is putting in the effort and making some progress. In January he spent two days in Brittany -- visiting farms and fisherman and even being photographed holding a pig. More than 2,000 people turned up to hear him speak in Quimper. Another thousand gathered to hear him in Nevers, a small city in central France.

When he spoke in the wealthy southern city of Lyon on Feb. 4, Louisa, a 72-year-old retiree, traveled from the nearby village of Rillieux-la-Pape to listen. She said she'd always voted for the Socialists in the past but she was swayed by Macron's progressive case for renewing France.

"I haven't decided yet," she said. "But this time he could be the one."

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French presidential candidate to U.S. scientists afraid of Trump: 'Come to France'

<https://www.facebook.com/sarah.ka.plan.31>

Emmanuel Macron, France's liberal former economy minister and a leading candidate for president, has a message for U.S. climate researchers who are worried about the fate of their research under President Trump: "Please, come to France, you are welcome."

In a video posted on Twitter and Facebook on Thursday, Macron contrasted his commitment to fighting global warming with the U.S. president's skepticism. Trump has said that "nobody really knows" whether climate change is real, and last month he met with William

Happer, a Princeton physicist who argues that climate change may be good for the world. The new administration and GOP-led Congress have also proposed policies perceived as attempts to stifle government scientists.

"I do know how your new president now has decided to jeopardize your budget, your initiatives, as he is extremely skeptical of climate change," Macron said. "I have no doubt about climate change, and how committed we have to be regarding this issue."

Macron labeled his tweet with the hashtag #ScienceMarch — presumably to get the attention of the more than 800,000 people who say they plan to attend a rally in Washington or satellite marches in April to advocate for science.

The same hashtag was appended to a video from a campaign rally Saturday, when Macron told "researchers, academics and companies in the United States fighting obscurantism and who are afraid today ... you now have a new homeland: France." The declaration was met with a long round of cheers, applause and waving of French and European Union flags.

Macron may get an opportunity to make good on his promise. A recent poll placed him second among the crowded field of presidential candidates, according to Reuters. If he does make it to the second round of voting, a two-way runoff scheduled for May 7, he would beat far-right candidate Marine Le Pen

with 66 percent of the vote, the poll found.

Macron is the most progressive of the front-runners in the presidential race. A cabinet member for former Socialist prime minister Manuel Valls, he left the government last year to start his own party, En Marche! The party's platform is strongly pro-European and includes a commitment to developing renewable energy.

But it might take more than that to entice American scientists to leave their labs in the United States. As Science magazine pointed out, French spending on research is less than that in the United States, and French researchers frequently take to the streets to protest budget cuts and bureaucratic obstacles.



Bank of France Warns Voters on Cost of Euro Exit, Rising Spread

- French-German bond spread is at highest level since 2012
- Villeroy de Galhau sees higher borrowing costs outside euro

Bank of France Governor Francois Villeroy de Galhau cautioned French voters about the costs of withdrawing from the euro, noting

that local interest rates are already rising on concerns about this year's presidential election.

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National Front leader Marine Le Pen, who wants to take France out of the single European currency, is on track to place first in the initial round of voting in France's 2017 election, though she is unlikely to win the run-off and attain office, polls show. Even so, with the National Front closer than ever to power, the premium the French government pays to borrow over Germany has increased to its highest level in more than four years.

"The recent increase in French rates -- which I believe is temporary -- corresponds to a certain worry about the exit from the euro," Villeroy de Galhau said Monday on France Inter radio.

Le Pen has the support of about 26 percent of the electorate for the first round of voting in April, compared with 20.5 percent for independent Emmanuel Macron and 17.5 percent for Republican Francois Fillon, according to the latest Ifop daily rolling poll. Both Macron and Fillon would defeat Le Pen in the second round vote, all polls show.

The National Front candidate has been hammering home her

message on euro exit. Speaking Sunday she said that the single currency was a political instrument that limits French sovereignty.

"I can't implement my promises of intelligent protectionism and industrial policy with the single currency," Le Pen said. "It's a brake on the economy, it's an obstacle to the recovery. The euro isn't a currency, it's a political tool."

Villeroy, by contrast, estimates that leaving the euro would increase the cost of debt service for the French government by about 30 billion euros (\$32 billion) a year.

"That might seem a bit abstract to listeners, but 30 billion euros, to be

very concrete, is equivalent to France's annual defense budget," he said.

France would also have a harder time defending itself on the global economic stage, he added.

The euro "is an arm in global competition in the uncertain world we live in," he said. "If we were alone, we would be unequipped to face financial market speculation."



There Are Risks Under Trump But Economy Is Safe, French PE Says

- French private-equity firm Eurazeo rolls out U.S. expansion
- Eurazeo seeks deals in \$200 million-\$500 million sweet spot

There's political, social and geopolitical uncertainty in the U.S. under President Donald Trump, but the economy is a safe bet.

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That's

Eurazeo SA's

baseline analysis as the French private-equity firm looks across the Atlantic for growth and deals in the \$200 million to \$500 million range. The expansion strategy, initiated 15 months ago, is more relevant

than ever in the wake of Trump's election and the widening gap between U.S. and European economies, top executives Patrick Sayer and Virginie Morgon said in a joint interview in Paris.

Virginie Morgon

Source: Eurazeo SA

"We see uncertainty in the U.S. on politics, geopolitics, social issues, but not economic," Deputy Chief Executive Officer Morgon said. "Given the accelerated breakup of the European Union, the uncertainty around the French election, and the acceleration of macroeconomic growth in the U.S., we're even more convinced with our decision to invest there."

U.S. gross domestic product is estimated to grow 2.3 percent in 2017 and 2.5 percent the following year, an acceleration from 1.6% last year, according to forecasts by the International Monetary Fund. That's well above the forecast for France of 1.3 percent for 2017 and Germany's

1.5 percent. Financial markets have factored that data in, with the S&P 500 Index closing last week at an all-time high.

"Markets are betting that tax cuts should help companies in the U.S., as well as betting on infrastructure investments," CEO Sayer said at the company's headquarters in the French capital. There's no reason to think investors have lost faith in Trump's ability to make good on promises of boosting the economy, he said.

Expensive Assets

The business world more broadly has celebrated the potential benefits of a Trump-driven economic boom in the U.S., though his political moves including a ban on some migrants has drawn criticism, especially from the Silicon Valley.

Eurazeo, which had a net asset value of about 4.8 billion euros at Sept. 30, aims to balance out its portfolio between Europe and the U.S. in the long run. The firm is

betting on its international expertise to differentiate from local players and advise the companies it invests in on global expansion.

Morgon moved to New York in recent months to lead a 7-person team and screen potential targets locally, with a focus on the consumer and business services sectors. They won't rush into anything though, especially as assets are expensive in the current context, Sayer said.

"I hope there will be the opportunity to make one or two deals but we have no time pressure. The only pressure we have is to make good investments," Sayer said. If that doesn't happen right away, "in case of anxiety on the markets, holding cash wouldn't be a bad thing at all."

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French far-right candidate zeroes in on security, migration

Far-right presidential candidate Marine Le Pen is zeroing in on two of her top priorities, security and immigration, in a visit to southeastern France.

Le Pen paid homage to the 86 victims of an attack last year in Nice, with a visit Monday to the city's famed seaside promenade where revelers were mowed down by a truck while celebrating Bastille Day.

Le Pen was then heading to the border post in Menton, where migrants often try to enter France from Italy.

She wants France to better control its borders to fight illegal arrivals, quitting the border-free Schengen

zone as well as the European Union.

Polls suggest Le Pen will place among the top two in France's April 23 first-round election, but will struggle to win the May 7 runoff.



Editorial : The Rot in French Politics (online)

The Editorial Board

Emmanuel Macron at a meeting in Lyon, France, this month. An ardent supporter of the European Union, he quit the Socialist Party last year to launch his own party. Jean-Philippe Ksiazek/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

A little over two weeks ago, it looked like François Fillon, the nominee of the conservative Les Républicains party, was set to win the French presidency. Then, revelations late last month in the satirical weekly Le Canard Enchaîné that Mr. Fillon's wife and children were on the public payroll, receiving payments totaling nearly \$1 million, sent his poll ratings plunging.

Mr. Fillon says he has "nothing to hide." It's not illegal in France for members of Parliament to hire their spouses or children, assuming those family members do actual work, something that is still not clear in Mr. Fillon's case.

The rot in French politics runs deep. On Tuesday, a French judge ordered former President Nicolas Sarkozy to stand trial on charges of

illegally financing his failed 2012 political campaign. Meanwhile, Marine Le Pen, the leader of the National Front party who is currently leading in the polls for the first round of France's two-round presidential election in April, is also facing a slew of corruption charges. Last October, French judges ruled the National Front party and its treasurer had to stand trial for a fraudulent

enrichment scheme using public funds. Ms. Le Pen and her father, the party's founder, Jean-Marie Le Pen, are under investigation for undervaluing family-owned properties in public declarations of their assets. And Ms. Le Pen is defiantly refusing to pay back nearly 300,000 euros to the European Parliament that an investigation

found were illegally used to pay her party staff members.

All of this has given a boost to two fresh political faces: Benoit Hamon, a Socialist Party candidate running on a strong environmental platform and a proposal to pay the French a universal minimum income; and Emmanuel Macron, an ardent

supporter of the European Union who quit the Socialist Party last year to launch his own party. Mr. Macron is now polling just behind Ms. Le Pen, and is projected to defeat her should they face off in the final May 7 vote.

French voters are sick of the self-serving behavior of the political

class, as Mr. Fillon's crippled poll numbers make clear. Ms. Le Pen wants to upend the establishment order, but on this score, she and her party are playing by the same corrupt rule book.

Boston Globe : Protests in France after police deny raping black man

Associated Press February 13, 2017

PARIS — A demonstration by hundreds of people protesting the alleged rape of a young black man by police degenerated into violence in a Paris suburb, with small groups setting vehicles on fire and throwing projectiles at officers.

Officers responded with tear gas after the violence broke out Saturday night.

Advertisement

The demonstration began peacefully near the courthouse in the northeast Paris suburb of Bobigny. Protesters called for justice for the 22-year-old man, who was arrested Feb. 2 in Aulnay-Sous-Bois during an ID check by four police officers.

The young man — who is still hospitalized — says he was sodomized with a police baton. The situation has sparked a week of nightly unrest in several small towns with minority populations.

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One officer was charged with aggravated rape and three others with aggravated assault. All deny the allegations.

An RTL radio van was among the vehicles set ablaze in the unrest.

Police claimed that the violation of the man with a baton was an accident.

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After the violence, at least 37 people were jailed, and a girl had to be

rescued from a burning car. Police told AFP that "several hundred" people rampaged through the streets of Bobigny, "attacking cars, shops, and public property."

"The whole area where the demonstration started is now soaking in tear gas," Al Jazeera reported from the city.

The victim, identified as Théo, was in a hospital during the chaos, AFP reported, after an operation for severe injuries. He was covered in blood when he arrived at an emergency room Feb. 2.

Doctors discovered that his primary injury had been caused by a police truncheon used to sodomize the suspect.

While noting that the violent encounter was "very serious," the investigation by France's national police determined that the incident was "not a rape" because of the "unintentional character" of the penetration, according to the Huffington Post's French edition.

Despite those conclusions, Interior Minister Bruno Le Roux announced Sunday that the charges were being brought against the officers, who have been suspended from he force.

On Tuesday, Théo was visited by President François Hollande, who tweeted that "Théo reacted with dignity and responsibility."

Associated Press

Breitbart : PICS: Rioting Continues in France Over Alleged Police Rape

BOBIGNY (FRANCE) (AFP) – Police fired tear gas after clashes erupted in the suburbs of Paris as demonstrators protested over the assault of a young black man who was allegedly anally raped with a truncheon while being arrested.

Surrounded by a heavy police contingent, about 2,000 protesters, some carrying placards saying "Police rape" and "Police kill innocent people," gathered in Bobigny, northeast of the French capital, to demand "Justice for Theo".

Theo, a 22-year-old black youth worker, required surgery after his arrest on February 2 in the "3,000" estate in the gritty suburb of Aulnay-sous-Bois, when he claims a police officer sodomized him with a baton.

Projectiles were thrown at police on a footbridge with several vehicles torched and windows smashed on the sidelines of the protest, police said.

Protestors walk past a burning car after a demonstration in Bobigny outside Paris, Saturday, Feb. 11, 2017. A peaceful demonstration protesting the alleged rape of a black youth by police has degenerated, with small groups setting at least one vehicle afire and

throwing projectiles at police. (AP Photo/Aurelien Morissard)

French police officers face protestors as a car burns in Bobigny, outside Paris, Saturday, Feb. 11, 2017. A peaceful demonstration protesting the alleged rape of a black youth by police has degenerated, with small groups setting at least one vehicle afire and throwing projectiles at police. (AP Photo/Aurelien Morissard)

"Several hundred violent and very mobile individuals" committed various "acts of violence and damage," said the Paris police prefecture.

In a statement it listed projectiles thrown against public buildings, four vehicles torched, two shops and a bus station damaged and several bins burned.

"The police had to intervene to rescue a young child in a burning vehicle," the police said, adding however that no injuries had been reported so far during the protest.

Autoplay: On | Off

Two media vehicles were also attacked, with no casualties reported.

The demonstration ended in the evening after police fired tear gas.

A car burns after a demonstration in Bobigny outside Paris, Saturday, Feb. 11, 2017. A peaceful demonstration protesting the alleged rape of a black youth by police has degenerated, with small groups setting at least one vehicle afire and throwing projectiles at police. (AP Photo/Aurelien Morissard)

A fire set up by protestors is reflected in a broken window after a demonstration in Bobigny outside Paris, Saturday, Feb. 11, 2017. A peaceful demonstration protesting the alleged rape of a black youth by police has degenerated, with small groups setting at least one vehicle afire and throwing projectiles at police. (AP Photo/Aurelien Morissard)

Theo, who is still in hospital, and his family have appealed for calm after several days of protests over the alleged assault.

Rape charges have been filed against the officer and all four police involved in Theo's stop-and-search have been suspended pending an investigation.

With a presidential election this year, the incident has become highly politicised. It has also underscored the breakdown in trust between young people and the authorities in French suburbs.

Demonstrators gather during a protest in Bobigny outside Paris, Saturday, Feb. 11, 2017. A peaceful demonstration protesting the alleged rape of a black youth by police has degenerated, with small groups setting at least one vehicle afire and throwing projectiles at police. (AP Photo/Aurelien Morissard)

Protestors watch a car burning after a demonstration in Bobigny outside Paris, Saturday, Feb. 11, 2017. A peaceful demonstration protesting the alleged rape of a black youth by police has degenerated, with small groups setting at least one vehicle afire and throwing projectiles at police. (AP Photo/Aurelien Morissard)

"All the time, we get checks, we get assaulted, they talk trash to us, we say, 'Shut up'... We are given little slaps," a young man of about 20 named Kenzo told AFP.

"I didn't think it still exists," said 18-year-old Anissa. "How can they say it's an accident?"

Rallies took place in other French cities, including Rouen where some 200 people demonstrated, while around 250 gathered in Toulouse and more than 300 in Nantes.

Forbes: Michelin Guide 2017: New Stars For France's Restaurants Announced

Rooksana Hossenally ,

Contributor

I cover lifestyle subjects from travel to culture in France and beyond

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Last Thursday, the prestigious Michelin Guide announced the much awaited news of this year's gained and lost stars for France's restaurants.

To sum up, the guide counts 616 Michelin starred restaurants in total, 16 more than last year. Seventy establishments were awarded new stars while a surprising 52 lost one or more stars. The France Michelin Guide 2016 had a total of 26 restaurants in the three-star category, including new Parisian entrants Alain Ducasse at the Plaza Athénée Hotel and Le Cinq helmed by Christian Lesquer at the Four Seasons George V Hotel.

Le 1947 restaurant at the Cheval Blanc Hotel in Courchevel ski resort, France

1 new 3-star restaurant

This year, Yannick Alléno, behind several restaurants including his three-star Parisian flagship at Pavillon Ledoyen, was the only chef to be awarded a third star, which he won for his restaurant 1947 at the Cheval Blanc Hotel in Courchevel

ski resort, bringing the total of three-star restaurants to 27.

12 new 2-star restaurants

In Paris, the wonderful Le Clarence helmed by chef Christophe Pelé was rewarded with a second star, as well as Nicolas Sale's La Table de l'Espadon at the recently revamped and reopened Ritz Hotel, and Kei Kobayashi's Kei restaurant.



Bershidsky : Why Europe Is Warning of Pax Americana's End

Leonid Bershidsky

Last year, the global security establishment was mildly worried about a growing U.S. disengagement overseas. This year, the worry has given way to a realization that the "liberal world order" -- another name for Pax Americana -- may be finished, and that new security arrangements are needed.

That's the conclusion that can be drawn from this year's edition of the Munich Security Report, an agenda-setting document put out annually by the organizers of the Munich Security Conference, the world's most prestigious geopolitical gathering. The conference will open on February 17, and dignitaries such as German Chancellor Angela Merkel and U.S. Vice President Mike Pence are expected to attend. Perhaps for the first time since the Soviet Union's demise, the participants will try to map out strategy in a world in which they cannot see more than one or two moves ahead.

In 2016, the Munich Security report noted almost in passing that the absence of the U.S. from discussions about the eastern Ukraine conflict would have been unthinkable before, and that the U.S. didn't appear to be particularly interested in resolving the Syria crisis on its terms, either. In 2017, all bets are off on what the U.S. will ultimately do: Donald Trump and members of his team have made so many conflicting statements on foreign policy (and some of them are quoted in the report, side by side) that nothing is clear except that they intend to keep their cards close to the chest as they "put America first." The report says:

The consequences for the international order could be tremendous: if the U.S. does retreat, vacuums will be filled by other actors. Key institutions will be weakened, spoilers will be emboldened. And some U.S. allies may see no alternative than to start hedging by seeking out new partners. Others will try to convince the new administration that the U.S.-led alliances continue to be a good deal for Washington -- and that there is inherent value in long-term commitments. After all, successful deals are based on trust, which requires some predictability and is often strongest between countries sharing common values -- not between opportunistic leaders. A unilateralist Trump administration may find that it has a different hand than it currently thinks. And once cards are on the table, you cannot pretend you never played them.

U.S. ineffectiveness as a pillar of security, however, doesn't just stem from Trump's unpredictability. There is no way for it to assert itself in some of the most important global crises. The U.S. doesn't just feel compelled to avoid a direct confrontation with Russia, as it has obviously done in Ukraine and Syria -- it also appears to have reached the limit of its influence in the case of North Korea.

"If the U.S. adds sanctions (including ones that hit Chinese banks), presses China to increase its coercive measures against North Korea, or even opts for military steps, a major U.S.-China crisis could be right around the corner," the report points out. In other words, economic sanctions, the weapon that's easiest for the U.S. to wield, can lead to military escalation for which the U.S. has no stomach. The "strategic community," as the

Munich Conference organizers describe the attendees, is apparently beginning to see U.S. might as something of an untenable bluff. It's clearly there, but it can't really be used.

In 2017, the U.S. is no longer the whale on whose back the world rests but a source of uncertainty and tension. Pre-Trump conventional wisdom reserved this role for a different part of the West -- the European Union. While in the U.S. and the U.K., commentators often still persist in this thinking, the Munich report -- written in Germany, after all -- discusses the EU as a potential new superpower. In a security context, that's largely wishful thinking at this point, but the thrust of the report's message is that the growing threats to European security -- particularly Russian expansionism and Islamic terrorism -- are pushing Europe toward more unity, an important trend.

"When, if not now, should Brussels' clout in the world ever be on top of the menu?" the report asks.

Signs of a greater European awareness that reliance on the U.S. for defense is no longer feasible can be detected in growing defense spending -- though the U.S. still outspends the entire EU four to one.

More Self-Reliance

European countries' defense spending, U.S. \$ billion

Source: IHS Jane's Defense Budgets

About a third of Germans and French would like to see their countries spend more on the military. Poland and other eastern European countries are reliably in favor of stepping up defense expenditure.

Money alone, however, won't be enough to move Europe closer to military self-sufficiency. It needs to move toward more military integration, which means streamlining procurement. European armies use too many different weapons systems: seventeen main battle tank families compared with just one for the U.S.; 20 types of fighter planes compared with just six; and 13 kinds of air-to-air missiles compared with three. The mess is hard to fix because rearming is expensive, and European politicians can't allow each country's defense industry to wither.

Military cooperation outside the North Atlantic Treaty Organization framework is also untested and difficult. Without a dominant player such as the U.S., it may always be a contentious business, especially given European nations' long, and not entirely forgotten, history of military confrontation.

For these reasons, Europe's path toward superpower status seems long and thorny today. But the very fact that the organizers of the Munich conference consider it worthy of discussion shows that it's not a pipe dream, either. Europe may have no choice if U.S. dominance in the world continues to erode.

This column does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the editorial board or Bloomberg LP and its owners.

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U.K. Defense Chief, Following Prime Minister, Praises Trump Approach

Ben Kesling

Feb. 12, 2017
3:39 a.m. ET

ERBIL, Iraq—

U.K. Defense Minister Michael Fallon said Saturday that the British-American defense partnership has never been stronger and that President Donald Trump has likely galvanized the two countries' efforts to strengthen the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and to push allies to contribute more to mutual defense.

Mr. Fallon, who is scheduled to speak with U.S. Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis next week, said in an interview that the longstanding defense alliance between the U.S. and U.K. hasn't been affected by turmoil within the U.S. or internationally following Mr. Trump's election.

Mr. Fallon became the most recent U.K. official to offer public support for Mr. Trump's administration, despite widespread concern among Britons over a broad range of domestic and foreign stances.

British Prime Minister Theresa May drew criticism at home after she invited Mr. Trump to visit London, extending the offer during her January visit to Washington.

Mr. Fallon said during a trip to the Iraqi Kurdish capital of Erbil that the U.S. and U.K. agree that NATO partners must do more to contribute to the alliance. Mr. Fallon was due to visit British troops training Iraqi and Kurdish forces.

"The president's remarks have clearly turbocharged that process," Mr. Fallon said of the push for increased defense commitments. "If President Trump has galvanized the alliance, then we're in his debt."

Mr. Fallon said, in particular, the historically strong relationship between the two countries continues to this day.

"The British-American defense partnership is the deepest, strongest defense partnership anywhere in the world," Mr. Fallon said. "It was the British prime minister who was the first foreign leader into the White House. And defense and security

were right at the top of the agenda. Indeed, it was our prime minister who confirmed the United States' 100% commitment to NATO."

When asked if Mr. Trump has caused consternation in the British defense firmament, he said that is in no way the case.

"We've got an American president who has a British mother," Mr. Fallon said. "He's looking at ways to accelerate the campaign against Daesh which is a threat to Britain as it is to Western Europe as it is to the United States, so what would there be to worry about?" Mr. Trump's mother was born in Scotland.

Mr. Fallon pointed out that NATO has already accelerated its role in Iraq, opening up a new training program in the country earlier this month which both Britain and the U.S. support.

The defense minister said that while Britain wouldn't go as far as Mr. Trump, who said NATO is "obsolete," the minister agreed that the alliance needs to bring itself up-to-date.

"There's work to be done to modernize NATO," Mr. Fallon said, adding that its bureaucracy needs to be streamlined and it needs to be more attentive to current threats and, as Mr. Trump said a number of times on the campaign trail, member countries need to increase their funding levels. That means bringing spending up to the required 2% of their gross domestic product, which many NATO member countries fail to do.

"We want more European members of NATO to spend more on their own defense," Mr. Fallon said.

Mr. Fallon pointed out the many reasons NATO members need to boost spending as Mr. Trump and Ms. May have both said.

"Russian aggression, hybrid warfare, Daesh terrorism, instability in the Middle East and indeed in Asia-Pacific: We have to deal with all of this together," he said.

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Corruption Crusader Stirs Romania

Drew Hinshaw

Updated Feb. 13,
2017 4:31 a.m. ET

BUCHAREST, Romania—Not long ago, the prosecutors at Romania's anticorruption office rarely took on a bribery suspect bigger than a schoolteacher or a small-town cop. Often, the criminal gift was a pig, a lamb or a turkey.

These days, the National Anticorruption Directorate is investigating some 2,100 abuse-of-office cases, many against top politicians. Senators, parliamentarians and ministers have had to stand trial, and alleged damages investigated last year totaled €1 billion (\$1.06 billion). Whistleblowers have started walking in daily.

"Things are completely different now," said the directorate's chief prosecutor, Laura Codruta Kövesi, an ex-basketball champion who has become a popular figure for her role in battling corruption.

The resistance Ms. Kövesi has encountered from the government has sparked Romania's biggest protests since the fall of Communism. Demonstrations against corruption have broken out every night since Jan. 31, each met by counter-demonstrations against the directorate.

Hundreds of thousands marched here on Feb. 5. Another 100,000 rallied on Sunday.

The protesters are railing in part against a recent emergency ordinance by the government that would cut maximum prison sentences for corruption from seven years to three—and make it all but impossible for Ms. Kövesi's directorate to have politicians arrested or wiretapped for alleged abuse of office.

The protests have pushed the government to revoke the ordinance while parliament debates it. On Thursday, the justice minister who introduced the measure resigned.

That hasn't calmed the crowds, who are now demanding that more ministers step down.

"This government has no more trust!" said protester Eugene Lupoi, an engineer, marching through snow. "It's over!"

Romania joined the European Union in 2007. That membership opened up this former Communist dictatorship. Millions of young Romanians studied, worked or traveled in Western Europe, and returned home with higher expectations of their government.

To meet those demands, money and oversight from the EU boosted

the authority of anticorruption police. But those measures have collided with an older generation still leery of totalitarian rule.

At the crux of that difference is the anticorruption directorate—and its leader, the 43-year-old Ms. Kövesi, the daughter of a small-town prosecutor.

Ms. Kövesi grew up watching communist bureaucrats stymie her father's investigations: "A boss could tell a prosecutor what solution to order in a case," she said.

Since she took over the directorate, and became the country's first female chief prosecutor in 2013, it has sent 3,000 people to prison. At any given time, many of her prosecutors handle 100 or more cases. Television news trucks park out front to catch which politicians enter the building.

That caseload has made her a celebrity adored and abhorred across a defining demographic divide.

Younger, educated professionals marching in the capital muse on her running for president. "She's like a symbol to us...close to our ideal person," said Adriana Balan, a psychologist. "We've put her on a very high pedestal."

And yet many of those protesters say they can no longer talk about Ms. Kövesi with their parents and family in the countryside without an argument. Each night, a few hundred mostly older, blue-collar protesters have come to the president's house nightly to show opposition to her and her supporters. Many believe she is a tool of globalists trying to weaken Romania and take its oil. It is a view echoed on the country's culturally conservative political news TV.

"The anticorruption campaign is being led by an obscure, occult personage and her name is Kövesi," said 51-year-old protester Mihaela Mincu. "Foreign interests are using her to divide and conquer Romania."

The ruling Social Democratic Party says the anticorruption fight has become too zealous. Many in parliament feel the political drama over graft has eclipsed the business of lifting Romanians out of poverty.

"We have talk shows every day, many hours, talking about anticorruption," said Petre Florin Manole, a parliamentarian with the SDP. "It's the only topic in our society now."

For some, the rise of a powerful investigatory agency unearths memories of communist eavesdropping. Decades of

dictatorship left older Romanians with a defiance toward the state.

"When you live in a totalitarian state, the right thing to do is to cheat on that state," said radio journalist and pop-culture critic Alexandra Olivotto. "An older generation still feels that."

Romania shed communism just as Ms. Kövesi entered law. It began giving prosecutors more independence, more funding and

bigger mandates—a requirement to enter the EU.

By 2010, the anticorruption directorate was taking down senior politicians, often parading them on television. Viewers began emailing, posting, faxing and calling in reports of corruption. "It was a snowball," said directorate spokeswoman Livia Saplacan. "There was this trust, and with this trust, people started to tell us things."

These days, Romanians rate the anticorruption directorate as one of the few government agencies they trust—more so than the church, according to the most recent survey by Bucharest-based pollster Inscop Research.

Some walk-ins visit to report non-corruption crimes. Several teenagers recently came bringing Ms. Kövesi portraits they had painted of her depicted as a

scarecrow, spooking away corruption.

"People's mentality and vigilance has changed," said Ms. Kövesi. "When you see results, your trust in institutions is increased."

Write to Drew Hinshaw at drew.hinshaw@wsj.com

The New York Times

Anger and Mistrust Fuel Unabated Protests in Romania

Kit Gillet

Thousands of people protested outside the main government building in Bucharest, Romania, on Sunday, a week after the government reversed its decision to weaken a corruption law. Daniel Mihailescu/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

BUCHAREST, Romania — Exactly one week after the largest protests in a quarter of a century rocked Romania, an estimated 70,000 demonstrators filled the square outside the main government building in Bucharest on Sunday evening, determined to show those in power that the crisis was far from over.

While significantly less than the half a million who took to the streets across the country the previous Sunday, the Bucharest demonstration was still a potent sign of the resilient unrest in the country and the loss of trust between the new government, only in office since the beginning of January, and a large sector of the population.

Sunday was the 13th night in a row that protesters occupied Piata Victoriei — Victory Square — in Bucharest, after the government passed an emergency ordinance on Jan. 31 that effectively decriminalized some low-level

corruption offenses, including cases of official misconduct in which the financial damage was less than 200,000 lei, or about \$47,000. Protests have also taken place in more than 50 towns and cities across the country.

In the face of the large-scale backlash, the emergency ordinance was repealed a week ago, but that has not stopped protesters from demonstrating their anger.

Many in the square on Sunday continued to call for the resignation of Prime Minister Sorin Grindeanu, as well as the presidents of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, among the highest political offices in the country.

"We don't trust this government. They lied to us. We want this government to resign," said Maria Stoica, 38, an information-technology business analyst standing in the square. For her, it was the 10th night of protesting.

The Romanian government had hoped that it had weathered the worst of the crisis. On Wednesday it easily survived a no-confidence motion brought about by the parliamentary opposition. One day later, the prime minister accepted the resignation of Florin Iordache, the minister of justice and one of the architects of the emergency

ordinance that was the catalyst for the protests.

However, Mr. Iordache's resignation appears to have done little to appease those on the street.

"They promised one thing, but did another," said Vlad Puiu, 41, a retail manager. "We are here to make sure what happened won't happen again."

After several days where it seemed as if the protests may have been waning, with nightly crowds diminishing to a few thousand in the face of falling temperatures, the turnout on Sunday was a strong signal that the government may have miscalculated.

At exactly 9 p.m. local time, tens of thousands of Romanians, using pieces of colored paper and the lights from their cellphones, created a vast Romanian flag across the square. Temperatures hovered around 20 degrees Fahrenheit.

According to Florin Badita, 28, an activist who has helped rally people through a Facebook group he created after a deadly nightclub fire in 2015 — a disaster partly blamed on corruption — the protests are far from over.

"This won't be the last night. We haven't won anything yet. If we don't go out now we'll need to in six

months, when there's the next big thing," he said.

Mr. Badita, who took unpaid leave from his job in the northern city of Cluj to participate in the Bucharest protests, said he also believed the momentum would grow.

"I think the main thing is that now people know that there are a lot of people wanting change," he said. "What we want to do is build this in a sustainable way, and also to train citizens in things like the Freedom of Information Act. We can go out all the time to protest, but we need to do more."

Others also said that they saw the potential for these protests to develop into a more long-term movement.

"The success of these protests, resulting in the withdrawal of the ordinance, has boosted the most active of the protesters in their commitment to a more sustained and permanent kind of organization," said Sergiu Miscoiu, a professor of political science at Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj.

"This involves maybe only a quarter or even a tenth of last Sunday's demonstrators, but it will be enough to put pressure on the government," he said.

The New York Times

Switzerland Votes to Ease Citizenship for Third-Generation Immigrants

Nick Cumming-Bruce

A poster in Zurich opposing the citizenship measure was graffitied over to read "Unchecked incitement? No — Yes to an easier path to citizenship," instead of the original "Unchecked naturalization? No to an easier path to citizenship." Arnd Wiegmann/Reuters

GENEVA — The posters seen in several cities and provinces featured two very similar young women: both born in Switzerland, educated in Swiss schools, now in their 20s and working full time in Swiss jobs. They even share the given name Vanessa.

The point, though, was the crucial way they differ. One Vanessa is a Swiss citizen, while the other is not, and is locked in a lengthy and expensive process to obtain citizenship even though her family put down roots in Switzerland two generations ago.

The posters backed a government-sponsored measure that would ease the path to citizenship for third-generation immigrants like the second Vanessa. And on Sunday, the measure was approved in a nationwide referendum.

The outcome went against the recent tide of right-wing populism and anti-immigrant sentiment in

much of Western Europe. Just over 60 percent of votes were in favor, including majorities in 17 of the country's 23 electoral cantons — a minimum of 12 are required to pass — despite a right-wing campaign that sought to stoke fears of Muslims infiltrating the country.

"We are quite surprised," said Stefan Egli, a manager of Operation Libero, a politically independent group that campaigned in support of the initiative and organized the poster campaign featuring the two Vanessas, among others. Mr. Egli said he had thought the referendum would win the national popular vote, but he worried that more of the rural cantons would oppose the change.

Swiss law typically requires foreigners to be residents of the country for 12 years before applying for citizenship; after that they must undergo a series of tests and interviews to assess their suitability, and are judged by criteria that differ from one canton to another. Unlike the United States and some European countries, Switzerland does not grant automatic citizenship to children born on its soil.

The measure approved on Sunday will not change those basic rules, but will speed up and simplify the approval process, using uniform criteria, for foreigners under 25 whose parents and grandparents have permanent residence status in

Switzerland. "These are people who are at home," Simonetta Sommaruga, the federal justice minister, said in a statement explaining the government's position on third-generation immigrants. "The only difference is they do not have a red (Swiss) passport."

An assessment by Geneva University for the government's department of migration found that just under 25,000 people could benefit from the changes. Most of them are Italian, it found, and nearly 80 percent are of European extraction.

Vanessa Seyffert, the second woman in the poster, will not be one of them; she is already deep in the process of applying the old way. She said she had taken part in the

poster campaign to highlight the inequality facing young people who were brought up attending the same schools and speaking the same language but do not have the same rights. "The crucial thing for me is to be able to vote," Ms. Seyffert said in an interview. "I just want to have a voice."

Noncitizens make up one-quarter of Switzerland's eight million residents, one of the highest proportions in Europe, and the continent's refugee crisis has sharpened fears in the country of a dilution of national culture and character. Changes to the country's restrictive immigration laws, even modest ones like the referendum on Sunday, tend to touch a nerve. Given the climate, proponents said they saw almost no

chance of enacting broader changes, like automatic citizenship for third-generation immigrants, which was defeated in a 2004 referendum.

"We don't see any reason whatsoever to make it easier," said Luzi Stamm, a legislator from the right-wing People's Party, which favors making controls on foreign workers and migrants even tighter. "The movement of people in the world has increased considerably," he said. "You have an increased probability of problem-makers coming here." To reinforce the point, the party mounted a poster campaign of its own, featuring a silhouette of a woman in a burqa and with the slogan "No to uncontrolled naturalization."

Though the People's Party has a long history of provocative posters and slogans playing on popular suspicion of outsiders, the current posters shocked many Swiss, who saw them as racist and irrelevant to the ballot measure.

"It's quite systematic — they are really trying what Trump's campaigns did, to go beyond the facts," said Lukas Goldber, an analyst at Gfs.bern, a political and social research institute, referring to President Trump's election campaign in the United States.

"Some elements were trying to see if it works in the Swiss system," Mr. Goldber said. "It didn't work at all."

The New York Times Angela Merkel, Squeezed by Far Right, Now Faces a Rising Left

Alison Smale

BERLIN — She is considered the indispensable European, yet one of the biggest questions looming over the Continent's crucial elections this year is whether Germany still regards Angela Merkel as indispensable, too.

Seven months before national elections in Germany, the prevailing wisdom has held that Ms. Merkel, now seeking a fourth four-year term as chancellor, is most vulnerable to the rising popularity of the country's far right, just as other populist, far-right parties are gaining in coming elections in the Netherlands and France.

Yet suddenly, Germany's left has unexpectedly resurged, prompting *Der Spiegel* magazine this weekend to pose a question on its cover: "Will She Fall?"

A reliable answer is not in sight. The shocks of 2016 — Britain's vote to leave the European Union and the election of Donald J. Trump as president of the United States — have profoundly shaken Germany, which depends more than any other European nation on Pax Americana and global institutions set up after World War II.

But on Sunday, the rebound of the left — along with the broad German distaste for Mr. Trump that has helped fuel it — was on full display. The center-left Social Democrat Frank-Walter Steinmeier, who has served in Ms. Merkel's coalition government as foreign minister for seven years, won the presidency with 931 votes in the 1,260-member assembly that elects the president to a five-year term.

Despite being a largely ceremonial position, the presidency provides

stature and an important platform for Mr. Steinmeier, a popular and charismatic politician. In his brief acceptance speech, he encouraged Germans to be bold in difficult times.

"If we want to give others courage, then we must have some ourselves," he said on a day when many other speakers evoked the country's dark past and its emergence as a democracy after the Nazis' defeat in World War II.

One marvel of traveling the world, he said, was to realize that Germany has become a model. "Isn't it wonderful that this, our difficult fatherland, is seen as an anchor of hope for many people in the world?" Mr. Steinmeier said.

Before the vote, the conservative head of parliament, Norbert Lammert, gave a surprisingly fiery speech that — without mentioning names — attacked Mr. Trump and President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia for trying to divide or weaken Europe.

"Whoever champions a closed mind instead of openness to the world, whoever literally walls themselves in, bets on protectionism instead of free trade and preaches isolationism instead of states cooperating, and declares 'We first' as a program, should not be surprised if others do the same — with all the fatal side effects for international ties which we know from the 20th century," Mr. Lammert said. That goes, he added, for individual European states "but also for our great partner country across the Atlantic."

Once, it would have been rare for German politicians to lecture other democracies on values, especially the United States, but Germany is now regarded as a critical pillar in upholding the liberal Western order, which is one reason the Sept. 24

national elections are being watched so closely.

It is also why some of Ms. Merkel's fellow conservatives quietly grumbled that she was outfoxed when she agreed to put Mr. Steinmeier forward as the presidential candidate of her grand coalition government, which unites her conservative bloc with the center-left Social Democrats. Even as the presidency stands above party politics, Mr. Steinmeier, 61, a lawyer and lifelong politician, is likely to be a boon for his party.

The rebound of Germany's left was on full display Sunday, when Frank-Walter Steinmeier of the center-left Social Democrats was elected president, a largely ceremonial post that nevertheless provides an important platform. Fabrizio Bensch/Reuters

His election coincided with a Social Democratic surge in polls since the center-left chose Martin Schulz, a former president of the European Parliament, to lead them into battle against Ms. Merkel in the elections.

Mr. Schulz grew up in a village in the Aachen area, becoming mayor of the nearby town of Würselen in 1987, and likes to tell stories from those days to portray himself as an ordinary guy. He first won election to the European Parliament in 1994, going on to become president in 2012. Most unusually for a German politician, he did not finish high school with a certificate, and trained initially as a bookseller.

He outpolled Ms. Merkel in personal popularity, 50 percent to 34 percent, in the Infratest dimap survey this month, albeit with a slightly smaller degree of support than Ms. Merkel's last Social Democratic challenger had at a similar stage of the 2013 race.

Perhaps because he has spent most of his political career in European institutions in Brussels, Mr. Schulz can appear fresh to German voters.

"What he is doing is filling a vacuum which has obviously arisen," said Franz Müntefering, a veteran Social Democratic leader. "He is reaching people through emotions."

In its weekend cover story, *Der Spiegel* described the current period as "the twilight of Merkel" and noted that she had appeared listless of late.

Ms. Merkel's conservative bloc appears somewhat rattled. Her respected finance minister, Wolfgang Schäuble, the longest-sitting member of Germany's parliament, used an interview in *Der Spiegel* this weekend to accuse Mr. Schulz of Trump-style populism.

"When Schulz lets his supporters shout, 'Make Europe great again,' then it is almost word for word Trump," Mr. Schäuble told the newsmagazine.

Sigmar Gabriel, the Social Democrat who has replaced Mr. Steinmeier as foreign minister, swiftly retaliated: "The radical and ill-intentioned mockery" in American politics "should not be swept in to Germany," he said.

Unquestionably, Mr. Trump's election has so deeply altered the geopolitical landscape for Ms. Merkel. She has kept a cool distance, and the two leaders are expected to meet for the first time this spring.

Domestically, Ms. Merkel is contending with a continuing political backlash to her 2015 decision to admit more than one million migrants, many of them Muslim, into the country. The far-right Alternative for Germany party, which started as

a movement against the euro currency, now carries an anti-migrant, anti-Muslim message and has leaders who have sympathy for Mr. Trump's politics.

Tellingly, Frauke Petry and other Alternative for Germany leaders did not applaud with everyone else

during Mr. Lammert's speech when he attacked isolationism or what he termed a "We first" attitude. Under pressure, Ms. Merkel has backpedaled somewhat in recent months, reducing the influx of migrants and taking a tougher line on deportations.

As is often the case, people outside the bubble of national politics sounded considerably less stirred when asked about Ms. Merkel's standing.

Metin Elcivan, 41, who helps run a corner store in western Berlin's Schöneberg district, was certain that

German voters would prove conservative. "I think nothing will change at the elections," he said, "and that we will have a grand coalition again, with Merkel as chancellor."

**The
Washington
Post**

Germany picks anti-Trump president as trans-Atlantic bonds fray

BERLIN —

Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the former German foreign minister who was a vocal critic of Donald Trump during the U.S. campaign, was elected Sunday as the country's 12th postwar president.

The Social Democrat, who served two stints as foreign minister under Chancellor Angela Merkel, emerged as her governing coalition's candidate in November as their parties sought to avoid a political spat over the appointment in an election year. With the support of Merkel's Christian Democratic-led bloc and the Social Democrats in a special assembly on Sunday, Steinmeier was elected in the first round to the mostly ceremonial post.

While Merkel steered clear of sharing her views on Trump before his election as president, her top diplomat

vociferously derided what he saw as a campaign that broke taboos and threatened trans-Atlantic bonds. At one point, Steinmeier called Trump a "hate preacher." As head of state, Steinmeier will be Trump's counterpart, according to protocol, even though the German presidency lacks the political or policymaking power held by the chancellor.

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

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The day after Trump's surprise election victory, Merkel issued a couched warning that offered the new U.S. president German cooperation based on joint values, including democracy, respect for the rule of law and for human dignity "independent of origin, skin color, religion, gender, sexual orientation

or political views." Steinmeier was less diplomatic.

"The result is not what most Germans would have wished," Steinmeier said Nov. 9. "I don't want to sugarcoat anything. Nothing will be easier, many things will become more difficult."

Steinmeier shunned political tension or any mention of Trump in an eight-minute speech after his election, though he cited Germany as an "anchor of hope" in an increasingly unsettled world.

"We're living in tumultuous times; many in our country feel insecure," he told the assembly after winning 931 of 1,253 votes cast.

Steinmeier, 61, will succeed Joachim Gauck, 77, who opted to stand down after serving a single five-year term. Gauck will remain in office until March 18.

Steinmeier, who had a 79 percent approval rating this month in a poll for public broadcaster ARD, came forward as a presidential hopeful after Merkel failed to find a suitable candidate from within her party bloc willing to run.

The Social Democrats have enjoyed a surge in support after the surprise candidacy for chancellor of Martin Schulz, the former European Parliament president. Enthusiasm for Schulz in the SPD base has narrowed the gap with Merkel seven months before the vote, with one poll last week showing the party ahead.

**THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL**

Podemos Re-Elects Leader, Sticking to Its Anti-Establishment Roots

Jeannette Neumann

Feb. 12, 2017 5:05 p.m. ET

MADRID—Podemos, the leftist party that disrupted Spanish politics only to fall far short of electoral victory and descend into internal feuding, opted Sunday to hew to its anti-establishment roots as party members defeated a bid by its No. 2 leader to steer a more moderate course.

A party congress overwhelmingly re-elected Pablo Iglesias head of Podemos and handed his allies control of 37 of the 62 seats on the party's governing body.

"The winds of change continue to blow," Mr. Iglesias told hundreds of party members who gathered in Madrid on Sunday. "Today Podemos is stronger and more mature."

The bitter feud between the ponytailed Mr. Iglesias, 38 years old, and his deputy, Íñigo Errejón, 33, had played out in public for months, a frustrating spectacle for an anti-austerity party that two years ago

had seemed a strong contender to take over the government. Mr. Errejón's allies won 23 of the 62 seats on the party's governing council.

Podemos's troubles have underscored the resilience of Spain's two establishment parties at a time when upstarts on the far right and far left are challenging mainstream leaders across Europe, with varying degrees of success.

Mr. Iglesias, who won with about 89% of the vote, was part of a group of political scientists and others who founded Podemos in 2014. The party brought together factions that had occupied Spain's streets and public squares three years earlier to demand an end to austerity policies that many blamed for deepening a painful recession.

Those origins bestowed Podemos, which means "We can" in Spanish, with an energized base of voters as its leaders worked to juggle the interests of an amalgamation of left-leaning groups across the country.

Podemos surged in the polls in the year after its founding, challenging

the decadeslong dominance of the center-right Popular Party and the center-left Socialists. But it fell short of expectations, finishing a distant third in Spain's election last June, winning 71 of parliament's 350 seats in an alliance with smaller leftist parties.

Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy's Popular Party finished first and the Socialists, who came in second, agreed not to block his re-election. The two parties have since teamed up to reach agreements on the framework of a budget and other legislation.

Meanwhile, divisions among Podemos leaders and supporters deepened concerning the best strategy to overtake the Socialists as the party of choice for Spain's left-leaning voters.

Mr. Iglesias and his allies called for Podemos to maintain its street-protest, outsider roots and treat the Socialists skeptically, as an establishment party that has at times abandoned its own leftist roots.

Mr. Errejón's faction advocated a more moderate tack, calling for greater cooperation with the Socialists to pass legislation both parties agree on, block initiatives by Mr. Rajoy, and broaden Podemos' support beyond its far-left base.

Some leaders in the Socialist and Popular parties privately have acknowledged that they welcome the quarreling among Podemos' leadership.

Podemos leaders and supporters said they hoped that Sunday's party congress would quiet the party's divisions so its leaders could focus on their mission of shaking up Spain's political and economic status quo.

"I think we have all heard in a very clear-cut way a straightforward call that said, 'We want you together, we want unity,'" Mr. Errejón said Sunday. "I am convinced that responsibility will prevail. And that we are stronger when we are able to work together."

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**THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL**

IMF's Stand on Greek Bailout Unnerves Europe

revue de presse américaine du 13 février 2017

Simon Nixon

Feb. 12, 2017 2:54 p.m. ET

As a new Greek debt crisis gathers pace, one of the major players in the drama has remained remarkably calm: the International Monetary Fund.

European governments and institutions are desperate to resolve a months-old standoff over the next phase of Greece's bailout program. The window for a deal is fast closing with the imminent start of the Dutch election campaign and may not reopen until after the French election in May. But the IMF is proving impervious to political pressure.

Some European governments have said they won't give any more money to Greece unless the IMF gives it money too. But the IMF is sticking to its mantra that it won't participate in any new Greek bailout unless it is satisfied the numbers add up. As things stand, it is far from satisfied.

Meanwhile the clock is ticking toward two major bond redemptions in July that Greece is unlikely to be able to meet without aid.

A crisis meeting in Brussels on Friday failed to break the impasse. The IMF and European institutions did agree to demand further austerity measures equivalent to 2% of gross domestic product to be legislated now to ensure Athens hits its short-term budget targets.

But it isn't clear whether Athens is willing or able to deliver; meanwhile

the creditors are no closer to a deal on what Greece's medium-term austerity targets should be, nor how much relief is needed to put the country's debts on a sustainable footing.

For many Europeans, the IMF is the villain of this crisis.

Eurozone officials accuse it of using overly pessimistic forecasts and being unfairly gloomy about Greece's capacity for reform. They point to recent data that show Athens on track to deliver an unexpectedly robust primary budget surplus before interest payments in 2016 of at least 2%. As far as the European Commission was concerned, this was evidence Greece could hit its 3.5% primary surplus target in 2018 and maintain it thereafter with no extra fiscal tightening.

Some European governments would be happy to go along with the Commission's forecasts, not least because there is little appetite for imposing further belt-tightening on Greece after years of depression.

But the IMF counters that the budget data are provisional and flattered by one-off factors including a very substantial cash inflow in December. It also notes that Greek budget figures are invariably revised down every quarter—and that the average revision is a whopping 2.5%. If the eurozone wants to insist on tough targets, the IMF will insist they are credibly met.

The IMF's critics are on stronger ground when they accuse it of

inconsistency. After all, the fund has been vocal with doubts that Greece can ever achieve a primary surplus of 3.5%, or sustain such a surplus for any period, or that it would be in Greece's interests to do so. So why not simply rule out any program with such unrealistic targets?

The IMF's problem is there is no reason in theory Greece can't deliver such a surplus. Other countries have managed it, and indeed some in the eurozone will need to do so for many years to avoid their debts becoming unsustainable.

The IMF considers Greece a special case because of the weakness of its governance and political system. But the fund also accepts that it is hard for the eurozone to acknowledge this publicly.

The fund's response instead has been to accept such tough surplus targets only if accompanied by far-reaching reforms of its pension and tax systems as well as growth-friendly overhauls of its product and labor markets, legislated in advance as a condition of financial aid. That is a very high political bar in a country that has consistently resisted such reforms.

Not surprisingly, many Europeans—not least in Athens and Brussels—would like nothing more than to get rid of the IMF altogether. But this has proved politically impossible too.

The German and Dutch governments have promised their parliaments that the IMF would participate, and its absence would

send a clear signal the numbers don't add up. Nor will the IMF simply walk away from Greece and refuse to back any future bailout, as some Europeans have hoped. Greece is an IMF shareholder, and a core IMF principle is that it never hangs up the phone.

If the IMF is relaxed, it is because there is nothing Europeans can do to force its hand. IMF staff and management appear to be strongly united in the view their position is analytically robust and in accordance with the IMF's core principles.

Indeed, fund staff believe their hand has been strengthened by the election of President Donald Trump, since they believe the new U.S. administration is likely to look unfavorably on a sweetheart deal for Europeans.

European officials complain the IMF is failing to take account of the implicit solidarity the eurozone continues to provide Greece. But if the eurozone wants the IMF on board, it will have to make that solidarity explicit. If it wants another short-term fudge designed to kick the can safely down the road again until after this year's elections, it will have to find a way to do so on its own.

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INTERNATIONAL

Trump Faces Test Over North Korea Missile

**THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL**

Peter Nicholas in West Palm Beach, Fla., Carol E. Lee in Washington and Jonathan Cheng

in Seoul

Updated Feb. 12, 2017 11:59 p.m. ET

President Donald Trump is facing calls for a show of strength toward North Korea after Pyongyang's weekend launch of a ballistic missile, posing the first major challenge to his administration by a foreign leader and an awkward balancing act with China.

U.S. lawmakers called for military exercises with regional allies, a rapid deployment of regional missile defenses and tough new sanctions. A senior administration official said

the White House is unlikely to use authority it has to go after Chinese companies that do business with North Korea's weapons sector.

The launch was a potent and troubling reminder of Pyongyang's nuclear weapons ambitions as well as the limits of U.S. options. It came days after what White House officials consider a promising conversation between Mr. Trump and President Xi Jinping of China, which could prove a crucial partner in dealing with the threat from North Korea, among other issues.

The missile landed in the Sea of Japan on Sunday in Asia while Mr. Trump was hosting Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach, Fla., prompting the leaders to make an unscheduled, late-night joint appearance.

Mr. Abe called the launch "absolutely intolerable" and demanded North Korea "fully comply" with United Nations resolutions banning such activity. Mr. Trump made no mention of North Korea, South Korea or possible retaliatory plans, saying, "I just want everybody to understand and fully know that the United States of America stands behind Japan, its great ally, 100%."

World leaders are watching how Mr. Trump responds to Pyongyang's move, which could provide clues to how the new U.S. administration will react to a range of other foreign-policy challenges and hot spots around the world.

U.S. defense officials believe the launch was of a medium- or intermediate-range missile, according to the Pentagon.

Early Monday, North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency called the launch a successful test of a "surface-to-surface medium long-range ballistic missile," which it called the Pukguksong-2. The North said that leader Kim Jong Un personally guided the missile launch.

In the report, Mr. Kim said the launch proved the North had made advances in various rocket technologies, and said the missile could be "tipped with a nuclear warhead."

A former administration official said the Obama White House left the Trump team a playbook of options, anticipating a provocative action was likely immediately following the presidential inauguration last month. That included possible multilateral and unilateral moves

encompassing sanctions, United Nations action, statements with South Korea and Japan, and speeding up the deployment of missile defenses.

The senior Trump administration official said Sunday the White House is in the midst of a policy review regarding North Korea.

Sen. Cory Gardner (R., Colo.) urged Mr. Trump in a written statement to "immediately pursue a series of tough measures," including tough sanctions, military exercises with U.S. allies in the region, and the accelerated deployment in South Korea of an advanced missile system known as the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system, or Thaad.

Other lawmakers echoed those prescriptions.

"It's time the regime had to face consequences for its behavior," Sen. Tom Cotton (R., Ark.) said in a statement.

A bill passed last year and signed into law by former President Barack Obama allows the administration to go after Chinese companies that do business with North Korea's weapons complex. The law in effect forces companies to cut their ties to Pyongyang or suffer punitive financial consequences, such as

restricted access to banking systems and financial networks.

The Obama administration used its provisions on at least one occasion last year, but lawmakers have urged a broader application, given that U.S. officials believe 90% of North Korea's trade is with China, making Chinese companies an integral player in the country's struggling economy.

"I think we have to tell the Chinese that they have to put the wood to North Korea in a much more serious way than they have done so far," Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer of New York said Sunday in an interview on CBS' Face the Nation.

North Korea launched the missile off its east coast at 7:55 a.m. Seoul time on Sunday, in what officials in Japan and South Korea saw as both a provocation and a test of U.S. and Japanese responses.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the missile flew about 500 kilometers (310 miles) before landing in waters between Japan and the Korean Peninsula.

"We suspect North Korea demonstrated a show of force in order to test the Trump administration and U.S. responses," said a South Korean military official.

The U.S. Defense Department's U.S. Strategic Command systems detected and tracked the launch of a medium- or intermediate-range ballistic missile at about 6 p.m. EST, according to a written statement from U.S. Strategic Command. The missile was launched near the northwestern city of Kusong and was tracked over North Korea and into the Sea of Japan, where it landed, the statement said.

South Korea's acting President Hwang Kyo-Ahn said he and the government would push for a strong international response to punish North Korea, according to a written statement from his office.

Kim Kwan-jin, South Korea's director of national security, convened a meeting of the Standing Committee of the National Security Council in response, a spokesman for the South Korean president's office said. Mr. Kim also spoke by phone on Sunday with Michael Flynn, Mr. Trump's national security adviser, the South Korean president's office said.

Experts initially said the missile appeared to be one of North Korea's so-called Musudan intermediate-range missiles, which are capable of reaching U.S. bases in Japan and Guam. The North has attempted to test the Musudan

missile from the same launch site in the past, failing several times last year, though it claimed a successful test launch of the Musudan from a mobile launcher in June last year.

In a new-year address last month, North Korea's Kim Jong Un said that the country was close to test launching an intercontinental ballistic missile, which would bring the North closer to being able to send a nuclear warhead to the continental U.S.

"It won't happen!" Mr. Trump wrote a day later on his Twitter account, taking a tough stance toward North Korea's nuclear ambitions before his inauguration. Earlier this month, Mr. Trump sent Defense Secretary Jim Mattis to Seoul and Tokyo, where he promised an "effective and overwhelming" response to any use of nuclear weapons against America or its allies.

—Kwanwoo Jun in Seoul and Gordon Lubold in Washington contributed to this article.

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Trump-Trudeau Meeting Will Preview Trade, Border Issues

Paul Vieira and William Mauldin

Feb. 12, 2017 9:00 a.m. ET

President Donald Trump and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau are scheduled to meet in Washington Monday in a visit likely to provide a glimpse of how the Trump administration will seek to overhaul the 23-year-old economic framework of North America.

Mr. Trump wants to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement, or Nafta, and has vowed to extract new, better terms for the U.S. So far most of his focus has been on Mexico and the \$63 billion U.S. trade deficit there.

Mr. Trudeau, the leader of Nafta's other partner, has indicated that he is intent on building a smooth relationship and finding common ground with Mr. Trump despite their many policy differences on issues including immigration.

"We both got elected on commitments to strengthen the middle class and support those working hard to join it, and that's what we are going to focus on in these meetings," Mr. Trudeau, leader of the centrist Liberal Party of

Canada, said during a tour of Canada's North last week.

The prime minister had a smooth and easy relationship with former President Barack Obama, with whom he shared views on a number of issues including the goal of fighting climate change. They did differ on TransCanada Corp.'s proposed Keystone XL pipeline, which Mr. Obama opposed and for which Mr. Trump has indicated his support.

Officials haven't disclosed details about the Trump-Trudeau meeting, although the future of Nafta and ramifications of a potential border-adjusted tax are expected to be a focus, U.S.-Canada experts say. White House press secretary Sean Spicer said Wednesday that "trade and security and commerce" will be on the agenda.

So far, Mr. Trump has encountered setbacks in his bid to get started on revamping Nafta, including slow confirmation for his leading trade officials and the cancellation of a previous trip to Washington by Mexico's President Enrique Peña Nieto after a bitter public dispute over a proposed wall on the southern border.

Mr. Trudeau's arrival begins the delicate maneuvering that will set the tone for formal talks to update the pact, which would require the cooperation of all three countries including their lawmakers. Mr. Trump hasn't yet formally notified Congress of plans to hold talks on Nafta, a step that is required 90 days before negotiations can begin on any trade deal eligible for expedited consideration on Capitol Hill.

"To me, what we've seen so far continues to confirm that Mexico and Canada have not yet agreed to renegotiate any particular provision of Nafta," said Matt Gold, a Fordham University adjunct law professor and former deputy assistant U.S. trade representative. "I think it's predictable that Canada and Mexico are going to slow down that process."

To date, Mr. Trudeau and other Canadian officials have been cautious in their comments about the Trump administration and Nafta, conveying instead a readiness to discuss improvements to the deal.

Some matters of interest from Canada's perspective include greater labor mobility for high-tech workers and freer services trade.

U.S. lawmakers, on the other hand, have complained about Canada's lumber trade and access to Canada's dairy market.

Some of Mr. Trudeau's most senior aides have touched base with key members of Mr. Trump's team.

Commerce Secretary nominee Wilbur Ross, who is expected to lead the Nafta talks, has spoken to former Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, who worked with Ronald Reagan on a bilateral trade agreement between the U.S. and Canada that predates Nafta, which took effect in 1994.

Mr. Trump has repeatedly backed two-way rather than multilateral trade negotiations. He hasn't arranged a three-way North American summit yet, and some former trade officials say Nafta, a trilateral agreement, could devolve into separate deals with Canada and Mexico. Mr. Trump warned repeatedly in the 2016 campaign he'd pull the U.S. out of Nafta if the partner countries don't agree to an overhaul.

Canada "is hoping to approach the negotiations as opportunity to improve Nafta while also making the case it shouldn't be subject to any

new forms of protectionism," said Roland Paris, a professor at University of Ottawa and Mr. Trudeau's former foreign-policy adviser. He said Mr. Trudeau needs to be ready to protect Canadian interests, "and I expect he will."

U.S.-Canada trade is largely balanced, with latest data indicating a U.S. deficit in the trade of goods of \$11 billion, or a fraction of the shortfall with China, Germany and Mexico. On a goods-and-services basis, the U.S. is running a trade surplus with Canada of just over \$10 billion through the first three quarters of 2016.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Donald Trump's Diplomatic Moderation

Peter Nicholas and Carol E. Lee

Updated Feb. 12, 2017 9:08 a.m. ET

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla.—President Donald Trump appears to be adopting more conventional positions aligned with decades of U.S. foreign-policy making and diplomacy, pulling back from some of the more unorthodox promises he advanced as a candidate.

In recent dealings with Asia and the Middle East, Russia and European allies, Mr. Trump has showed more deference to the consensus views taken by past Republican and Democratic administrations. The coming week provides another set of tests, with visits by the leaders of Canada and Israel scheduled.

A weekend missile launch from North Korea offered a vivid illustration of how Mr. Trump has abandoned crowd-pleasing campaign rhetoric in the face of real-world threats. As a candidate, Mr. Trump said a U.S. defense agreement with Japan was unfair, permitting the Japanese to sit home and watch "Sony" TV while the U.S. was attacked.

With Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visiting his Mar-a-Lago estate, the two men made a joint appearance Saturday night in response to the missile launch and Mr. Trump proclaimed that the "United States of America stands behind Japan, its great ally, 100%."

Mr. Trump's evolution comes as his foreign-policy team has taken shape, with Jim Mattis and Rex Tillerson confirmed by the Senate and firmly in place at the Defense and State departments, respectively.

"He's getting more advice and he seems to see wisdom in greater orthodoxy," said Jon Alterman, who

Mr. Trudeau will also point to the deep, integrated U.S.-Canada trade ties. Canada is the top export destination for 35 U.S. states, according to Canadian figures. Nowhere is that most prevalent than in Rust Belt states like Michigan and Ohio that carried Mr. Trump to victory.

In 2015, Canada ranked as the largest export market for U.S. automotive parts with \$22 billion in parts sold, according to data compiled by the Center for Automotive Research in Ann Arbor, Mich. One third of exports from the Detroit metropolitan area, the

runs the Middle East program at the Center for Strategic & International Studies, a think tank.

The early days of the Trump presidency also have proved a reality check for the president, with his campaign messaging and bold assertions of executive power colliding with geopolitical realities and Constitutional checks and balances.

Last week, an appeals court in San Francisco dealt him a setback, upholding suspension of travel restrictions Mr. Trump says are necessary to guard Americans against terrorist attack. In the ruling, the Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals reaffirmed the limits on a president's powers, sweeping aside the government's argument that Mr. Trump's authority when it comes to immigration is "unreviewable" by the courts.

Peter Edelman, a law professor at the Georgetown University Law Center, said about the court's decision: "This is a marker. What it shows us is there are boundaries to the power of the executive and that no president can violate them."

In the foreign-policy realm meanwhile, Mr. Trump has been tempering, shifting and reversing course on a host of statements he made while campaigning against former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

During the race, he had maintained a combative approach to China, and broke protocol after his victory by accepting a congratulatory phone call from Taiwan's leader. He described the "One China" policy that grants diplomatic recognition to Beijing but not Taiwan as up for negotiation, a possible bargaining chip as he pressed for concessions from the Chinese in its currency practices.

epicenter of the U.S. auto industry, are Canada-bound.

Still, economists say Canada has much to lose from these talks. "The bilateral trade relationship is very important for the U.S., but it's beyond critical for Canada," said Doug Porter, chief economist at BMO Capital Markets. Three-quarters of all Canadian exports, or the equivalent of 20% of Canada's output, heads to the U.S.

Canadian officials estimate roughly 400,000 people and \$1.5 billion in goods and services cross the 4,000-mile U.S.-Canada border each day. The two countries have one of the world's largest trading relationships,

"Everything is under negotiation, including 'One-China,'" Mr. Trump told The Wall Street Journal in an interview a week before he was sworn-in.

But on Thursday, Mr. Trump spoke to Chinese President Xi Jinping and acquiesced to the status quo, confirming he would abide by the same "One China" policy that has underpinned Sino-American relations.

White House officials said Mr. Trump did so to reset relations with the Chinese.

During his campaign, Mr. Trump vowed that his Treasury Department will label China a "currency manipulator," setting in motion "countervailing duties" on Chinese imports.

Now, three weeks into his administration, Mr. Trump still hasn't slapped China with that designation.

Last week, he also moved to embrace broadly the status quo in U.S.-Asia policy, saying, after a meeting with Mr. Abe in Washington, that he would uphold America's alliances and military agreements in the region.

Even before the report of North Korea's missile launch, Mr. Trump had dropped the tough talk about Japan and gone out of his way to befriend America's ally. He flew Mr. Abe to his Florida home Air Force One and the two golfed together Saturday at the Trump National Jupiter Golf Club.

"Having a great time hosting Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in the United States!" Mr. Trump wrote Saturday in a post on his Twitter account, accompanied by a picture of the two men high-fiving on a tee.

Mr. Trump has taken a similar posture toward U.S. alliances in Europe, particularly the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. After

with two-way trade in merchandise goods of roughly \$545 billion in 2016, trailing only China, based on the most recent Bureau of Economic Analysis figures.

U.S.-Canada trade ties and intertwined supply chains have deepened since the first milestone North American trade agreement in 1965 for the auto sector, which eliminated some features of protectionism with respect to North American trade in motor vehicles and parts.

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meeting with British Prime Minister Theresa May, he said he would strongly back the alliance. His administration is expected to support Montenegro's bid to join NATO, though Russia opposes the move.

Before taking office, Mr. Trump described the NATO alliance as "obsolete." But key cabinet secretaries have been far more bullish on NATO and Mr. Trump has shown he will heed recommendations from his advisers. Both Messrs. Mattis and Tillerson voiced support for NATO in confirmation hearings.

As a candidate, Mr. Trump advocated waterboarding as a means of fighting terrorists. A week after taking office, Mr. Trump announced that he would reverse course and defer to Mr. Mattis, a retired Marine Corps general, who believes such measures don't work—a position consistent with Obama administration policy.

Mr. Trump also has retreated from his campaign promise to move the U.S. embassy in Israel to Jerusalem from Tel Aviv, opting not to do that within days of taking office. What's more, Mr. Trump issued a statement warning Israel that expanding the construction of settlements to new areas could be an impediment to an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement. That stance tracks with longstanding U.S. policy toward the Middle East.

Settlements, Mr. Trump told an Israeli newspaper last week, "don't help the process. I can say that. There is so much land left. And every time you take land for settlements, there is less land left."

With Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu scheduled to visit Mr. Trump at the White House on Wednesday, the settlement and embassy issues could prove a source of contention.

That, too, wouldn't be unusual. Former President Barack Obama clashed openly with Mr. Netanyahu about settlement construction.

Russia is one glaring piece of Mr. Trump's foreign policy around which there is still little clarity. Mr. Trump has said he wants closer relations with Russia, but it is unclear how he would achieve that. Russia is seen by many U.S. officials from both parties as an adversary, a view that intensified after U.S. intelligence agencies

determined Moscow used cyberattacks to try to interfere with the 2016 presidential election. Russia denies involvement in the hacks.

Mr. Trump has suggested he might lift sanctions imposed by the Obama administration in response to the hacks if he can cut a deal with Russia on other issues.

Yet he has fallen in line with European leaders and U.S. lawmakers' view that America

should maintain sanctions against Russia over its military intervention in Ukraine until Moscow abides by an agreement to end the violence. The White House said recently those sanctions should not be lifted unless Russia holds up its end of that bargain.

David Rothkopf, a former Clinton administration official and author of "Running the World," a book about the U.S. National Security Council, said about the president's trend toward diplomatic conventions:

"These are very early days, but it's clear that Trump is getting a healthy dose of reality. As a consequence of his encounters with both foreign leaders and the professional representatives of the U.S. government, it's becoming clear to him that a lot of his campaign rhetoric was ill-conceived."

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The New York Times

Netanyahu's Meeting With Trump to Set Tone for U.S.-Israel Relations

Ian Fisher

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel said on Sunday that he and President Trump "have known each other for years." Pool photo by Gali Tibbon

JERUSALEM — As President Trump appeared to shift closer to the political center on several contentious policies on Israel, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu suggested on Sunday that it was unrealistic to expect their two countries to agree completely on all issues.

But amid growing challenges from the right, Mr. Netanyahu said he was the strongest leader to navigate the relationship — the nation's most important, yet often its trickiest.

The Israeli leader's comments came the night before he leaves for Washington for his first face-to-face meeting with Mr. Trump as president.

While Mr. Trump at first appeared to give Israel's leaders carte blanche — he remained silent, for example, as the nation announced the construction of thousands of new homes in the occupied West Bank — he has since said he does not believe that "going forward with these settlements is a good thing for peace."

And on Sunday, Mr. Netanyahu was quoted on Army Radio telling members of his right-wing Likud Party that "to believe there are no restrictions now would be a mistake."

The meeting with Mr. Trump on Wednesday is expected to set the tone for the American-Israeli relationship, which was notably frosty under President Barack Obama because of Israeli settlements in occupied territory, Israel's vehement opposition to the nuclear deal with Iran and personality clashes with Mr. Netanyahu.

Although Mr. Trump's comments on the settlements have tamped down expectations on the right of a new era unfettered by American constraints, some analysts here portray the president's position as politically beneficial to Mr. Netanyahu. He is portraying himself as an experienced hand in dealing with Washington — unlike, he suggested, more aggressive forces on the right who are suggesting an annexation of some settlements.

"I have navigated Israeli-U.S. relations in a prudent manner, and I will continue to do so now," Mr. Netanyahu told cabinet members on Sunday, according to an official transcript of his remarks, in which he noted that he and Mr. Trump "have known each other for years."

His main rival to the right, Naftali Bennett, the Jewish Home Party leader and education minister, warned Mr. Netanyahu not to discuss the possibility of a state for Palestinians — though Mr. Netanyahu has tepidly endorsed one and Mr. Trump has said repeatedly that he would like to make an unspecified "deal" for peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

"If in their statements after the meeting they mention, for the first time in Trump's term, their obligation to forming Palestine or two states in one way or another, we will all feel it in our flesh for years to come," Mr. Bennett warned in a Facebook post. "The earth will shake."

The tussle between the two men is personal — Mr. Bennett would like to succeed Mr. Netanyahu as prime minister — and central to the longstanding conflict here: Mr. Bennett argues that the time for a separate state for Palestinians is over and that Israel has an opportunity under Mr. Trump to significantly expand Jewish presence in the West Bank.

Apart from the challenge from the right, the meeting comes at a difficult time for Mr. Netanyahu, who is facing at least three inquiries into allegations of corruption.

Mr. Trump has also backed off, for now at least, a campaign promise to relocate the United States Embassy to Jerusalem from Tel Aviv, a move opposed by the Palestinians, who would consider it a de facto recognition of Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem after the 1967 war.

Here again, political analysts have seen Mr. Netanyahu's influence, with the prime minister possibly communicating that such a move was not a top priority given the reaction it could provoke among Palestinians.

In his statements on Sunday, Mr. Netanyahu also said he had registered his opposition to appointing the well-regarded former Palestinian prime minister, Salam Fayyad, as the United Nations envoy to Libya. On Friday, the new American ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki R. Haley, opposed the appointment. "For too long, the U.N. has been unfairly biased in favor of the Palestinian Authority to the detriment of our allies in Israel," she said.

The Israeli news media also reported over the weekend that Tzipi Livni, a prominent Israeli lawmaker, may be offered a position as an under secretary-general for the United Nations chief, António Guterres.

The Washington Post

Netanyahu is urged not to use the words 'Palestinian state' when he visits Trump

<https://www.facebook.com/william.booth.5074?fref=ts>

JERUSALEM — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu likes to boast to his boisterous cabinet that no one understands the Americans better than he does.

But in his many years in power, appeasing and challenging Republicans and Democrats alike, Netanyahu has never dealt with a leader such as President Trump.

The two are to sit down as equals at the White House on Wednesday. They have known each other since Netanyahu served as Israel's ambassador to the United Nations in New York in the 1980s and was friendly with Trump's father, Fred.

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Netanyahu has been in nonstop consultations with his advisers as they prepare him for one of the most important meetings of his career.

Israeli officials say the prime minister will seek to strengthen his already warm rapport with Trump after years of feuding and policy clashes with the Obama administration. But there is stark division on what message his right-wing government wants him to deliver in Washington.

His education minister and coalition partner, Naftali Bennett, leader of the pro-settlement Jewish Home party, has pressed him to abandon his tentative commitment to the two-state solution, which Netanyahu first announced in a speech at Bar Ilan University in 2009.

Calling the upcoming visit to the White House "the test of Netanyahu's life," Bennett warned the 67-year-old prime minister that there were two words he could not

utter at the meeting: "Palestinian state."

"They must not be said. This is our test," Bennett cautioned, voicing an ultimatum from the increasingly powerful settlers' wing, a group that numbers more than 600,000 in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. If either side utters those words after the meeting, Bennett said, "the earth will shake."

[Rights groups ask court to bar Israel from taking Palestinian land for settlements]

Inside Netanyahu's own Likud party, activists have been circulating a letter calling for the prime minister to jettison the two-state paradigm.

Israel's intelligence minister, Yisrael Katz, told Army Radio on Sunday: "Whoever talks about a Palestinian state today does not live in the real world. There is a general consensus among the public there is no way to reach it."

But Katz said Bennett was wrong to try to publicly force Netanyahu into a corner on the eve of his Washington trip.

There is broad agreement in Netanyahu's coalition cabinet that the prime minister should seek a mind-meld with Trump on Iran, which is seen not only by Israel, but also by its moderate Sunni Arab neighbors, such as Saudi Arabia, as the looming challenge to regional security.

Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman said the Trump meeting should have one overarching goal. "The greatest

threat to Israel is Iran, Iran and Iran," he said.

But as much as Netanyahu might want to keep circling back to Iran, the long-running Palestinian conflict has flared again, even as Israel begins its 50th year of military occupation.

After Trump's election, Israel's right wing was almost giddy with expectations of better days to come, hailing Trump as a savior of Greater Israel who would not only get tough with Iran, Israel's nemesis, but also would quickly move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and green-light a building boom for Jewish settlements in the West Bank.

But it has been a stormy few weeks — for the settlements and Netanyahu personally, who is facing down police investigations including an embarrassing probe into his family's receipt of thousands of dollars in gifts from wealthy benefactors, such as diamond jewelry, pink champagne and fancy cigars.

No politician likes to wake up to a front-page headline like the one in the Haaretz newspaper last week that read "The Netanyahu's requests for gifts made me sick."

Late last month, after years of delays, the Israeli police finally carried out a Supreme Court order for the demolition of Amona, an illegal Jewish outpost in the West Bank built on private Palestinian land. Israeli TV screens blazed with the images of violent resistance for 24 hours.

Netanyahu and Lieberman quickly sought to shore up their right flank by announcing building plans for 5,500 more homes in the settlements.

Then Israel's parliament passed a controversial bill last week allowing the state to expropriate more private Palestinian land and grant it to settlers — so there would never be another Amona eviction.

Netanyahu supported the bill, but even his fellow Likudnik, Israel's president Reuven Rivlin, cautioned, "It will cause Israel to be seen as an apartheid state, which it is not," according to Israeli news media accounts.

On Friday, Trump surprised Jerusalem when he gently warned Israel in an interview that building more homes in Jewish settlements was not "good for peace" and said that he wanted Israel to "act reasonably" as his administration explores paths toward brokering peace talks with the Palestinians and Arab governments. Trump also said he would move cautiously on a possible relocation of the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem, which Arabs have warned would inflame religious passions and spark violence.

[Trump says he really wants Israeli-Palestinian peace deal, warns both sides to 'act reasonably']

The interview was published in Israel Hayom, the pro-Netanyahu newspaper owned by the prime minister's long-term supporter Sheldon Adelson, the casino magnate and GOP mega-donor

who dined at the White House with Trump last week.

For the Israeli government, the most problematic takeaway of the interview was Trump's suggestion that he and his son-in-law, senior adviser Jared Kushner, are considering a new round of peace talks to broker what Trump has called "the ultimate deal."

Orly Azoulay, a columnist for the Israeli daily Yedioth Ahronoth, wrote on Sunday, "The Israeli right wing appear to have popped their champagne corks a bit prematurely when they celebrated Trump's victory."

She added, "Presidents come and presidents go, but there is nothing new under the sun in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and nor are there any magical solutions."

On Sunday at his cabinet meeting, Netanyahu said, "I hear and understand that there is great excitement ahead of this meeting" with Trump, "with all different kinds of motivation behind it." But he stressed that his goals were "to strengthen the steadfast alliance with the U.S." and other national interests dependent on that tie.

In response to the calls to abandon the two-state solution, Netanyahu said his White House visit "requires a responsible and considered policy — and thus I intend to act. I have navigated Israeli-U.S. relations in a prudent manner," he said, "and I will continue to do so now."

Ruth Eglash contributed to this report.



Sens. Feinstein and Heinrich : Two-state solution crucial for Mideast peace

Dianne Feinstein and Martin Heinrich 9:01 a.m. ET Feb. 12, 2017

An Israeli soldier clashes with Palestinian protesters in the West Bank on Feb. 2, 2017. (Photo: Jaafar Ashtiyeh, AFP/Getty Images)

The United States has been unwavering in its commitment to Israel's security. We and other leaders have worked together to address the myriad challenges Israel faces, including terrorism, incitement, de-legitimization efforts and regional instability.

Previous administrations have consistently enhanced this assistance and cooperation, including Barack Obama's pledge of an additional \$38 billion over 10 years, the largest security assistance package to any nation in U.S. history.

An integral component of the U.S.-Israel relationship is our shared commitment to negotiating a two-state solution, which would see the creation of an independent Palestine beside a democratic, Jewish Israel. This remains the only way to build a lasting peace and ensure Israel remains the democratic homeland of the Jewish people.

A two-state solution would resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict, resulting in normal relations between Israel and its Arab neighbors. Achieving peace would help enhance cooperation, stability and security in the Middle East, which is in our own national security interests.

That is why previous administrations — Democratic and Republican alike — have engaged, with overwhelming bipartisan congressional support, in efforts to help facilitate such an outcome.

Yet a negotiated two-state solution seems further out of reach than ever before.

Since President Trump's inauguration, Israel has announced that it would dramatically expand settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Israeli politicians have proclaimed an end to the goal of a Palestinian state, and are agitating for the outright annexation of major Israeli settlement blocks in the West Bank. Furthermore, President Trump's nominee to be the ambassador to Israel, David Friedman, has been a benefactor of Israeli settlement expansion and has demonstrated an openly hostile attitude to a two-state solution. These Israeli actions and Friedman's views are not helpful to Israel, to the peace process, or to the national security of the United States.

Also standing in the way of peace is the incitement of violence and terror by Palestinians. Last year the world witnessed hundreds of indiscriminate attacks against ordinary Israelis. Terrorists used knives, guns and vehicles to kill, injure and maim random Israeli civilians. Even our own citizens were killed in these despicable terror attacks. As violence continues, it's understandable why many would doubt whether peace is possible in the face of such hatred.

Yet, according to public opinion polls, the majority of Israelis and Palestinians continue to favor a two-state solution.

We strongly believe that without two states for two peoples, the violence we see today will only become worse. Without two states, true security for Israel will vanish, alongside the legitimate aspirations

of ordinary Palestinians for a state of their own.

POLICING THE USA: A look at race, justice, media

Perhaps most importantly, without an independent Palestine by its side, Israel cannot be both a democratic and majority Jewish state. Today, the Jewish people are already a minority between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River. There are 6.3 million Jewish Israelis compared to 6.6 million non-Jewish minorities, most of

them Palestinian Arabs.

Since the Jewish people are already a minority, a one-state solution cannot be both majority Jewish and democratic. We have not heard a plausible proposal where a one-state solution wouldn't require a Jewish minority to govern a non-Jewish majority.

To avoid this outcome, we urge the Trump administration to prioritize the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to help create the conditions necessary for resuming direct talks between the two parties. That must

include a halt to Israeli settlement construction and an end to Palestinian incitement of terror.

We recognize only the parties themselves can ultimately negotiate an end to their conflict. Yet, the United States must continue to play a constructive role, rather than turning a blind eye to actions by either party that undermine the prospects for peace.

Dianne Feinstein is a Democratic senator from California. Martin Heinrich is a Democratic senator from New Mexico. Follow them on

Twitter: @SenFeinstein and @MartinHeinrich.

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Editorial : Don't Put the Muslim Brotherhood on the Terrorist List

The Editors

President Donald Trump's advisers are reviewing a plan to officially designate the Muslim Brotherhood as a foreign terrorist organization. While some members of the group are certainly terrorists, adding it to the official list would be a mistake.

That's because the Muslim Brotherhood isn't a single organization so much as a collection of loosely affiliated groups in dozens of countries, each deciding on its own policies and programs. In some places, it is purely focused on social services and humanitarian issues. In others, it is constructively engaged in politics; its Tunisian offshoot, called

Ennahda, is central to the coalition now desperately trying to make that country the first true Muslim democracy. In Syria, members are battling against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad.

Some affiliated groups, such as Hamas in Gaza, are revolutionary and violent. But Hamas is already on the U.S. terrorist list, indicating that Washington is capable of dealing with the Muslim Brotherhood on a case-by-case basis. Those chapters and individuals proved to be engaging in terrorism or supporting murderous jihadist groups should be placed on the list, maintained by the State Department, and subject to related sanctions -- freezing money the

groups have in the U.S., for instance, or cracking down on front groups that funnel money to terrorists.

The downside of a blanket designation is equally clear. First, it would not likely pass legal muster: The Supreme Court ruled in 2010 that the government cannot criminalize affiliations with foreign political movements unless it can prove that money given to them is reaching terrorist groups, and there is no evidence of that for most chapters. In addition, designating the entire group it would undoubtedly inflame anti-Americanism in places where the Muslim Brotherhood is legal and performs valuable public services,

such as U.S. allies Jordan and Morocco.

Instead of painting with a broad brush, Trump and Congress should ask the State and Treasury departments to determine which Muslim Brotherhood branches are violent and which could be allies in the fight against extremism. Just as there can be no doubt of the danger extremist groups pose to the U.S., there should be none about the value of moderate groups in joining the fight against terrorism.

To contact the senior editor responsible for Bloomberg View's editorials: David Shipley at davidshipley@bloomberg.net.



Report Rebuts Russia's Claims of Restraint in Syrian Bombing Campaign

Michael R. Gordon

"Throughout the entire length of the battle for Aleppo, there have been multiple claims of violations of human rights and multiple denials," said Eliot Higgins, a senior fellow at the Digital Forensic Research Lab of the Atlantic Council.

"What we have been able to present now is a wealth of evidence confirming the targeting of civilian structures, namely hospitals, which in certain cases has been denied by the Russian Ministry of Defense," he added. "We have been able to confirm the use in civilian areas of a variety of indiscriminate weapons."

Syrian forces, backed by Hezbollah fighters, Iran's paramilitary Quds Force and Russian air power, took Aleppo in late December. The capture of the city was an important milestone that gave the government of President Bashar al-Assad control over all of Syria's major cities and strengthened Moscow's hand in discussions over the country's future.

But while the Atlantic Council report acknowledges that his victory in Aleppo has solidified Mr. Assad's hold on power, at least for now, it argues that the ruthless strategy and tactics used by the Syrian and Russian governments would make the Syrian president "a poor if not harmful partner" in efforts to defeat the Islamic State and other extremist groups.

Experts at the Atlantic Council have long urged the United States to do more to protect civilians in Syria and support the moderate opposition. In the report, the group employs hard evidence, including satellite images from DigitalGlobe, a commercial satellite company, fresh accounts from Syrian activists on the ground and photography published by Russia's Defense Ministry.

Much of the analysis of the photos and social media was done by Mr. Higgins, a Britain-based researcher who founded the investigative website bellingcat.com.

A reconstruction of one key episode — the July 16 bombing of another

hospital, known as M2, in the Maadi district — was carried out by Forensic Architecture, a research organization at Goldsmiths, University of London, which was asked to take an independent look at the video and photographic evidence of the bombing.

A reconstruction of the bombing of the hospital known as M2 in the Maadi district of Aleppo on July 16. It was prepared by Forensic Architecture, a research organization at Goldsmiths, University of London, which was asked to make an independent examination of the video and photographic evidence of the bombing. Video by AtlanticCouncil

Aleppo was divided in July 2012 between government- and opposition-controlled areas. With the support of Russia, the Assad government began a major offensive in September of last year to take the city.

Fragile and temporary cease-fires were used by the Syrians and their allies to prepare fresh offensives,

which, despite Russian and Syrian denials, often targeted civilian areas.

One claim that the Atlantic Council report challenges was issued by Lt. Gen. Sergei F. Rudskoi, the head of the operations directorate of the Russian general staff, who insisted in October that no damage had been done to the al-Sakhour hospital in a Russian bombing raid. To buttress his case, General Rudskoi displayed satellite photos that he said had been taken between Sept. 24 and Oct. 11. Eyewitness accounts to the contrary, he added, were "mere fakes."

But a comparison of DigitalGlobe satellite photos taken on Sept. 25 and Oct. 13, the Atlantic Council report notes, shows the emergence of a large bomb crater near the hospital, also known as M10, and damage to the hospital building. Security camera videos from inside the hospital offer corroborating evidence of an Oct. 3 attack, as does a photo from the street by a local resident.

Security camera video of the Oct. 3 bombing of the M10 hospital in Aleppo. Video by bellinacat

The report concludes that there were several reasons to think the attacks on the medical centers were deliberate, including the large number of strikes, the Assad government's knowledge of the terrain, and the Syrian government's practice of confiscating medical supplies from humanitarian aid convoys.

The M2 hospital was damaged by air and artillery strikes at least a

dozen times between June and December.

Security camera video of the July 16 bombing of the M2 hospital in Aleppo. Video by حلب مركز الإيع لأمي AMC

Other photographic evidence points to the use of incendiary munitions and cluster bombs. The Kremlin-backed television channel, Russia Today, provided some of the evidence in video footage it showed in June that had been taken at a Russian air base near Latakia, Syria. (The version of the report that

was later uploaded to YouTube deleted the images of the weapons being mounted on a Russian warplane.)

When a Russian team later entered eastern Aleppo to clear away unexploded ordnance, a photograph published by the Russian Defense Ministry showed the remains of cluster bombs, the Atlantic Council report notes.

A variety of reports from victims and video on YouTube indicate that Syrian government attacks with chlorine gas increased in the final

phase of the battle for Aleppo. One video "showed a chlorine gas cylinder with its labels intact," the report said.

The use of chlorine bombs by the Syrian government, Mr. Higgins said, continued even after reports confirming their use were made by the United Nations and an international watchdog organization in The Hague that enforces the ban on the use of chemical agents in war.



Trump pushes for 'safe zones' in Syria: Could they work?

The Christian Science Monitor

February 13, 2017 United Nations, N.Y.—President Trump has been sharply critical of European countries — particularly Germany — for opening borders and taking in millions of refugees from Syria and other conflict zones.

Better to avoid the security risks — to both the refugees and to the countries that would host them — and help those displaced by war stay home, Mr. Trump says.

His solution? "Safe zones," where displaced families could live securely without having to become refugees. In the case of Syria, Trump has directed the Pentagon and State Department to come up with a plan by the end of April for havens that would be protected by the United States with security and financial participation of regional powers.

Trump has already taken the idea to some regional leaders and continues to tout the idea as part of a Middle East policy in which local governments would take on more of the responsibility for initiatives in the region.

The US "will absolutely do safe zones in Syria," Trump said in an interview with ABC News last month.

But the idea of safe zones — originally pushed by Hillary Clinton during the Obama presidency — gives many diplomats and experts pause. In the 1990s, safe zones in Bosnia and

Rwanda often only exposed refugees to greater risks. The danger is that the zones become targets for other groups in the country who do not want them to succeed. For its part, Russia has already cautioned the United States against such a plan.

Moreover, at a time when the Trump administration is attempting to block Syrian refugees from entering the US indefinitely, there is concern that the plan is really more about keeping refugees out than about making them safe at home.

The United Nations' refugee agency, UNHCR, says it stands ready to work with the Trump administration on any initiative that improves the security and well-being of the world's record number of displaced people. But officials caution that the track record on safe havens is not encouraging.

"We believe that history gives us some stark and relatively recent lessons in the effectiveness of safe zones," says Christopher Boian, a spokesperson for UNHCR based in Washington. Citing Bosnia and Rwanda, he adds that "we would be very concerned that people seeking security would end up exposed to the very violence they are trying to flee."

The challenges

As secretary of State, Mrs. Clinton failed to persuade President Obama to champion safe zones. Mr. Obama was leery of the military involvement the plan would require.

The prospect has grown only more complex as outside forces like Russia and Iran have stepped up involvement, the Syrian opposition has fragmented further, and the self-declared Islamic State has established itself.

"The objective of this kind of project may be described as fundamentally humanitarian, but the reality is that any number of parties, starting with the Assad regime and the Islamic State, are going to see it as a threat, and that's going to make it a target instead of a safe place," says Daniel Byman, a professor of security studies at Georgetown University in Washington.

Both the Syrian government and the Islamic State would be concerned that the haven could become a training ground for opposition fighters. As a result, the haven would almost certainly require ground forces to protect civilians, Professor Byman adds.

Those ground forces would face a constellation of groups opposed to outside forces on their lands, others say.

"Guarantees for the safety of civilians would be further challenged by the multitude of armed actors exercising varying degrees of military or other control over a complex patchwork of territory," says Mr. Boian of UNHCR.

Voices of caution

For these reasons among others, Byman says he expects a very cautious assessment of the

proposal from the Pentagon and State Department.

"They're certainly not going to so directly say, 'No we can't do this,' but I do think we'll see something like 'Here are the options for doing this, and here are the difficulties that will be baked into each one of those options,'" Byman says. "And then I'd expect an 'Oh by the way, did we mention we might end up fighting with the Russians if we do this?'"

Several diplomats at the UN say they took note of Russia's recent admonition to Washington to "think about the potential consequences of establishing safe zones." That suggests to them that Moscow could decide to veto any Security Council resolution Trump might seek to build international support for his safe zone plan.

Trump has always presented his "safe zones" plan in terms of what is best for the Syrian people, asserting they would be "happier" remaining home or close to home. But humanitarian experts say refugees are happiest where they are safe, can get work, and go to school — and that often means leaving home and even the region around home.

Moreover, Boian says no plan purporting to offer safety to displaced people in their home country should be conceived of as a means of fencing people in.

"We don't want to see 'safe areas' being used to deny people fleeing armed conflict and persecution the right to seek asylum and safety," he says.

President is a "paper tiger," citing Chinese officials who say Mr. Xi refused to speak with Mr. Trump until he softened his stance. But the substance of Mr. Trump's shift isn't surprising or dramatic.

Rather than embrace Beijing's "One China principle," which insists that Taiwan is part of China, Mr. Trump



Editorial : Trump's Winning Asia Diplomacy

Feb. 12, 2017 6:09 p.m. ET 68

Friday and 27 holes of golf with Mr. Abe on Saturday, followed by a joint press conference on North Korea's latest missile launch. Unlike some of his earlier encounters with foreign leaders, this round demonstrated sobriety, careful planning and respect for allies.

The news out of the Xi call is that Mr. Trump affirmed the longstanding U.S. "One China policy" concerning Taiwan, which he previously said would be "under negotiation" with Beijing along with trade and other issues. Some of our friends in the media have portrayed this as evidence that the U.S.

President Trump has had a busy few days of Asia diplomacy, including his first post-inauguration phone call with China's Xi Jinping on Thursday, a White House summit with Japan's Shinzo Abe on

only endorsed the U.S. policy of acknowledging a Beijing-Taipei disagreement over Taiwan's status, reserving U.S. judgment on the issue and calling for the peaceful settlement of disputes with the consent of Taiwan's people. As has been true for decades, this amounts to little more than agreeing to disagree. It certainly doesn't stop the U.S. from supporting Taiwan with means other than official recognition as an independent state.

Nor does it stop Mr. Trump from building on his December phone call with Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen by boosting economic, diplomatic and military ties with the island. On the contrary, by



Editorial : Trump Hands Xi a Diplomatic Victory

The Editors

A sigh of relief just rippled across Asia -- and the other six continents. Donald Trump is not, after all, too interested in blowing up the world's single most important bilateral relationship.

Late last year, Trump set the region and world on edge by questioning the "One China" policy that has stabilized U.S.-China relations for nearly four decades. Late last week, Trump walked that back, affirming the policy in a long-delayed phone call with Chinese President Xi Jinping.



Bolton : Trump's New Start With Russia May Prove Better Than Obama's

John Bolton

Updated Feb. 13, 2017 12:43 a.m. ET

Media tittle-tattle about President Trump's telephone calls with foreign counterparts received new fuel last week after details leaked of a conversation with Russia's Vladimir Putin. The usual anonymous sources alleged that when Mr. Putin raised the 2010 New Start arms-control treaty, Mr. Trump asked his aides what it covered—and then, once briefed, declared it to be one of those bad Obama deals he planned to renegotiate.

If so, Mr. Trump got the treaty right. From America's perspective, New Start is an execrable deal, a product of Cold War nostrums about reducing nuclear tensions. Arms-control treaties, properly conceived and drafted, should look like George W. Bush's 2002 Treaty of Moscow: short (three pages), with broad exit ramps and sunset provisions.

signaling that he won't risk a destabilizing clash with Beijing over a matter as sensitive as Taiwan's independence, Mr. Trump will now be able to secure more support for a cautious but still expanded Taiwan agenda from leaders in Taipei, Tokyo and other friendly capitals.

Which brings us to Mr. Trump's strikingly friendly summit with Mr. Abe, a display surely not lost on Chinese leaders who rightly identify the Japanese Prime Minister as a devoted opponent of their ambitions to dominate Asia. "We have a very, very good bond—very, very good chemistry," Mr. Trump gushed at a joint press conference. "When I greeted him at the car, I shook hands, but I grabbed him and

As welcome as this outcome is, it's worth noting that it was hardly inevitable and may not be lasting. Indeed, given current tensions between the U.S. and China, much could have gone -- still could go -- wrong. It's a good bet that last week's "unsafe encounter" between U.S. and Chinese warplanes won't be the last.

Some tension is inevitable in this relationship, but it's hard to argue Trump is making things better. In foreign policy especially, his belligerence could undermine both U.S. security (if it's ever acted on) and credibility (when it isn't). Now that Trump's threat has been

Although President Obama had considerable help from then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in this diplomatic failure, Russia was hardly blameless. Moscow subsequently exploited the treaty's weaknesses to rebuild and modernize its arsenal of nuclear warheads and ballistic missiles, while Mr. Obama stood idly by. Republican senators opposed New Start's ratification, 26-13 (three of them didn't vote), as did 2012 presidential nominee Mitt Romney. Mr. Trump's remarks are therefore squarely in the party's mainstream.

Not so, however, are some of Mr. Trump's comments—or at least the inferences drawn from them—on Mr. Putin's political and military adventurism in Europe. Many Republicans worry that, rather than strengthening the international economic sanctions imposed on Russia for its belligerent incursions into eastern Ukraine and its 2014 annexation of Crimea, Mr. Trump

hugged him because that's the way we feel." This is a turnaround from Mr. Trump's campaign-trail criticisms of Japan as a freeloading ally.

"We're committed to the security of Japan," Mr. Trump declared. He also echoed his defense secretary, Jim Mattis, in reaffirming that the U.S.-Japan security treaty covers the Japan-administered Senkaku Islands that China has swarmed with civilian and paramilitary ships in recent years. On trade, a potential sore point with Mr. Trump even in the best of circumstances, the two leaders punted to a bilateral working group to be led by U.S. Vice President Mike Pence and Japanese Finance Minister Taro Aso.

exposed as empty, the U.S. is arguably in a worse position than before. Trump has in effect handed Xi a diplomatic victory.

The fact is, cooperation between the U.S. and China is mandatory if the world is to meet such profound challenges as nuclear proliferation and climate change. Moreover, there is a lot the U.S. can and should do to improve the terms of its economic relations with China and strengthen the global economy in the bargain. The high-wire drama of the last few months has done nothing to advance any of those goals.

may reduce or rescind sanctions entirely.

This apparent difference is no small matter. Legislation to codify the existing sanctions is pending in Congress. It has overwhelming—most analysts think veto-proof—bipartisan support. Commentators wonder whether the remarkable Republican solidarity on Mr. Trump's cabinet nominations might be shattered if Russia policy is the first area in which the new administration faces off with the Republican congressional majorities.

The sanctions on Russia for its interference in Ukraine are already under assault in Europe: Germany, France and others appear close to succumbing to their apparently hard-wired inclination to sacrifice geostrategic imperatives for economic ones. Elections across the Continent this year may produce results even more favorable to Moscow (possibly, in part, because of Russian meddling). By contrast,

North Korea helped underscore the stakes of U.S.-Japan cooperation Saturday by shooting a Musudan intermediate-range ballistic missile into the Sea of Japan, its first test on Mr. Trump's watch. Though not the intercontinental missile launch Pyongyang has promised, this was a reminder that its nuclear program is advancing on many fronts. Mr. Trump, fresh off the golf course and a candlelight dinner with Mr. Abe and their wives, offered a brief statement: "The United States of America stands behind Japan, its great ally, 100%." Hear, hear.

The same might well be said about Trump's threats to tear up other alliances and trade agreements, to upend U.S. immigration law and procedures, and to build walls. Never mind the time spent by recently confirmed cabinet members to smooth over the relationships roiled by such bluster. The real danger of this un-creative destruction is that it leaves the U.S., and the world, more vulnerable when the next crisis hits.

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the Baltic republics and other NATO members in Eastern and Central Europe are alarmed that Russia's adventurism would increase if its Ukraine aggression were brushed aside and sanctions lifted.

Yet amid the breathless press accounts about Mr. Trump's purported fancy for Mr. Putin, one thing is clear: The Trump administration's policy toward, and even its strategic assessment of, Russia is still under construction. Most important, if the substance of Mr. Trump's comments on New Start was accurately reported, it shows him resisting items on Mr. Putin's wish list, and not for the first time.

Mr. Trump has, for example, unequivocally opposed Mr. Obama's Iran nuclear deal. On Feb. 1, National Security Adviser Mike Flynn put Iran "on notice" that the deal was on life support. New U.S. sanctions against Iran underlined the point. The White House is reportedly considering

listing Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps as a foreign terrorist organization, which should have been done decades ago. Such a move would have a significant political and economic effect on Moscow's military-industrial complex, particularly Rosoboronexport, its international arms-sales agency.

Washington should be also push back against Russia's inserting itself militarily and politically into the Middle East by using the Syria conflict as a

wedge. While Ukraine may seem an unrelated issue, it is not. Moscow's diplomatic efforts to "solve" the Syrian conflict are in substantial part an effort to "help" Europe with the Syrian refugee problem, providing yet another inducement to wobbly Europeans to roll back sanctions. Any perceived American weakness on the sanctions would embolden Russian efforts to further penetrate the Middle East, increasing the dangerous, destabilizing effects of Moscow's tacit alliance with Iran.

Significantly, Mr. Trump has said he doesn't know what his relationship with Mr. Putin will ultimately be, and he must surely recognize that national interests, not personal chemistry, underlie great-power foreign policies. America doesn't sacrifice its national-security bottom line just because a foreign leader "may smile, and smile."

So let's raise our glasses to Mr. Trump's disdain for New Start, not to mention the Iran nuclear deal, and hope for more of the same. The new president ought to strengthen

the sanctions, reassure NATO allies (while jouncing them to meet their commitments on military spending), and then have coffee with Vlad. Negotiate only from positions of strength.

Mr. Bolton is a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and author of "Surrender Is Not an Option: Defending America at the United Nations and Abroad" (Simon & Schuster, 2007).



Editorial : A way to get real news to Russia

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

A CONFOUNDING aspect of today's global conflicts is the use of soft power: propaganda, news, social media, cybermischief, deception, leaks and other means to influence hearts and minds and thereby prevail over an adversary. The digital age has greatly accelerated the importance and use of these techniques, and Russia has demonstrated a dark mastery of them, especially since its invasion of Ukraine three years ago. How should the West respond, and, more broadly, how can free and open societies answer propaganda from authoritarian regimes? Should America stoop to the same behavior? Or should free societies just hope that their existing news and social media will be a sufficient bulwark against the tide of

falsehood and deliberate confusion?

An intriguing and important U.S. attempt at an answer was formally launched last week. Current Time television, a product of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and the Voice of America, is a 24/7 Russian-language television network based in Prague and aimed at audiences inside Russia as well as the borderlands of the former Soviet Union. The content of Current Time is intended to provide "fair and accurate reporting, serving as a reality check on disinformation that is driving conflict in the region," the network said. In other words, this is an attempt to beam straight talk into countries where state-backed propaganda is far more prevalent.

Russians get a large share of their news from television, and the state has an outsized role in controlling and running most broadcast and cable channels. (The online, independent TV Dozhd is an

exception.) But Russians also flock to social media, where they can see Current Time video, which will also be available on a website or by satellite. Outside Russia, from the Baltics to Central Asia, there are millions more potential viewers, and many of them have had no Russian-language alternatives to Moscow's TV broadcasting. They should welcome the straight talk.

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Both organizations behind Current Time are funded by the U.S. government. The staffs of both VOA and RFE/RL are made up of professional journalists. They do not want to be U.S. propaganda tools, and they envision a television product that is fact-based and unflinching. A key to the success of

Current Time will be whether the reports will be deemed credible by audiences that have been fed a steady diet of anti-Americanism in recent years. Breaking through to these viewers is a worthy goal, but it won't be easy.

The Trump administration can help by keeping its hands off Current Time, avoiding the temptation to turn it into a U.S. propaganda machine. The idea is *not* to replicate well-funded Russian disinformation outlets such as RT and Sputnik. For its part, Congress has for some time been asking for a more robust answer to Russia's information war. This is one attempt, using real news and straight programming and reflecting the highest and best values of our open society. Congress ought to make sure it is properly financed and politically unhindered.



Stengel : Why Saying 'Radical Islamic Terrorism' Isn't Enough

Richard Stengel

They also told us that they did not consider the Islamic State to be Islamic, and its grotesque violence against Muslims proved it. We took a lot of care to describe the Islamic State as a terrorist group that acted in the name of Islam. Sure, behind the scenes, our allies understood better than anyone that the Islamic State was a radical perversion of Islam, that it held a dark appeal to a minority of Sunni Muslims, but it didn't help to call them radical Islamic terrorists.

Now the Trump administration wants to toss out the term "violent extremism" and the rubric we used to fight it. Instead, they are renaming it "countering Islamic extremism," or "countering radical Islamic extremism."

Fine. Abandon the name, but let's not abandon the strategy. First, let's acknowledge that it's working. The Islamic State as a military force,

much less as a caliphate, is on the ropes in Iraq and Syria. The group has not had a military victory in a year and a half. The flow of foreign fighters into Iraq and Syria is down by 90 percent, according to the Defense Department. The liberation of Mosul is on the horizon.

Second, let's recognize the truth of what King Abdullah of Jordan has said over and over: "This is our fight." And by that he meant that it is Islam's fight.

It is a misconception that the Islamic State is focused on fighting us. I led the State Department's agency that sought to counter the Islamic State's propaganda efforts and saw this firsthand. More than 80 percent of the Islamic State's propaganda is in Arabic. Russian is the second-most-used language, while English and French are tied for third. The United States is not the Islamic State's main audience. We have always been the distant enemy.

So, jettison "violent extremism," but let our Arab allies know that "radical Islam" or "Islamic extremism" refers only to the tiny fraction of the world's 1.6 billion Muslims who have embraced violence. Tell them we need their help both on the military battlefield and in the information and intelligence space. And be specific: "We are fighting the Islamic State and Al Qaeda and their *radical Islamic* imitators like Boko Haram." After all, "radical Islam" is only a shade less vague than "violent extremism."

The Islamic State is not just a terrorist group, it is an idea. Its rallying cry is that the West is hostile to Islam and that every good Muslim has a duty to join the caliphate. Most of the group's propaganda was not violent at all. I saw thousands of tweets about how beautiful the caliphate was. There were videos of kids on Ferris wheels and jihadi fighters distributing cotton candy. I remember one tweet showing a

shiny apple and the words, in Arabic, "The caliphate is bountiful."

It is not up to us to say what is Islamic and what is not. Only the voices of mainstream Muslims and independent clerics in Muslim countries can create a narrative that refutes the Islamic State's and offers a more positive alternative. A tweet from the United States government saying the Islamic State is a distortion of Islam is not going to hurt the group. Instead, it will help its recruiting.

That is why the Trump administration's executive order on immigration from seven Muslim-majority nations is deeply counterproductive in the fight against Islamic extremism. It has already been reported that the Islamic State has called it "the blessed ban" because it supports the Islamic State's position that America hates Islam. The clause in the order that gives Christians preferential treatment will be seen

as confirming the Islamic State's apocalyptic narrative that Islam is in a fight to the death against the Christian crusaders. The images of Muslim visitors being turned away at American airports will only inflame those who seek to do us harm.

Two years ago, just before Ramadan, Abu Muhammad al-Adnani, the Islamic State's

spokesman, said: Don't bother coming to the caliphate, but commit acts of violence against the enemy wherever you are. The call was no longer religious or ideological — what the group sought to do was exploit vulnerability. Mr. Adnani was, in effect, saying, "Whatever angers you — whether it's your boss or your neighbors or the police — commit acts of violence in the Islamic State's name."

Thus, the black flag of the Islamic State became a flag of convenience for any complaint. Now the travel ban, despite being blocked by the courts, has given the group ammunition to weaponize grievance here in America. President Trump may become its No. 1 recruiting tool.

The Islamic State will go away, but violent extremism will not. The way

to defeat radical Islamic extremism is to help our Islamic allies and promote the voices of mainstream Islam that reject everything the Islamic State does and stands for. Defeating the Islamic State on the military battlefield is only temporary. Violent extremism — or whatever you call it — must be defeated on the battlefield of ideas.



The Blackwater of Jihad

Paul McLeary | 1 hour ago

Trump's Syria strategy would be a disaster.

The women who could save Mosul

Heavily armed and expertly kitted with body armor and ballistic helmets, the men can be seen defending bunkers, storming buildings, and even posing by whiteboards giving tactical lessons. Though the titles of these YouTube videos are written in Russian Cyrillic, their background music is an a cappella Islamic chant known as a *nashheed*, which is often used by extremist groups in propaganda films. But the men are no ordinary jihadis. They are members of Malhama Tactical, the world's first jihadi private military contractor (PMC) and consulting firm.

Malhama Tactical isn't an enormous military conglomerate like the infamous Blackwater (now named Academi). It consists of 10 well-trained fighters from Uzbekistan and the restive Muslim-majority republics of the Russian Caucasus. But size isn't everything in military consulting, especially in the era of social media. Malhama promotes its battles across online platforms, and the relentless marketing has paid off: The outfit's fighting prowess and training programs are renowned among jihadis in Syria and their admirers elsewhere. It helps that until now the group has specialized its services, focusing on overthrowing Bashar al-Assad's regime and replacing it with a strict Islamic government.

The group's leader is a 24-year-old from Uzbekistan who goes by the name Abu Rofiq (an Arabic pseudonym that means father of Rofiq). Little is known about him other than that he cycles through personal social media accounts rapidly, using fake names and false information to throw off surveillance efforts. In virtually every video and photo posted online, he wears a scarf or balaclava to cover his face from the nose down, leaving visible only his narrow dark eyes and long, somewhat tangled, pitch-black hair. He speaks fluent Russian, but with a slight Uzbek accent.

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Since launching in May 2016, Malhama has grown to do brisk business in Syria, having been contracted to fight, and provide training and other battlefield consulting, alongside groups like the al Qaeda-affiliated Jabhat Fateh al-Sham (formerly known as the Nusra Front) and the Turkistan Islamic Party, a Uighur extremist group from China's restive Xinjiang province. And despite recent rebel setbacks in Syria, including the loss of Aleppo, demand for Malhama Tactical's services in the country is as strong as ever, Abu Rofiq told Foreign Policy in an interview conducted over the messaging app Telegram.

But he is also beginning to think about expanding elsewhere. His group is willing to take work, Abu Rofiq says, wherever Sunni Muslims are oppressed. He cites China and Myanmar as places that would benefit from jihad. He also suggests that Malhama Tactical might go back to its roots, returning to fight in the North Caucasus against the Russian government.

In November, the group placed job ads on Facebook looking for instructors with combat experience to join the group. The ad described the outfit as a "fun and friendly team" looking for recruits who are willing to "constantly engage, develop, and learn" and work with Jabhat Fateh al-Sham. It even specified that instructors were privy to benefits like vacation time and one day off a week from jihad. The wording was more befitting of a Fortune 500 company than a group of extremists fighting in a brutal and bloody war. Jihad went global long before Malhama Tactical, but rarely with so entrepreneurial a spirit.

Left: An undated image of Abu Rofiq performing military drills in Syria. (Photo by Malhama Tactical/ Vkontakte) Right: Abu Rofiq and two other members of Malhama Tactical pose for a selfie. (Photo by Malhama Tactical/ Vkontakte)

Although Malhama Tactical is the first PMC to work exclusively for extremist groups, it's hardly the first foreign PMC to enter the Syrian battlefield. The Syrian war has now lasted for nearly six years and cost the lives of more than 400,000 men, women, and children. And amid the chaos of groups like the Islamic State, the left-wing Kurdish People's Protection Units, and Jabhat Fateh al-Sham vying for territory and influence, the Syrian front has also been a boon for military contractors, who have found work fighting on both sides of the war.

The first iteration of PMCs in Syria was the Slavonic Corps, an ill-fated, Hong Kong-registered company comprising ex-Russian military that briefly worked alongside government forces in 2013, according to a report by the *Interpreter* magazine. But it quickly became clear that they did not have the full support of the Syrian government. First, the Syrian army stole their vehicles, then their paychecks never arrived, and finally a Syrian air force helicopter crashed into the Slavonic Corps convoy after flying too low and running into power lines, injuring one mercenary. The Slavonic Corps' misadventures came to an end when the group disbanded after a defeat by rebels in the desert near the city of Sukhnah in southern Syria in October 2013. The mercenaries returned home to Moscow and were promptly arrested by the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) for their unsanctioned Syrian intervention.

Following the Kremlin's own intervention in Syria in September 2015, nearly 1,500 Russian mercenaries arrived from the "Wagner" group, an infamous and secretive Russian PMC that previously fought alongside Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine, according to an investigation by Sky News. Their mission was to assist the Assad regime, and unlike the Slavonic Corps, Wagner enjoys extensive support from the Russian government. Dmitry Utkin, a former special forces brigade commander of Russia's military intelligence

service, allegedly leads the group. Although little is known about Wagner, it's believed that it mimics Academi's model by operating as an elite infantry unit and relies on the Russian government for support, even flying into Syria on board official military aircraft and training at a Russian special forces base in Molmino in southwestern Russia. Wagner remains in Syria to this day.

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The meeting that led to the creation of ISIS.

The greatest divorce in the Jihadi world

At the same time, a litany of Russian-speaking fighters have fought alongside jihadi groups waging war against the Syrian government. According to the Soufan Group, there are at least 4,700 foreign fighters from the former Soviet Union in Syria, the majority of whom come from the Russian republics of Chechnya and Dagestan. These fighters typically arrive in Syria better equipped and trained than local militants and with years of experience fighting the Russian government in the mountains of Chechnya and Dagestan during the 1990s and 2000s.

These battle-hardened fighters quickly earned respect from local militants, who noticed the Russian speakers took on a much higher death rate than local fighters. They came to populate the ranks of both the Islamic State and Jabhat Fateh al-Sham, as well as various smaller groups, where locals refer to them as *inghimasi*, a term used among jihadis to refer to fighters who plunge into enemy front lines to inflict the maximum amount of casualties with no plan of returning alive. The archetypal *inghimasi* fights until he runs out of ammunition before detonating his suicide vest as his position is overrun.

But while many of their compatriots have become front-line shock troops, the former Soviet fighters of Malhama Tactical go a different

way, carving out their own distinct niche between the worlds of professional PMCs and jihadi groups operating in Syria. They function as consultants, arms dealers, and, on occasion, elite warriors.

Malhama's elite status makes sense against the background of Abu Rofiq's own military career. Abu Rofiq told FP that he had moved as a young man from Uzbekistan to Russia, where, in addition to starting a family, he joined one of the Russian government's most elite military units, a group of airborne troops known as the VDV. In 2013, Abu Rofiq left Russia for Syria, where rather than joining one faction, like most foreign fighters do, he remained independent and moved between them, before founding Malhama in 2016.

Throughout 2016, Malhama Tactical's units trained the hard-line Islamist rebel group Ahrar al-Sham and Jabhat Fateh al-Sham in urban combat to help their fight against the Syrian regime in Aleppo. In one video, trainees practice firing multiple rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) rounds and work as squads to assault a building. In another, a two-man team clears rooms and eliminates targets using grenades and gunfire, all under the watchful eye of Malhama instructors.

This type of training isn't cheap — the RPG rounds Malhama uses in its practice sessions are estimated to cost around \$800 each on the black market — which is why military training for most rebel and jihadi groups in Syria has tended to consist of little more than marching, acrobatics, and basic marksmanship. But for jihadi groups that can afford it, Malhama Tactical's infantry

training is worth the expense. One European military contractor who spoke on the condition of anonymity acknowledged that the group's tactical skills would provide it, and whomever it trains, a distinct advantage on the Syrian battlefield.

Left: A Malhama Tactical member explains how to take apart and assemble an M16 assault rifle in an instructional video. (Photo by Malhama Tactical/ YouTube) Right: A Malhama Tactical member tests the group's manufactured grips for the PKM machine gun. (Photo by Malhama Tactical/ YouTube)

Malhama Tactical's operators have, on occasion, also acted as special forces for different jihadi groups. In September 2016, they embedded with the Turkistan Islamic Party to help it repulse an Assad regime attack in southern Aleppo, according to a rebel activist source familiar with the group. However, Abu Rofiq says his outfit's primary goal is to train other rebel and jihadi groups in combat, rather than fight on the front lines. Abu Rofiq admitted that Malhama also produces equipment for other jihadi groups as needed. Malhama, for example, manufactures accessories for the PKM, an extremely popular Russian-made 7.62 mm machine gun. The vests and grips, widely used in Aleppo during the intense fighting there, have become especially sought after among jihadis.

Malhama Tactical also takes its social media presence very seriously. The group advertises its services through Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and the Russian social media site VKontakte, although the group's account has been suspended. Its Instagram feed has the feel of something produced

by a major corporate gun manufacturer. It features artsy, filtered photos of weapons and fighters taken from multiple angles, interspersed between various high-quality Malhama logo designs. With more than 208,160 views on YouTube, Malhama has a large reach, especially for its size. By comparison, the Free Syrian Army al-Moutasem Brigade, which is 50 times larger and half a year older, has just over 110,000 YouTube views. Everyone from rebels in Syria to Ukrainian soldiers and Russian separatists in Donetsk has commented on the group's posts.

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Central Asia's autocrats welcome the age of Trump.

How to stop a martyr

Malhama's YouTube and Facebook pages also showcase free online guides for jihadis, covering improvised grenade construction, weapon cleaning, room clearing, and urban combat, among other skills. The group's instructors organize online training sessions — on subjects including battlefield first aid; the use of weapons, such as RPG-7s; hand signal systems for urban combat; and introductions on how to conduct ambushes — when in-person assistance and consulting is not possible.

Although Malhama Tactical charges for its services, Abu Rofiq insists he isn't a mercenary. He says his group's motivation transcends money. "Our goal is different; we are fighting for an idea," he said — namely, jihad against Assad.

"We'll see a lot more of this activity going forward in the decades to come," said Sean McFate, an associate professor at the National

Defense University and author of *The Modern Mercenary*, a book about private armies. For McFate, the growth of Malhama Tactical is a natural offshoot of the prolonged Syrian war, but the outfit's mixture of extremist ideology with the privatization of war is a unique and troubling trend. "A jihadi group doing this is a new level because if you're talking about hardcore idealists paying for [military training], then that's a milestone of modern warfare," McFate said.

Abu Rofiq's leadership has also brought him unwanted attention from the Russian government, which views him as a major terrorism threat. On Feb. 7, Russian airstrikes flattened Abu Rofiq's apartment in Idlib, killing his wife, infant son, and several other civilians. Despite initial reports to the contrary, a local source confirmed that the airstrikes missed Abu Rofiq entirely. He had exited his apartment just moments before to help casualties from another nearby bombing.

In either case, Abu Rofiq's jihadi PMC model has already had a significant effect on battles in northern Syria and could soon inspire copycat organizations outside the Middle East. Even if Abu Rofiq is killed and Malhama Tactical is destroyed, he's already shaken up the war against Assad — and maybe even the future of the global military-industrial complex.

Neil Hauer, lead analyst for the SecDev Group in Ottawa, Canada, contributed to this report.

Top Image Credit: Malhama Tactical Vkontakte page/Foreign Policy illustration

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Mexican Presidential Hopeful Wins Support With Trump Stance

Santiago Pérez and Juan Montes

Updated Feb. 12, 2017 11:10 p.m. ET

Leftist presidential hopeful Andrés Manuel López Obrador is gaining momentum in the race to lead Mexico, tapping into a nationalist backlash against the U.S. as President Donald Trump upends bilateral relations.

The former Mexico City mayor, narrowly beaten in Mexico's two previous presidential elections, is now widening his lead in opinion polls ahead of next year's contest.

A poll recently conducted by El Financiero newspaper gave Mr. López Obrador, the founder and leader of Mexico's National Regeneration Movement, 33% voter

support, up 4 percentage points since November and 6 percentage points ahead of former first lady Margarita Zavala, a leading presidential contender within the conservative National Action Party.

On Sunday, Mr. López Obrador, who hasn't officially declared his candidacy, addressed hundreds of Mexicans, migration activists and supporters gathered at Olvera Street Square in downtown Los Angeles, in the first of what he said would be visits to seven U.S. cities over the next two months. There are an estimated 35 million people of Mexican descent in the U.S.

The visit comes as the new U.S. administration ramped up an immigration crackdown and launched deportation raids of undocumented immigrants in

several U.S. cities over the past week. Mr. Trump also has shocked Mexicans with his insistence that Mexico will pay for a new border wall, and his attacks on U.S. companies that open factories in Mexico.

"We must confront this campaign of hate and human-rights violations," Mr. López Obrador said, adding that the crackdown on migration is the result of unrest, unemployment and low income that fueled a nationalist backlash in the U.S. "Low income and unemployment isn't the result of hiring Mexican workers, but of flawed government policies."

Mr. Trump's complaints about the U.S. trade deficit with Mexico are misleading, he said, since most Mexican exports to the U.S. have significant U.S. components. "If

Mexico was unfairly benefitting from [the North American Free Trade Agreement], then Mexico wouldn't suffer economic stagnation and emigration, as it is right now."

In Mexico City earlier Sunday, thousands took to the capital's central thoroughfare to protest the border-wall plan, while criticizing Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto and the ruling PRI party.

Mr. Peña Nieto faces rising political pressure to defend Mexico's national pride, even as both countries get ready to renegotiate Nafta.

Mr. López Obrador's visit to the U.S. appears to be designed to send a clear message: He will stand up to Mr. Trump, who he has called arrogant and autocratic, and

branded his plans as foreign aggression.

"No one believed Mr. Trump's campaign promises at first, but you can now feel the tension," said Israel Robles, a truck driver from Puebla state who migrated to Los Angeles 25 years ago. "The Mexican community in the U.S. is now waking up and beginning to organize as his administration steps up deportations."

Like Mr. Trump, the Mexican politician has cast himself as a political outsider challenging a corrupt and incompetent political "mafia." Both men also share a mistrust of globalization, with Mr. López Obrador calling on Mexico to focus on its domestic economy rather than exports.

AMLO, as he is widely known, "speaks truth to the power and is close to the people," said Salvador Irigoyen, a 21-year-old university student.

The visceral personality of Mr. López Obrador has often been

**THE WALL
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PHOENIX—All but one of about 50 undocumented Mexican migrants at a meeting Saturday indicated they would rather risk detention and long court battles in the U.S. than return to Mexico voluntarily.

The majority of migrants at the meeting in Phoenix, which included Mexican officials, signaled in a show of hands that they were ready to fight deportation in U.S. courts.

"Even if that means detention for weeks?" asked former foreign minister Jorge Castaneda.

"Even if it takes months," shouted one woman. "Even if it takes years," another yelled. "We are here to fight."

Mr. Castaneda and others want Mexico's government to endorse a tough and perhaps risky strategy to battle an expected increase in deportations of their undocumented compatriots in the U.S. by underwriting the migrants' legal struggle in the U.S. court system. By overwhelming already heavily burdened immigration courts, Mr. Castaneda hopes the legal system would break down, bringing deportations to a halt.

Mexico's government hasn't endorsed the strategy, but President Enrique Peña Nieto recently budgeted about \$50 million to the country's 50 consulates to

compared with that of Mr. Trump. "His weakest point is his intolerance and arrogance. Whoever doesn't agree with him is his enemy. He is in the tradition of the Latin American strongman," said Fernando Belaunzarán, a lawmaker with the leftist Democratic Revolution Party, which Mr. Lopez Obrador abandoned in 2012 to create his own party.

Yet this time around, he is also adopting a more moderate tone in the hopes of broadening the appeal of his nationalist movement. He recently appointed Mexican businessman Alfonso Romo to prepare his campaign platform and economic-policy proposals.

"The goal is to generate trust, we don't want to trigger instability nor harm rule of law," said Mr. Romo, the owner of local Vector brokerage firm.

The author of more than a dozen books on Mexican politics and history, Mr. López Obrador has promised to triple growth rates to an annual 6% and broaden welfare

help pay the costs of defending migrants who are in the U.S. illegally and facing deportation.

Some are worried that President Donald Trump has decided to expand the type of undocumented migrants who are at risk of being deported, from the violent or dangerous people that the Obama administration targeted to migrants who have had minor brushes with law enforcement.

Mr. Trump on Sunday called it a "crackdown on illegal criminals," adding in an early morning tweet that "Gang members, drug dealers & others are being removed!"

The Phoenix meeting took place two days after the deportation of a Guadalupe García, a 36-year-old Mexican who lived in the U.S. for 22 years and has two U.S.-born children. Ms. García's removal stoked panic and protests in immigrant communities.

Ms. García was convicted of identity theft, a felony, after being arrested in 2009 with a false Social Security card. She had been released into the community with the requirement of checking in with immigration agents every six months. This week, when she reported to the Immigration and Customs Enforcement office in Phoenix, she was detained and deported to Mexico.

Heightening fears in Hispanic communities across the country, immigration agents made raids and

plans. He also wants to lower Mexico's high dependency on U.S. corn and gasoline imports, goals that have been criticized as unrealistic and protectionist.

Mr. Romo said Mr. López Obrador won't upend economic stability nor interfere with markets should he become a candidate and win the presidency. That includes preserving central bank independence and open capital markets.

One of Mr. López Obrador's policy proposals is a referendum to overturn Mexico's historic 2013 opening of the oil industry to private investment. Mr. Romo said existing contracts wouldn't be canceled, but said they would be renegotiated.

"We can't breach contracts. I don't see a new government imposing itself unilaterally," Mr. Romo added.

Mr. López Obrador has been on a long campaign since 2005, ahead of his first bid for the presidency, which he narrowly lost the following year. He refused to concede defeat

and declared himself Mexico's legitimate president, blocking the capital's Paseo de La Reforma boulevard for weeks with his supporters. In 2012, he lost to Mr. Peña Nieto by 7 percentage points.

Not everyone is convinced the third time will be a charm for the leftist politician.

"What surveys show at this stage is how well-known a politician is, because there are no formal presidential candidates yet," said Ulises Beltrán, head of local polling firm BGC. "Mr. López Obrador always begins the race up high because of this factor, and also because of his populist rhetoric. But then his lead tends to narrow as the election nears."

—Robbie Whelan contributed to this article.

Write to Juan Montes at juan.montes@wsj.com

Mexican Migrants Signal They Prefer Detention to Deportation

José de Córdoba

arrested hundreds of migrants last week in a five-day enforcement "surge" in cities which included Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles and New York, ICE said.

An ICE official said the raids were on par with similar operations the agency has done in the past in southern California.

"This is a real threat," said Ruben Reyes, a Phoenix immigration lawyer who took part in the meeting. "We are in an emergency."

The Phoenix meeting, to raise awareness about the situation of illegal immigrants in the U.S., was hosted by activists, business groups and journalists, mostly from Mexico.

Margarita Acosta, an illegal immigrant who attended the meeting, said she and her family lived in fear since Mr. Trump's victory. "We live in the shadows," she said. "It seems as if we are happy, but we live in terror about what will become of us."

How Mexico will deal with the ramped-up return of its citizens has become a major issue between the two countries since Mr. Trump's inauguration. The newly elected U.S. president's plans to increase deportations of undocumented Mexicans, renegotiate the countries' free-trade deal and build a border wall at Mexico's expense have sparked a nationalist backlash south of the border.

Anti-Trump demonstrations were scheduled for Sunday in Mexico

City and more than two dozen other cities across the country. Also Sunday, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the leftist populist who leads in the polls for Mexico's 2018 presidential race, is kicking off a tour of U.S. cities with a rally in Los Angeles. Mr. López Obrador has urged the Mexican government to denounce the U.S. treatment of migrants in the United Nations.

At the Phoenix meeting, Armando Ríos Piter, a senator of the leftist Party of the Democratic Revolution, drew cheers when he called on the Mexican government to take a harder line with the Trump administration on its treatment of the migrants and other issues.

"Mexico's government was silent when Trump started to threaten Mexicans, and that's where things stand," he said. He called for Mexico to cease antinarcotics and antiterrorism cooperation with the U.S.

Mr. Ríos Piter also urged Mexico to pressure the U.S. by buying food such as yellow corn from other suppliers. "We should be very clear that we won't buy not one ton of corn from the U.S.," he said. "The whole Corn Belt voted for Trump, and we bought \$1.6 billion of corn last year. Let's stop it."

Graco Ramírez, the president of the Mexican governors' association, said the governors planned to lobby their U.S. counterparts to let them know "just how much they will hurt

their own economies if they support Donald Trump's policies."

But not all legislators were on board with those calling for a tough negotiating posture. "If we bet on confrontation without first trying to convince, then we are making a big mistake," said Gabriela Cuevas Barron, from the opposition

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Robbie Whelan

Updated Feb. 12, 2017 11:46 a.m. ET

President Donald Trump's threats to rewrite the North American Free Trade Agreement and build a wall at the U.S. southern border are causing a reckoning for the Mexican economy before a single cinder block has been set or trade negotiation scheduled.

Mexican output growth is projected to slow to a near halt in 2017; inward investment has tumbled; the peso is down; interest rates and inflation are rising; and the nation's business and political leaders are asking whether they need a new economic model less dependent upon their northern neighbor.

Before the U.S. presidential election in November, Citibanamex forecast that Mexico's gross domestic product would grow by 2.3% in 2017. Since then the bank has twice lowered growth expectations, first to 1.8% and more recently to a paltry 1.2%, in part because of uncertainty over trade and investment relations with the U.S.

Surveys show rising pessimism among businesses. Citibanamex predicts gross fixed investment in Mexico will contract by 0.8% this year, after rising 4.6% in 2015. In the first nine months of 2016, foreign direct investment fell by 24% compared with a year earlier, according to the Bank of Mexico, as businesses that rely on cross-border commerce grew spooked by campaign criticism of free-trade deals even before the U.S. election. Since 1999, the U.S. has accounted for 46% of all foreign direct investment in Mexico, with Spain as the next largest single country investor at 3%,

conservative National Action Party, who heads the Mexican Senate's foreign relations committee.

About 80% of Mexico's exports go to the U.S., she said. "We should negotiate more forcefully, but we don't have a blank check," she said.

according to Mexico's Economy Ministry.

"The key word for 2017 is uncertainty," said Sergio Luna, chief economist for Citibanamex. "Manufacturers are going to prefer to have more clarity before they make any investments."

Another drag on growth has been higher interest rates: Mexico's central bank has raised interest rates six times over the last year in response to a weakening peso and concerns that the currency's decline is pushing inflation higher. Economists at PNC Financial Services Group warn that recession is likely in 2017.

Angst over the longer-term is tied to Mexico's dependence on exports, which account for a third of its economic activity. Some 80% of those exports go to the U.S.

"Any economy, in order to be healthy, has to be based on two engines of growth: the domestic market and the external market," said Economy Minister Ildefonso Guajardo in an interview in his Mexico City office Tuesday. "What do you do to strengthen the external engine? You have to diversify trade."

To that end, Mexico's leaders have recently sped up negotiations to secure expanded trade deals with the European Union and opened talks with Argentina and Brazil about the possibility of buying corn, wheat and soybeans from South American producers. That would ease their dependence on U.S. grain—especially advantageous in case of a trade war.

Some in Mexico's export industries see a silver lining in the decline of the peso, which has lost 16% of its

In the meeting, the migrants urged the Mexican legislators to make deep reforms at home, which they said they were forced to leave because its widespread corruption, violence and terrible education system killed economic opportunity.

"In Mexico, we don't have any opportunity, we don't have any

education, and you can't get a job unless you have connections," said Maria, a woman who wouldn't give her last name. "Here my son graduated from university. If I lived in Mexico, I would be selling chewing gum in the street."

Trump's Harder Line on Mexico Casts Shadow on Long-Term Growth Picture

value against the dollar since the beginning of May. Any border tax imposed by the U.S., the thinking goes, will be met with a devaluation that will be more than enough to keep Mexican goods competitive.

"Whatever tariff Trump puts on Mexican products, the peso is going to devalue enough to accommodate it," says Doug Donahue, who runs Entrada Group, a San Antonio-based company that offers business services and rents industrial parks to Mexican exporters, 40% of whom are automotive suppliers.

But the weak currency has a downside: Annual inflation jumped to 4.72% last month, the highest level in more than four years. Rising inflation is likely to prompt the central bank to keep raising interest rates, which crimps domestic demand.

One school of thought holds that Mr. Trump's protectionist stance might be the reality check Mexico needs to turn inward and invest in bolstering the domestic economy.

Nafta's critics south of the border point to the fact that Mexico's annual GDP growth since the deal took effect has averaged 2.6%, compared with 4.2% during the previous two decades. Poverty levels have remained roughly the same as before the free-trade era.

And despite recent reforms that opened up the energy and telecommunications industry and successfully attracted billions in foreign investment, Mexico faces significant barriers and risks associated with relying more on its domestic market, including high rates of organized crime, weak rule of law, a lackluster education system and political corruption.

In order to focus on internal growth, "there's a stronger need than ever for Mexico to keep at it with domestic reforms," says Christopher Wilson, a Mexico expert at the Wilson Center, a policy think tank in Washington.

Monica DeBolle of the Peterson Institute for International Economics points out that 60% of Mexican workers still work in the underground economy—where workers avoid taxes—despite government programs aimed at helping them access banking services and the social safety net.

"Mexico's consumers are very hand-to-mouth," Ms. DeBolle said. "Going from an economy that is export-led to a domestic-led economy would be really hard."

Others, including many of Mexico's top industrialists, believe the country's best chance is to divert Mr. Trump's attention to China, with which the U.S. ran a trade deficit of \$347 billion in goods alone last year.

Eduardo Garza T. Fernández, president of Grupo Frisa Industrias, a steel manufacturer that exported roughly half of its \$500 million in sales last year to the U.S., says Mexican producers should buy more of their supplies from within North America, rather than Asia, to reduce the deficit and sidestep Mr. Trump's ire. The idea is central to Mexico's approach to renegotiating Nafta.

"Things are going to be more expensive for Mexican companies," Mr. Garza said, "but there has to be more integration."

Write to Robbie Whelan at robbie.whelan@wsj.com

The New York Times

Editorial : Australia's Grim Toll in the Church's Sex Abuse Scandal

The Editorial Board

Cardinal George Pell after meeting with victims and their families in Rome last year. Riccardo De Luca/Associated Press

The global scale of the Catholic clergy's sexual abuse scandal becomes harder for the Vatican to deny with each shocking national inquiry. The latest, from Australian government investigators, found that from 1980 to 2015 there were 4,444 victims of abuse and at least 1,880 suspected to be abusers,

most of them priests and religious brothers.

Through this period, the haunting subtext is the culpability of bishops who did nothing about the crimes. The abused children were ignored or punished while priests who raped

children were protected by supervisors.

"Secrecy prevailed as did cover-ups," said Gail Furness, senior counsel to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The inquiry, which began six years ago, has been

meticulous, with hearings investigating 116 institutions, including government agencies responsible for children's welfare.

The findings show harrowing patterns of abuse. Forty percent of religious brothers from the order of St. John of God were accused of sexually assaulting their wards in residences where some of the most vulnerable youngsters were housed. Of all the chilling statistics, one stands out: 33 years is the average time it took for victims to overcome decades of personal despair and go

to authorities with complaints. And many might never have filed complaints but for the emergence of other victims as the scandal grew churchwide in the wake of news media investigations.

The Australian inquiry underlines the question of whether the Vatican will ever discipline offending bishops. One of Pope Francis's confidants, Cardinal George Pell of Australia, who is now the Vatican treasurer, testified last year before the government inquiry. "I'm not here to defend the indefensible," the

cardinal declared. He termed the abuses a "catastrophe" for the church, but denied that he knew of priests abusing children during decades of work at his country's diocesan and parish levels.

In late December, Pope Francis called for "zero tolerance" by bishops of the sexual abuse of children and spoke of "the sin of covering up and denial." Earlier, in 2015, Pope Francis approved the creation of a special tribunal to investigate offending bishops who routinely shielded pedophile priests

and paid hush money to victims. But Francis stirred skepticism when he dropped the tribunal plan last year and assigned the task to the Vatican bureaucracy.

The devastating findings in Australia raise yet again the question: Will the church faithful ever see diocesan leaders brought to account for protecting the abusers and not the children they victimized?

ETATS-UNIS



Mike Flynn's Position as National Security Adviser Grows Tenuous in White House

Carol E. Lee, Shane Harris and Peter Nicholas

Updated Feb. 13, 2017 12:42 a.m. ET

WASHINGTON—The White House is reviewing whether to retain National Security Adviser Mike Flynn amid a furor over his contacts with Russian officials before President Donald Trump took office, an administration official said Sunday.

Mr. Flynn has apologized to White House colleagues over the episode, which has created a rift with Vice President Mike Pence and diverted attention from the administration's message to his own dealings, the official said.

"He's apologized to everyone," the official said of Mr. Flynn.

Mr. Trump's views toward the matter aren't clear. In recent days, he has privately told people the controversy surrounding Mr. Flynn is unwelcome, after he told reporters on Friday he would "look into" the disclosures.

But Mr. Trump also has said he has confidence in Mr. Flynn and wants to "keep moving forward," a person familiar with his thinking said. Close Trump adviser Steve Bannon had dinner with Mr. Flynn over the weekend, according to another senior administration official, and Mr. Bannon's view is to keep him in the position but "be ready" to let him go, the first administration official said.

Mr. Trump's son-in-law and senior adviser, Jared Kushner, as of Sunday evening hadn't yet weighed in, the official said.

Mr. Flynn initially said that in a conversation Dec. 29 with the Russian ambassador, Sergey Kislyak, he didn't discuss sanctions imposed that day by the outgoing Obama administration, which were levied in retaliation for alleged Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election. Mr. Flynn now concedes that he did, administration officials said, after transcripts of his phone calls show as much. He also admits he spoke with the ambassador more than once on Dec. 29, despite weeks of the Trump team's insisting it was just one phone call, officials said.

Mr. Pence, in television interviews, vouched for Mr. Flynn, based on a private conversation, and he was angered he repeated information publicly that turned out to be untrue, administration officials said. Messrs. Pence and Flynn spoke twice on Friday, one official said.

If Mr. Flynn had promised any easing of sanctions once Mr. Trump took office, he may have violated a law that prohibits private citizens from engaging in foreign policy, legal experts have said. That would mark the first instance of a person close to Mr. Trump found to have inappropriate links to Russia, a subject U.S. officials have been investigating for months.

Mr. Flynn's calls to the Russian envoy came amid a push by Mr. Trump more broadly to warm U.S. ties to Moscow, a tenet of the new administration's foreign policy. Mr. Flynn has more staunchly advocated Mr. Trump's views than have some of the president's top cabinet officials, which could complicate any White House decision to cut ties with the security adviser.

A senior White House policy adviser, Stephen Miller, declined on NBC Sunday to say whether the White House maintained confidence in Mr. Flynn, a retired general, in the wake of questions over his phone calls.

"That's the question that I think you should ask the president, the question you should ask Reince [Priebus], the chief of staff. I'm here today as a policy adviser," Mr. Miller said.

Mr. Priebus is leading the review. Some administration officials are hopeful Mr. Flynn would resign on his own, a person familiar with the matter said. Some people close to Mr. Trump already are speculating on possible successors, including retired Lt. Gen. Keith Kellogg, who advised Mr. Trump during the campaign and who is chief of staff of the National Security Council.

U.S. intelligence services routinely intercept and monitor conversations with Russian diplomats, officials have said. The transcripts of the conversations don't show Mr. Flynn made any sort of promise to lift the sanctions once Mr. Trump took office, the officials said. Rather, they show Mr. Flynn making more general comments about relations between the two countries improving under Mr. Trump, people familiar with them said.

Jettisoning Mr. Flynn might end one controversy, but would potentially feed perceptions of a disorganized White House, some people close to Mr. Trump said. That's one reason the White House might be hesitant to cut ties to Mr. Flynn, they added.

Mr. Flynn's travails come amid turmoil in the NSC, where some longtime career officials have asked

to leave their posts and return to their home agencies earlier than planned, and others say their inability to influence policy decisions has been demoralizing. NSC officials say there is no process in place by which decisions are run past Council professionals, and some said discussions about policy decisions in their areas of focus have excluded them.

At early NSC meetings, career staffers asked Mr. Flynn basic questions such as what Mr. Trump means when he calls for an "America First" policy. Their search for guidance has come amid what they describe as a bewildering series of tweets and ad hoc statements by the president.

As pressure has built on White House officials, Democrats on Sunday pressed for an independent investigation into Mr. Flynn's conversations with Russia's ambassador.

"Either he was lying about discussing it or he forgot," said Sen. Al Franken (D., Minn.), speaking Sunday on CNN. "You don't want a guy in either of those scenarios to be in that position."

Mr. Franken called for an independent investigation into the Trump campaign's and the administration's ties to Russia, citing allegations of Kremlin interference in the 2016 U.S. election and Mr. Trump's refusal to release his tax returns, as candidates have done since the 1970s.

"We don't know what [Mr. Trump] owes Russia," Mr. Franken said. "We don't know how many Russian oligarchs have invested in his business."

On Saturday, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D., Calif.) tweeted, "Gen. Flynn should be suspended and have his intelligence clearance revoked."

Sens. Lindsey Graham (R., S.C.) and Sheldon Whitehouse (D., R.I.),

who lead the Senate Judiciary Committee's subpanel on crime and terrorism, already have launched an investigation of Russia's efforts to influence the U.S. election.

The Wall Street Journal reported in January that U.S.

counterintelligence agents had investigated multiple communications Mr. Flynn had with Russian officials.

—Donna Borak contributed to this article.

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White House Rocked by Flynn's Overtures to Russia

Paul McLeary | 1 hour ago

Bombshell revelations about National Security Advisor Michael Flynn's potentially illegal conversations with the Russian ambassador have sullied his credibility, jeopardized his status in the White House, and fueled suspicions that the Trump administration is intent on appeasing a resurgent Moscow.

The episode — in which Flynn reportedly chatted with the Russian ambassador about the possibility of lifting sanctions on Moscow before President Donald Trump took office — reinforces growing concerns among lawmakers in Congress and European allies about Trump's apparently unshakable affinity for Russian President Vladimir Putin.

With Flynn already mired in a power struggle with the president's chief strategist, Stephen Bannon, and other officials, the embarrassing incident threatens to further undercut his influence and bolster Bannon's role.

Flynn had insisted he never discussed sanctions in a series of phone calls in late December with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak. But after numerous officials told the *Washington Post* otherwise, Flynn walked back his strenuous denials. His spokesman told the *Post* that while Flynn "had no recollection of discussing sanctions, he couldn't be certain that the topic never came up."

Despite the gravity of the allegations, the White House — which usually does not hesitate to hit back at unfavorable reporting — did not rush to Flynn's defense on Friday.

After questions were raised last month about Flynn's phone calls, Vice President Mike Pence had vehemently denied any sanctions talk had taken place. But on Friday, the vice president's office said Pence had made those comments to CBS News based on Flynn's own account of the phone calls.

The question now is whether "Flynn will continue to stand by his previous statements and whether the White House will continue to stand by Flynn," said Susan Hennessey, a fellow at the

Brookings Institution who worked as an attorney in the National Security Agency's Office of General Counsel.

It is unclear what the leaks might mean for Flynn, who was on hand at the White House for the visit of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Friday. President Trump was not asked about the reports on Flynn during a brief press conference, where he only took two questions from the American press. In theory, Flynn could face potential charges for violating the Logan Act, which bars private citizens from negotiating with foreign governments on issues affecting the U.S. government, though no one has ever been convicted under the law that dates back to 1799.

The White House did not respond to requests for comment.

The timing of Flynn's phone conversations raised red flags, because the calls came just as the outgoing Obama administration was preparing to impose a new round of sanctions on Russia over its meddling in the U.S. election, including hacking into the emails of campaign aides to Trump's Democratic rival, Hillary Clinton.

As a career military intelligence officer, who once ran the Defense Intelligence Agency, Flynn should have been aware that the country's spy agencies would have been eavesdropping on any phone call from the Russian ambassador and that intelligence officials would have had access to the transcript, former senior officials said.

In his phone calls to the Russian ambassador, Flynn reportedly made clear that ties with Moscow would improve under Trump's watch, after a rocky period during the Obama administration.

Democrats expressed outrage over the allegations, and the ranking Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, Rep. Adam Schiff, demanded Flynn resign if the media reports proved accurate.

"The allegation that Gen. Flynn, while President Obama was still in office, secretly discussed with Russia's ambassador ways to undermine the sanctions levied against Russia for its interference in the presidential election on Donald

Trump's behalf, raises serious questions of legality and fitness for office," Schiff said in a statement.

"If he did so, and then he and other administration officials misled the American people, his conduct would be all the more pernicious, and he should no longer serve in this administration or any other."

Other Democrats, alarmed by accusations that Flynn discussed the lifting of sanctions and then lied about doing so, urged House and Senate intelligence committees to accelerate their investigations into potential ties between Trump's top aides and the Russian government.

"I'm hoping that today's news will provide even greater impetus for a bipartisan, no holds-barred investigation," Rep. Mike Quigley, a Democratic member of the House Intelligence Committee, told Foreign Policy. "There's a little more urgency because they've pushed the envelope. These concerns go way beyond just mistakes."

Both committees are currently carrying out bipartisan investigations into Russian interference in the 2016 presidential campaign, including "any intelligence regarding links between Russia and individuals associated with political campaigns," the chair and ranking member of the House Intelligence Committee announced last month.

Apart from accounts of Flynn's phone conversations with the Russian ambassador, U.S. intelligence officials continue to collect information related to possible links between Trump's campaign and Russian representatives. CNN reported Friday that some details of a dossier compiled by a former British intelligence agent have been corroborated by U.S. investigators, giving them greater confidence in the dossier's overall credibility. None of the new information related to salacious allegations in the dossier, according to CNN, and officials said they are still seeking to verify other elements of the report.

Republicans initially refused to expand the scope of the investigation to Trump's aides, but when Democrats threatened to boycott, the two sides came to an agreement. Still, Democrats remain

worried that Republicans could slow-roll the investigation.

"There's a concern that this will take too long and we won't get the information we need," Quigley said.

Sen. Mark Warner (D-Va.), the ranking Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee, said the reports of Flynn's phone calls underscored "the gravity and the urgency" of its probe into Russian interference in the 2016 election.

Flynn reportedly is under investigation as part of ongoing inquiries into the Trump team's contacts and ties to Russia. The FBI is investigating Paul Manafort, Trump's former campaign chief; Carter Page, a former advisor to the campaign; and Roger Stone, a Republican political operative and longtime supporter of Trump.

In addition to an unlikely Logan Act indictment, Flynn could face charges based on other criminal statutes that prohibit a U.S. citizen from taking direction or providing assurances to agents of a foreign power. But legal experts said it was highly unlikely Flynn would be indicted — unless he lied to any federal investigators. It remains unclear if investigators have interviewed Flynn.

Retired Gen. James Cartwright was convicted of making false statements to federal investigators related to his role in leaking information to the *New York Times* about a U.S. cyberattack on Iran's nuclear program. Former President Barack Obama pardoned Cartwright before he left office.

The revelations about Flynn only serve to fuel deep disquiet in Congress and among career diplomats and intelligence officers about the Trump administration's persistent overtures to Russia without clear demands for concessions in return. Trump has repeatedly flirted with the idea of lifting sanctions on Russia in exchange for better relations in general, or "cooperation" in the fight against the Islamic State.

As Russia already claims to be targeting the Islamic State while it props up Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria, it's not clear what Washington would be getting in exchange for lifting an array of

sanctions that were imposed for Moscow's seizure of Crimea and its backing of separatists in eastern Ukraine.

Some experts and former officials with contacts in Washington and Moscow predict the Trump White House will strike a deal in coming months that would remove sanctions in return for Russian assistance in the fight against the

Islamic State in Syria and in places like Libya, where Moscow wants to extend its influence.

That's fueling consternation in Congress. This week six Republicans and six Democrats proposed a bill to require a review of any measure to lift sanctions on Russia.

"There are some, including in the administration, who believe that

maybe we can do a deal with Vladimir Putin where he helps us fight against ISIS and in return we lift sanctions," Republican Sen. Marco Rubio said in a speech on the Senate floor on Wednesday, using an alternate acronym for the Islamic State.

The idea was unrealistic and problematic, said the Florida senator, and would play into

Russia's effort to have a veto over U.S. influence across Eastern Europe or other potential spheres of influence.

"Why do we have to do a deal with Vladimir Putin to fight ISIS? He already claims that he is.... Why would we then have to cut a deal to encourage him to do what he claims to already be doing?"

POLITICO Trump reviews top White House staff after tumultuous start

By Josh Dawsey
and Alex

Lsenstadt

President Donald Trump, frustrated over his administration's rocky start, is complaining to friends and allies about some of his most senior aides — leading to questions about whether he is mulling an early staff shakeup.

Trump has told several people that he is particularly displeased with national security adviser Michael Flynn over reports that he had top-secret discussions with Russian officials and lied about it. The president, who spent part of the weekend dealing with the Flynn controversy, has been alarmed by reports from top aides that they don't trust Flynn. "He thinks he's a problem," said one person familiar with the president's thinking. "I would be worried if I was General Flynn."

Story Continued Below

Yet Trump's concern goes beyond his embattled national security adviser, according to conversations with more than a dozen people who have spoken to Trump or his top aides. He has mused aloud about press secretary Sean Spicer, asking specific questions to confidants about how they think he's doing behind the podium. During conversations with Spicer, the president has occasionally expressed unhappiness with how his press secretary is talking about some matters — sometimes pointing out even small things he's doing that he doesn't like.

Others who've talked with the president have begun to wonder about the future of Chief of Staff Reince Priebus. Several Trump campaign aides have begun to draft lists of possible Priebus replacements, with senior White House aides Kellyanne Conway and Rick Dearborn and lobbyist David Urban among those mentioned. Gary Cohn, a Trump economic adviser who is close with senior adviser Jared Kushner, has also been the subject of chatter.

For now, Priebus remains in control as chief of staff. He was heavily involved in adviser Stephen Miller's preparation for appearances on Sunday morning talk shows, which drew praise from the president.

If there is a single issue where the president feels his aides have let him down, it was the controversial executive order on immigration. The president has complained to at least one person about "how his people didn't give him good advice" on rolling out the travel ban and that he should have waited to sign it instead of "rushing it like they wanted me to." Trump has also wondered why he didn't have a legal team in place to defend it from challenges.

The discussions come at a tense time for the Trump White House, which has endured a tumultuous start. The president, who can be hard on his staff, is known for orchestrating shake-ups when things aren't going right. His campaign had several leadership changes, and such decisions, such as his late-summer elevation of Conway and Stephen Bannon, are often made by gut.

The White House did not respond to requests for comment.

While Trump is unlikely to make any immediate staff moves, senior administration officials say, he has ramped up his contact with people he trusts outside the White House and has expressed concerns about how things are going. The president is turning to longtime New York friends like investor Stephen Schwarzman for advice and is relying more on Cohn, who worked at Goldman Sachs before joining the Trump team.

"He only asks you a lot of questions when he's unhappy," one person who recently talked to Trump and knows him well said. "If he thinks things are going well, he just tells you how well it's going."

"There will definitely be a change by the end of the summer, if not sooner," this person added.

This weekend, Trump had at a 30-minute meeting at his Mar-a-Lago

resort with Chris Ruddy, a longtime friend who is chief executive of Newsmax, a conservative website.

Ruddy, who discussed an array of topics with Trump as he sipped whiskey and the president drank Diet Coke, said changes could be afoot. "He's always been successful and had strong people around him, and he's in the process of figuring out who those people are," he said.

After the meeting, Ruddy made an appearance on CNN's "Reliable Sources," where he complained about Priebus and called for his ouster. Ruddy said that his remarks were warmly received by others in the administration, but that he hadn't given the president a heads-up beforehand.

"A number of high-ranking Trump administration officials sent me a text praising my performance," Ruddy said. "If they don't get someone of a different skill set, they're going to continue having problems."

Late Sunday, Ruddy said he had spoken with the chief of staff, who had briefed him on his plans for the White House. Ruddy said he came away from the conversation confident that things would improve.

Adding to the intrigue: Sources say the president is planning to have lunch this week with New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, a longtime confidant who is among those mentioned as having a possible future White House role. While Christie, who has a chilly relationship with Kushner, is seen as unlikely to take a White House job, the lunch has raised eyebrows among some Trump aides. Christie had earlier been offered several roles in the administration but turned them down.

Some Trump friends note that he is adjusting to a new reality — and learning that running a business is a lot different than running the White House. The Washington staff he runs is larger and more complex than the one he oversaw in his business.

"There's a reality check of what's happening, that everything President Trump does, there's going to be a protest and a lawsuit filed," said New York Rep. Chris Collins.

Others point out that, at this early stage, things still need time to settle.

"I think they're getting their sea legs more and more and some of the growing pains will go away in time," said New York Rep. Tom Reed, a top Trump ally. "He's a loyal guy, but he's from the private sector, and he'll want to see results. As long as he sees progress, I think he'll keep his current staff around for the foreseeable future."

White House aides say it can be hard to know what will make Trump happy, or what will anger him. Some aides chafed at Conway's decision to plug Ivanka Trump's merchandise line on television, a move that drew widespread criticism, including from ethics experts who said she was walking a dangerous line. But, far from hurting her internally, Trump liked the appearance, and her standing has increased in his eyes, said several people close to the president.

Yet, as the notoriously image-conscious president endures days of negative headlines, some aides have begun to worry. One person who spoke with the president recently said he seemed to be looking for someone to point his finger at.

"You're not going to see Trump come out and say I was wrong," this person said. "If you're waiting on him to take the blame, you're going to be waiting a long time."

Yet at the same time, Trump has told friends and he wants his Cabinet members to stay the course no matter the accusations lobbed against them, and that shaking up his staff could be seen as an admission of failure.

Douglas Brinkley, a presidential historian who recently met with Trump, said the presidency had

been "off to the rockiest start that I can remember."

"Everything he rolls out is done so badly," Brinkley said. "It reeks of

being short-staffed and not having a true pecking order of production from the White House. They're just releasing comments, tweets and policies willy-nilly. It's been a very

convulsive and confusing first few weeks, but nevertheless it's been salad days if you care about Republican policies."

**The
Washington
Post**

As Flynn falls under growing pressure over Russia contacts, Trump remains silent

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Ed-OKeefe/147995121918931>

White House national security adviser Michael Flynn is under increasing political pressure and risks losing the confidence of some colleagues following reports that he misled senior administration officials about his discussion of sanctions with a Russian envoy shortly before President Trump took office.

As White House aides scramble to get their stories straight about the exact nature of those communications and as Democrats call for Flynn's security clearance to be suspended or revoked, neither Trump nor his advisers have publicly defended Flynn or stated unequivocally that he has the president's confidence.

Privately, some administration officials said that Flynn's position has weakened and support for him has eroded largely because of a belief that he was disingenuous about Russia and therefore could not be fully trusted going forward.

"The knives are out for Flynn," said one administration official who, like others interviewed for this report, spoke on the condition of anonymity in order to speak candidly.

On Sunday, the top White House aide dispatched to represent the administration on the political talk shows pointedly declined to defend Flynn.

(Bastien Inzaurrealde/The Washington Post)

White House senior policy adviser Stephen Miller on Feb. 12 declined to say if President Trump still trusts national security adviser Michael Flynn. Meanwhile, Democrats scolded Flynn after The Washington Post reported that Flynn discussed sanctions with Russia's ambassador to the U.S. during the transition of power. Democratic lawmakers scold national security adviser Michael Flynn for his alleged discussion of sanctions with Russia's ambassador to the U.S. (Video: Bastien Inzaurrealde/Photo: Jabin Botsford/The Washington Post)

Asked on NBC's "Meet the Press" whether the president had confidence in Flynn, senior policy adviser Stephen Miller said he did not know.

"It's not for me to tell you what's in the president's mind," Miller told moderator Chuck Todd. He added that his colleagues at the White House "did not give me anything to say" about Flynn.

When ABC News anchor George Stephanopoulos asked Miller about Flynn's interactions with Sergey Kislyak, Russia's ambassador to the United States, Miller said, "I don't have any news to make ... today on this point."

The Washington Post revealed last week that Flynn and Kislyak had discussed U.S. sanctions against Russia in the month before Trump's inauguration.

The Post's finding, confirmed by nine current and former U.S. officials, contrasted with the assurances made publicly by Vice President Pence and other top administration officials that Flynn never talked about sanctions with Russian officials.

[National security adviser Flynn discussed sanctions with Russian ambassador despite denials]

Based on Flynn's private assurances, Pence, White House Chief of Staff Reince Priebus and White House press secretary Sean Spicer stated publicly that Flynn never discussed sanctions with Kislyak.

Pence spoke to Flynn twice on Friday — once face to face and once by telephone, according to an administration official who declined to characterize the contents of those discussions.

"Flynn is running out of friends, no question," a different administration official said. "The broad consensus in the White House is that he lied. The vice president feels like he lied. In a position that needs to be no drama, it's nonstop drama. I would be very surprised if he lasts much longer."

New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie (R), an informal adviser to Trump, called on Flynn to "clear up" what happened with Trump and Pence, but he stopped short of accusing him of wrongdoing.

"I think that's the obligation of General Flynn, his national security adviser, to have those type of candid conversations with the president and the vice president," Christie said on CNN. "And then they will act as they see fit, given all the circumstances."

Over the weekend at Trump's Mar-a-Lago Club in Palm Beach, Fla., the president privately voiced frustration with Flynn and the political baggage he is hanging on the White House, according to two people familiar with his comments.

Spicer denied that Trump criticized Flynn to anyone at the club and called assertions to the contrary "fake news."

People close to Flynn said he feels confident in his position despite the swirling controversy. He flew to Florida this weekend with the president along with other National Security Council officials to engage with his Japanese counterparts during Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit.

Furthermore, people in Trump's orbit cautioned that the president was unlikely to fire Flynn because doing so would amount to an admission of guilt and misjudgment in the face of media scrutiny and would also demonstrate chaos early in his presidency.

The doubts about the national security adviser come as Trump faces his first significant provocation from a U.S. adversary overseas. North Korea fired a ballistic missile over the weekend, a move suspected by some experts as designed to serve as a test of components of an intercontinental ballistic missile capable of reaching the United States.

Trump responded on Saturday night in a joint appearance with Abe at Mar-a-Lago, where he reassured his Japanese counterpart that the United States fully supported Japan.

Flynn, a retired lieutenant general and a decorated intelligence officer, met Trump in late 2015 to offer advice about his campaign and signed on with Trump the following year. He won Trump's approval during the general election with his willingness to travel regularly and deliver fiery stump speeches trashing Trump's Democratic opponent, Hillary Clinton.

[He was one of the most respected intel officers of his generation. Now he's leading 'Lock her up' chants.]

Democratic leaders have called for investigations into the Flynn's contact with Russian officials and for Trump to suspend and revoke Flynn's security clearance.

"President Trump's kowtowing to Vladimir Putin is endangering our national security and emboldening a dangerous tyrant," House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) said Saturday.

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

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Rep. Elijah E. Cummings (Md.), the top Democrat on the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, said Sunday on ABC News that suspending Flynn's clearance would be "an appropriate action."

Trump has not yet issued a comment about Flynn, either on Twitter or in one of his brief appearances before journalists over the weekend. Aboard Air Force One on Friday, reporters asked Trump about The Post's report on Flynn's discussion of sanctions and the president claimed he did not know about it, even though it had by then become a major story across cable news.

"I don't know about that. I haven't seen it," Trump said during a flight to Florida from Washington. "What report is that? I haven't seen that. I'll look into that."

Greg Miller contributed to this report.

TIME

White House Shies Away From Publicly Defending Michael Flynn

Jill Colvin and Julie Pace / AP

(WASHINGTON) — Embattled national security adviser Michael Flynn's fate as one of President Donald Trump's senior aides is uncertain following reports that he discussed U.S. sanctions with a Russian envoy before Trump's inauguration.

A top White House official sidestepped repeated chances Sunday to publicly defend him. The president, who spent the weekend at his private club in Florida, has yet to comment on Flynn's status. Nor has Vice President Mike Pence, who previously denied that Flynn had discussed sanctions with Sergey Kislyak, the Russian ambassador to the U.S.

Pence and Flynn spoke twice on Friday, according to an administration official.

Trump has told associates he is troubled by the situation, but he has not said whether he plans to ask Flynn to step down, according to a person who spoke with him recently. Flynn was a loyal Trump supporter during the campaign, but he is viewed skeptically by some in the administration's national

security circles, in part because of his ties to Russia.

The administration official and both people with ties to Trump spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss private conversations.

Stephen Miller, Trump's top policy adviser, skirted the issue on several Sunday news shows, saying it was not his place to weigh in on the "sensitive matter" or to say whether the president retains confidence in Flynn.

Read More: *The White House Keeps Tripping Up on the Truth. President Trump Doesn't Seem to Mind*

Several other White House officials did not respond Sunday to questions about whether Trump had confidence in his national security adviser. Their silence appeared to reflect some uncertainty about the views of the president, who is known to quickly change his mind.

On Friday, The Washington Post reported that Flynn addressed sanctions against Russia in a call with Kislyak. The report contradicted repeated denials from

Trump officials, including Pence, who vouched for Flynn in a televised interview.

Flynn has since told administration officials that sanctions may have come up in the calls, which coincided with the Obama administration slapping penalties on Russia for election-related hacking.

New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, who led Trump's transition planning before the election, said Flynn would have to explain his conflicting statements about his conversations with Kislyak to Trump and Pence.

"Gen. Flynn has said up to this point that he had not said anything like that to the Russian ambassador. I think now he's saying that he doesn't remember whether he did or not," Christie said on CNN. "So, that's a conversation he is going to need to have with the president and the vice president to clear that up, so that the White House can make sure that they are completely accurate about what went on."

The controversy surrounding Flynn comes as the young administration grapples with a series of national

security challenges, including North Korea's reported ballistic missile launch. The president, who was joined at his Mar-a-Lago estate by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe over the weekend, voiced solidarity with Japan.

Trump meets Monday with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and later in the week with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The White House is also dealing with fallout from the rocky rollout of Trump's immigration executive order, which has been blocked by the courts. The order was intended to suspend the nation's refugee program and bar citizens of seven Muslim-majority countries from entering the U.S.

Advocacy groups contend the government has rounded up large numbers of people as part of stepped-up enforcement. The agency calls the effort no different from enforcement actions carried out in the past.

**The
New York
Times**

Peter Baker

WASHINGTON — These are chaotic and anxious days inside the National Security Council, the traditional center of management for a president's dealings with an uncertain world.

Three weeks into the Trump administration, council staff members get up in the morning, read President Trump's Twitter posts and struggle to make policy to fit them. Most are kept in the dark about what Mr. Trump tells foreign leaders in his phone calls. Some staff members have turned to encrypted communications to talk with their colleagues, after hearing that Mr. Trump's top advisers are considering an "insider threat" program that could result in monitoring cellphones and emails for leaks.

The national security adviser, Michael T. Flynn, has hunkered down since investigators began looking into what, exactly, he told the Russian ambassador to the United States about the lifting of sanctions imposed in the last days of the Obama administration, and whether he misled Vice President Mike Pence about those conversations. His survival in the job may hang in the balance.

Turmoil at the National Security Council, From the Top Down

David E. Sanger,
Eric Schmitt and

Although Mr. Trump suggested to reporters aboard Air Force One on Friday that he was unaware of the latest questions swirling around Mr. Flynn's dealings with Russia, aides said over the weekend in Florida — where Mr. Flynn accompanied the president and Japan's prime minister, Shinzo Abe — that Mr. Trump was closely monitoring the reaction to Mr. Flynn's conversations. There are transcripts of a conversation in at least one phone call, recorded by American intelligence agencies that wiretap foreign diplomats, which may determine Mr. Flynn's future.

Stephen Miller, the White House senior policy adviser, was circumspect on Sunday about Mr. Flynn's future. Mr. Miller said on NBC's "Meet the Press" that possibly misleading the vice president on communications with Russia was "a sensitive matter." Asked if Mr. Trump still had confidence in Mr. Flynn, Mr. Miller responded, "That's a question for the president."

This account of life inside the council — offices made up of several hundred career civil servants who advise the president on counterterrorism, foreign policy, nuclear deterrence and other issues of war and peace — is based on conversations with more than two dozen current and former council staff members and others throughout the government. All

spoke on the condition that they not be quoted by name for fear of reprisals.

"It's so far a very dysfunctional N.S.C.," Representative Adam B. Schiff of California, the senior Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, said in a telephone interview.

In a telephone conversation on Sunday afternoon, K. T. McFarland, the deputy national security adviser, said that early meetings of the council were brisker, tighter and more decisive than in the past, but she acknowledged that career officials were on edge. "Not only is this a new administration, but it is a different party, and Donald Trump was elected by people who wanted the status quo thrown out," said Ms. McFarland, a veteran of the Reagan administration who most recently worked for Fox News. "I think it would be a mistake if we didn't have consternation about the changes — most of the cabinet haven't even been in government before."

There is always a shakedown period for any new National Security Council, whose staff is drawn from the State Department, the Pentagon and other agencies and is largely housed opposite the White House in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building.

President Barack Obama replaced his first national security adviser,

Gen. James Jones, a four-star former supreme allied commander in Europe, after concluding that the general was a bad fit for the administration. The first years of President George W. Bush's council were defined by clashes among experienced bureaucratic infighters — Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld and Colin Powell among them — and by decisions that often took place outside official channels.

But what is happening under the Trump White House is different, officials say, and not just because of Mr. Trump's Twitter foreign policy. (Two officials said that at one recent meeting, there was talk of feeding suggested Twitter posts to the president so the council's staff would have greater influence.)

A number of staff members who did not want to work for Mr. Trump have returned to their regular agencies, leaving a larger-than-usual hole in the experienced bureaucracy. Many of those who remain, who see themselves as apolitical civil servants, have been disturbed by displays of overt partisanship. At an all-hands meeting about two weeks into the new administration, Ms. McFarland told the group it needed to "make America great again," numerous staff members who were there said.

New Trump appointees are carrying coffee mugs with that Trump campaign slogan into meetings with

foreign counterparts, one staff member said.

Nervous staff members recently met late at night at a bar a few blocks from the White House and talked about purging their social media accounts of any suggestion of anti-Trump sentiments.

Mr. Trump's council staff draws heavily from the military — often people who had ties to Mr. Flynn when he served as a senior military intelligence officer and then as the director of the Defense Intelligence Agency before he was forced out of the job. Many of the first ideas that have been floated have involved military, rather than diplomatic, initiatives.

Mr. Trump and Defense Secretary Jim Mattis arriving at the Pentagon last month. Mr. Mattis did not see a number of executive orders before they were issued. Stephen Crowley/The New York Times

Last week, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis was exploring whether the Navy could intercept and board an Iranian ship to look for contraband weapons possibly headed to Houthi fighters in Yemen. The potential interdiction seemed in keeping with recent instructions from Mr. Trump, reinforced in meetings with Mr. Mattis and Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson, to crack down on Iran's support of terrorism.

But the ship was in international waters in the Arabian Sea, according to two officials. Mr. Mattis ultimately decided to set the operation aside, at least for now. White House officials said that was because news of the impending operation leaked,

a threat to security that has helped fuel the move for the insider threat program. But others doubt whether there was enough basis in international law, and wondered what would happen if, in the early days of an administration that has already seen one botched military action in Yemen, American forces were suddenly in a firefight with the Iranian Navy.

Ms. McFarland often draws on her television experience to make clear to officials that they need to make their points in council meetings quickly, and she signals when to wrap up, several participants said.

And while Mr. Obama liked policy option papers that were three to six single-spaced pages, council staff members are now being told to keep papers to a single page, with lots of graphics and maps.

"The president likes maps," one official said.

Paper flow, the lifeblood of the bureaucracy, has been erratic. A senior Pentagon official saw a draft executive order on prisoner treatment only through unofficial rumors and news media leaks. He called the White House to find out if it was real and said he had concerns but was not sure if he was authorized to make suggestions.

Officials said that the absence of an orderly flow of council documents, ultimately the responsibility of Mr. Flynn, explained why Mr. Mattis and Mike Pompeo, the director of the C.I.A., never saw a number of Mr. Trump's executive orders before they were issued. One order had to be amended after it was made public, to reassure Mr. Pompeo that

he had a regular seat on the council.

White House officials say that was a blunder, and that the process of reviewing executive orders has been straightened out by Reince Priebus, the White House chief of staff.

Stephen K. Bannon, center, Mr. Trump's top strategist, who was made a member of the National Security Council two weeks ago. Stephen Crowley/The New York Times

Still, Mr. Flynn presents additional complications beyond his conversations with the Russian ambassador. His aides say he is insecure about whether his unfettered access to Mr. Trump during the campaign is being scaled back and about a shadow council created by Stephen K. Bannon, Mr. Trump's top strategist, who was invited to attend meetings of the "principals committee" of the council two weeks ago. For his part, Mr. Bannon sees the United States as headed toward an inevitable confrontation with two adversaries — China and Iran.

Mr. Flynn finds himself in a continuing conflict with the intelligence agencies, whose work on Russia and other issues he has dismissed as subpar and politically biased. Last week, in an incident first reported by Politico, one of Mr. Flynn's top deputies, Robin Townley, was denied the high-level security clearance he needed before he could take up his job on the council as the senior director for Africa.

It was not clear what in Mr. Townley's past disqualified him, and in every administration some officials are denied clearances. But some saw the intelligence community striking back.

Two people with direct access to the White House leadership said Mr. Flynn was surprised to learn that the State Department and Congress play a pivotal role in foreign arms sales and technology transfers. So it was a rude discovery that Mr. Trump could not simply order the Pentagon to send more weapons to Saudi Arabia — which is clamoring to have an Obama administration ban on the sale of cluster bombs and precision-guided weapons lifted — or to deliver bigger weapons packages to the United Arab Emirates.

Several staff members said that Mr. Flynn, who was a career Army officer, was not familiar with how to call up the National Guard in an emergency — for, say, a natural disaster like Hurricane Katrina or the detonation of a dirty bomb in an American city.

At the all-hands meeting, Mr. Flynn talked about the importance of a balanced work life, taking care of family, and using the time at the council to gain experience that would help staff members in other parts of the government. At one point, the crowd was asked for a show of hands of how many expected to be working at the White House in a year.

Mr. Flynn turned to Ms. McFarland and, in what seemed to be a self-deprecating joke, said, "I wonder if we'll be here a year from now?"



Steven Mnuchin Poised to Secure Confirmation as Treasury Secretary

Nick Timiraos
Feb. 12, 2017

7:49 p.m. ET

WASHINGTON—The Senate is expected to confirm Steven Mnuchin as the 77th Treasury secretary as soon as Monday night, which would end one of the most protracted confirmation battles for the position and place the 54-year-old financier in a leading position to advance President Donald Trump's promises to refashion the U.S. tax code and financial regulation.

Mr. Mnuchin has faced opposition from Democrats for several reasons, including his role rehabilitating the failed IndyMac Bank, later rebranded OneWest Bank, by moving thousands of defaulted mortgages through foreclosure.

Senators also have raised concerns about answers he provided the

committee during the confirmation process pertaining to his complex financial disclosures and his record at OneWest.

Already, his confirmation has faced the longest delay of any recent Treasury secretary, and he appears likely to win confirmation for the position with a historically weak margin of support, a pattern reflected with other high-profile Trump nominees.

Mr. Trump was set to meet with Mr. Mnuchin on Sunday afternoon at his private club in Palm Beach, Fla. With Mr. Mnuchin not in office during the first three weeks of the administration, Gary Cohn, the former Goldman Sachs banker named as the director of the White House National Economic Council, has played an increasingly influential role shaping policy on tax, regulation and infrastructure. Mr. Mnuchin spent 17 years at the New

York investment bank, leaving in 2002.

The vote will take place as senators work to approve remaining Trump administration cabinet appointees. The Senate on Monday also is expected to confirm Dr. David Shulkin as Mr. Trump's secretary of Veterans Affairs. Dr. Shulkin currently serves as the head of the VA's health-care system.

That would leave six more Trump cabinet picks whose confirmations are pending, including Commerce Secretary-designate Wilbur Ross, Energy Secretary-designate Rick Perry and Interior Secretary-designate Ryan Zinke. One of the pending nominees, Labor Secretary-designate Andy Puzder, is set to have a confirmation hearing on Thursday.

In the Republican-controlled Congress, lawmakers also plan to

work this week to undo as many last-minute Obama administration regulations as possible on a simple-majority vote. Among expected targets in the House is a rule that blocks states from denying organizations that provide abortion services access to federal funds available for pregnancy testing and other family-planning services. Federal law prohibits the use of federal funds for abortions except in the case of rape, incest, or the endangerment of the mother's life.

Mr. Mnuchin cleared the Senate Finance Committee earlier this month after Democrats boycotted the vote.

Democrats said they wanted more information from the nominee, though some had already announced their opposition, and Republicans subsequently suspended the rules to advance his

nomination without any Democrats in attendance.

Mr. Mnuchin has rejected Democrats' critiques of his record, and a spokesman has said he has provided truthful answers to their questions. "Since I was first nominated to serve as Treasury secretary, I have been maligned as taking advantage of others' hardships in order to earn a buck. Nothing could be further from the truth," Mr. Mnuchin said at his Jan. 19 confirmation hearing.

The partisan row illustrates the challenge facing Mr. Mnuchin in fashioning a tax-code overhaul, infrastructure package, financial-regulation revamp and housing-finance legislation that can attract bipartisan support.



Trump undertakes most ambitious regulatory rollback since Reagan

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

President Trump has embarked on the most aggressive campaign against government regulation in a generation, joining with Republican lawmakers to roll back rules already on the books and limit the ability of federal regulators to impose new ones.

After just a few weeks in office, the new administration is targeting dozens of Obama-era policies, using both legislative and executive tactics. The fallout is already rippling across the federal bureaucracy and throughout the U.S. economy, affecting how dentists dispose of mercury fillings, how schools meet the needs of poor and disabled students, and whether companies reject mineral purchases that fuel one of the world's bloodiest conflicts.

The campaign has alarmed labor unions, public safety advocates and environmental activists, who fear losing regulations that have been in place for years, along with relatively new federal mandates. Business groups, however, are thrilled, saying Trump is responding to long-standing complaints that a profusion of federal regulations unnecessarily increases costs and hampers their ability to create jobs.

Under Trump, "there's great optimism that all of them will be addressed," said Rosario Palmieri, vice president for labor, legal and regulatory policy at the National Association of Manufacturers.

Trump and congressional Republicans are working to strip rules away at an unprecedented rate. One of the most powerful

For example, Democrats have pressed Mr. Mnuchin to explain how he will uphold a pledge delivered hours after Mr. Trump announced his nomination to revamp the tax code in a way that provides "no absolute tax cut" for the upper class.

"He has failed to commit to following his own rule or to provide any specific answers on how we would reduce the tax burden on middle-class and working families," said Sen. Mark Warner (D., Va.) on the Senate floor last Friday.

The responsibilities of the Treasury secretary, who is fifth in the presidential line of succession, include everything from tax collection and fiscal policy to public-debt management, bank regulation

levers is the Congressional Review Act, a 1996 law that gives lawmakers the power to nullify any regulation within 60 days of enactment.

Before Trump took office, the Congressional Review Act had been successfully used only once, to overturn a Clinton administration ergonomics rule in 2001. So far this year, the House has moved to nullify eight new rules and is considering dozens more. Two of those measures — which would loosen environmental restrictions on waste-mining companies and financial disclosure requirements on oil and gas firms — have cleared the Senate and are on their way to the White House for the president's signature.

A more extensive assault on government regulation is likely to come. On Jan. 30, Trump signed an executive order that requires agencies to offset the cost of every significant new regulation by eliminating existing regulations or making them less onerous. The order declares that "the total incremental cost of all new regulations" issued this year "shall be no more than zero."

That sets a far more stringent standard than recent Republican administrations have attempted, experts on regulation said, leaving a slew of Obama-era rules in limbo.

"It's clear as can be that they intend to reduce the level of regulation," said James Gattuso, a senior fellow in regulatory policy at the conservative Heritage Foundation, who said the directive marks the first explicit attempt to contain the costs of federal mandates.

and the implementation of international sanctions.

One pressing need for the new Treasury secretary will be to raise the government's borrowing limit, currently suspended through March 15, after which the department must use emergency measures to prevent the country from being unable to pay certain bills. Independent analysts believe those measures can last through the summer.

At his confirmation hearing, Mr. Mnuchin said he hoped lawmakers would move soon to increase the borrowing limit.

He said he believed existing sanctions on Russia should be maintained and he called for a boost in staffing at the Internal Revenue Service, where ranks have

thinned partly due to spending cuts driven by congressional Republicans.

Delays in Mr. Mnuchin's confirmation also have pushed back the process of approvals for top Treasury deputies, meaning it could be weeks or months before those positions are filled. Mr. Mnuchin, who served as the Trump campaign's finance chairman, is expected to bring on another campaign official, Eli Miller, as his chief of staff.

He also has recruited two senior advisers, former BlackRock executive Craig Phillips and Reed Rubinstein, a Washington lawyer who previously held a top post at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

—Siobhan Hughes contributed to this article.

"If successful," Gattuso said, "it would be the first time in a generation," since Ronald Reagan was in the White House.

According to the White House Office of Management and Budget, the cost of federal regulations has grown every year since 1982. Republicans of all stripes have long railed against what they say are crippling economic effects.

"Overregulation has stemmed economic growth and job creation," White House press secretary Sean Spicer recently told reporters.

(Reuters)

White House press secretary Sean Spicer detailed executive orders expected to be signed on Feb. 3 that will roll back financial regulations. Spicer details new executive actions on financial regulations (Reuters)

Making sure government rules "are meeting their intent and not stifling job creation at the expense of whatever they were intended to do is something that should be smart and welcome by everybody," he said.

The administration's anti-regulatory push goes well beyond a technical review, however.

"It's a much more aggressive rollback attempt than we've seen in recent years," said Tevi Troy, who served George W. Bush as a senior White House official and in two Cabinet-level agencies. He noted that many conservatives have long been disappointed that the Bush administration did not do more to "clear out some of the regulatory underbrush."

[With days left in office, Obama ushers in dozens of policies]

Votes under the Congressional Review Act have come at such a rapid clip that liberal interest groups feel pummeled. After the House voted last week to overturn a planning rule issued by the Bureau of Land Management, Defenders of Wildlife spokeswoman Haley McKey issued a statement headlined: "The Congressional Review Act Claims Latest Victim."

Meanwhile, the Trump White House is employing an executive tactic that dates to the Reagan administration: issuing a 60-day freeze on new regulations.

The tactic is a mainstay of new administrations. George W. Bush initially delayed 90 Clinton-era rules, and Barack Obama delayed, altered or rescinded more than two dozen of Bush's actions.

Within a week of Trump's inauguration, the new administration withdrew 24 significant rules that were about to be sent to the Federal Register for publication, regulatory analyst Curtis Copeland said. The new administration also delayed the effective dates of roughly 250 others, including 30 Environmental Protection Agency rules that were frozen in a single day, with no opportunity for public comment.

And although White House Chief of Staff Reince Priebus's Jan. 20 memo called for a 60-day regulatory freeze, some regulations already are being delayed longer than that. An Agriculture Department rule tightening animal welfare requirements for organic livestock and poultry was just delayed from March 20 until May 19.

As a result, groups that had finally settled long-fought battles are feuding once again. Take the issue of the rusty patched bumble bee, whose population has shrunk 87 percent since the mid-1990s. On Jan. 11, the Obama administration declared it would be added to the endangered species list. Last Thursday — a day before those protections were set to take effect — the Trump administration said it would postpone the listing until at least March 21.

[Obama to top aides: "What are we doing on bees?"]

Ryan Yates, director of congressional relations for the American Farm Bureau, said the group is "pleased that the administration is taking a second look." If the bee is declared endangered, he said, farmers in parts of Wisconsin, Illinois and Minnesota would be subject to severe penalties for killing or harming the insects through "normal farming operations" such as plowing and pesticide use. As an alternative, Yates said, the Farm Bureau is open to discussing a strategy for voluntary conservation.

But voluntary plans are inadequate, said Rebecca Riley, a senior attorney with the Natural Resources Defense Council. Riley said the group is weighing whether to challenge the delay, which was issued without the normal 30-day period for public comment.

"We don't want to reach a point of no return for the rusty patched bumblebee," Riley said in an email, "but further delay could dash our last, best chance to keep this bee around."

Incoming agency officials are also signaling significant shifts in the way some industries are regulated. In November, the EPA sent out a lengthy request to nearly 20,000 oil and gas companies, asking them to gauge their emissions of methane within 60 or 180 days, depending on their facilities. Methane is a potent greenhouse gas linked to climate change.

Matthew Hite, who represents gas processors as vice president for government affairs at the GPA Midstream Association, called the request "unnecessary and duplicative" and estimated that complying would cost each processor nearly \$3 million.

Since Trump took office, EPA officials have been granting companies that ask for it a 90-day extension. Several oil and gas officials said they expect the methane survey to be scaled back significantly or abandoned altogether.

Meanwhile, Michael S. Piwowar, the acting chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission, said he has instructed staff to determine whether it is "still appropriate" to require manufacturers to certify that they do not use minerals from conflict-ridden areas such as Congo, where armed groups accused of massive human rights violations profit from their trade.

Some major U.S. firms, including Intel and Tiffany & Co., have embraced the policy, but others have said complying with the disclosure rule is costly and complicated.

Lawrence Heim, managing director at Elm Sustainability, an auditing

firm that consults on conflict minerals, said he has seen "a notable slowdown" in the demand for doing "due diligence" on the origin of minerals, as manufacturers apparently place bets that the rule will soon disappear.

Implementation of Trump's Jan. 30 executive order will be left in large part to the White House budget director. Nominee Mick Mulvaney, a Republican congressman from South Carolina, could be confirmed as soon as this week.

A coalition of liberal groups that include Public Citizen, NRDC and the Communications Workers of America has challenged the order in court, calling it "arbitrary, capricious, an abuse of discretion, and not in accordance with the law." They predicted the order would force the government to eliminate critical public protections.

Spicer called those claims "wildly inaccurate," saying they make "a ton of assumptions . . . on what may or may not happen in the future."

Whatever happens in court, Rep. Jared Huffman (D-Calif.) predicts Trump's executive order will cause "complete chaos." Huffman noted that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration briefly declined to issue critical regulations for the opening of fishing seasons off both coasts, unnerving commercial fishermen who rely on the government to set the annual guidelines.

"Apparently members of the new administration don't understand some regulations are critically important for the economic sector, and businesses depend on them," Huffman said.

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Some industries are openly worried about what the directive will mean for them. Commercial drone manufacturers, for example, waited four years for the Federal Aviation Administration to issue its first rule integrating drones into public airspace. The FAA has been planning to tackle bigger questions, such as whether drones may fly over people's heads or travel long distances.

Brian Wynne, president of the Association for Unmanned Vehicle Systems International, said he fears that the answers to those questions will be delayed. The "current inaction," he said in a statement, could prevent drone "operations, such as news reporting, disaster relief and public safety, from becoming a reality."

Many companies, however, foresee huge benefits from the regulatory rollback.

Eric Myers, chief executive at Oil City Iron Works in Oil City, Tex., said he's seen a flood of new orders since Trump took office. The company makes metal castings for equipment used in energy, mining, farming and transportation — industries expected to benefit from Trump administration actions.

"It's not happening in a tidal wave," Myers said in an interview, "but it is coming."

POLITICO The husband-and-wife team driving Trump's national security policy

By Eli Stokols, Bryan Bender and Michael Crowley

Before they became a Trump administration power couple, Sebastian and Katharine Gorka were prolific collaborators on research about the Islamic terrorist threat who built a fan base in far-right circles.

Business partners as well as published co-authors, the Gorkas made successful careers out of their shared passion. "Our pillow talk is the Islamic State and al Qaeda," Sebastian Gorka, now a senior White House aide, said during a talk in Florida last November.

Story Continued Below

At times it can even be difficult to tell which Gorka is doing the talking. Several passages of Sebastian's

2007 dissertation, on the rise of radical Islam, appeared almost verbatim two years earlier in an article for the conservative journal *Human Events*. The byline over an online version of the article, "ccornell," links to an author page for Katharine Cornell—the maiden name of Katharine Gorka.

The dissertation, written for Sebastian's doctorate in political science from Corvius University of Budapest, does not credit either a Katharine Cornell or Katharine Gorka in its endnotes.

"We write together all the time," Gorka said during an hourlong conversation with POLITICO. He brushed off the overlapping passages as "probably something I dictated or that we came up with together." Much of his writing and that of his wife, he explained, is the

result of a "collaborative effort," even if that's not clear to readers. "She's my wife and she's my closest collaborator," he said.

In the decade since earning his doctorate, Sebastian has vaulted into the heart of the American national-security apparatus. At the White House, Gorka—who was born in Britain and became a U.S. citizen in 2012—is a deputy assistant to the president. He reports to strategist Steve Bannon and includes the Strategic Initiatives Group, Bannon's in-house think tank, in his email signature.

That appointment, which includes a portfolio focusing on terrorism and national security, has befuddled mainstream counterterrorism experts, who recognize Gorka from his Fox News appearances but not as an influential thinker.

"He is hardcore," said retired Army Colonel Joseph Collins, a professor at the National Defense University who worked with Sebastian Gorka when he taught there. "He came at the issue from the ideological route."

Joining Sebastian in Trump's orbit is his wife, Katharine, who served on the Trump transition's Department of Homeland Security "landing team," focusing on plans to shift its "Countering Violent Extremism" programs to concentrate on Islamist extremism, according to a former DHS official. Sebastian Gorka declined to comment on his wife's current role within the department, and calls and emails seeking comment from DHS were not returned.

Trump first summoned Gorka to Trump Tower in the summer of

2015. At the time, Gorka was national-security editor at Breitbart News, the right-wing website Bannon ran before joining Trump's campaign. Long before most people took Trump's candidacy seriously, Gorka wrote him a series of position papers.

Gorka's biography at the Institute of World Politics, a Washington-based program that offers masters' degrees and continuing education programs for military and other government officials, casts him as an "internationally recognized authority on issues of national security, irregular warfare, terrorism and democratization." Gorka taught there as an adjunct before becoming a professor in 2016.

Several experts interviewed by POLITICO puzzled over the gap between the numerous military academic credentials listed by Gorka—a political science Ph.D. who unfailingly uses the title "Dr."—and their unfamiliarity with his work and views.

In the decade since earning his doctorate, Sebastian Gorka has vaulted into the heart of the American national-security apparatus. | POLITICO Screen grab

"When I first encountered his name during the transition, I did a triple-take. I've been in counterterrorism since 1998, and I thought I knew everyone. But I'd never heard his name and couldn't recall anything he'd written or said," said Daniel Benjamin, who served as counterterrorism coordinator under Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

Retired Col. Peter Mansoor, a former top aide to General David Petraeus in Iraq who helped rewrite the Army's counterinsurgency manual, also said he's never crossed paths with Gorka. "What I've heard has not been complimentary," added Mansoor, who now teaches at Ohio State University and remains active in military circles.

Gorka's defenders dismiss such criticism. "Seb has never been in the traditional kind of academic world," said James Carafano, a national security expert at the conservative Heritage Foundation. "There is a certain demonization that goes on against these guys."

Trump's rhetoric and actions since taking office reflect the influence of the Gorkas, who call for a tougher response against Islamist radicalism. In his Florida speech days after Trump won the election, Gorka showed what he acknowledged was a controversial PowerPoint slide featuring a dead ISIS fighter face down in the sand framed by a black background featuring white text that read: "Now we can win." The Trump administration, Gorka told POLITICO, is committed to "crushing" ISIS "with [its] partners in the region."

Gorka was one of the few White House staffers consulted ahead of Trump's controversial Jan. 27 executive order limiting arrivals into the U.S. from seven majority-Muslim countries. He told POLITICO that he believes "it's absolutely water-tight when it comes to the legality and the president's right to do this." Although two federal courts have halted the order, Gorka hasn't changed his opinion. "It's a fundamentally preventative measure," he added. "Counterterrorism isn't about responding afterwards."

Katharine Gorka wrote in 2013 that the Obama administration "seems to be allowing Islamists to dictate national security policy." And she criticized Obama's DHS for allegedly changing its training protocols include an "emphasis on Islam as a religion of peace."

The Gorkas are also strong believers in changing official U.S. government rhetoric to include the phrase "radical Islamic terrorism," which Obama and George W. Bush before him, shunned. "We are prepared to be honest about the threat. We're not going to white it out, delete it as the Obama administration did," Sebastian Gorka told NPR last month.

In November, the Council on American-Islamic Relations described the views of both Gorkas as "Islamophobic."

Gorka disputes that characterization. He claims that half of the students he has instructed are from predominantly Muslim countries, including Jordanian Princess Aisha bin Al Hussein, King Abdullah's sister. "I've said again and again, the people who are most at peril in this world are our Muslim partners, because ISIS and al

Qaeda are killing them first," he told POLITICO. "It's not a war with Islam," he continued. "It's a war within Islam."

Gorka was born in the United Kingdom to Hungarian parents who fled during the country's failed 1956 anti-Soviet revolution. In *Defeating Jihad*, Gorka describes how his father was tortured and imprisoned for two years, searing in his mind what he calls the "evil" of Soviet totalitarianism and turning him, unlike many anti-jihadist hardliners, against torture, which he calls "fundamentally wrong."

The Gorkas met in Romania in 1994, when they both attended a symposium for young leaders. At the time, Gorka was working in Budapest, while Katharine was working for a small policy think tank in New York. Katharine, whose father was president of a major Pennsylvania iron works factory, earned her master's degree from the London School of Economics and in the early 1990s focused on the post-Soviet transition to democracy.

They married in Hungary and remained in Europe. After the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, they turned their attention to terrorism, like many in the national-security world.

Gorka's biography at the Institute of World Politics says he spent four years on the faculty of the Program on Terrorism and Security Studies at the George C. Marshall Center in Germany. Gorka said he worked for the program's founder, retired U.S. Marine Corps Col. Andrew Nichols Pratt, who died in 2013. The program's current director, James Howcroft, also a retired Marine colonel, said Gorka only "periodically delivered lectures or served as a seminar leader."

The Gorkas returned to the U.S. nine years ago, Gorka said. On several of his personal biography pages, Gorka lists a two-year fellowship at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, though he said he left after less than a year to take a position at RAND, the Washington think tank.

Several military sources noted that Gorka's teaching affiliations—including the Marine Corps University Foundation as well as the Joint Special Operations University (JSOU)—have been with part-time professional development seminars for mid-career military officers,

rather than at premier war colleges such as the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) in California and the Army War College in Carlisle, Pa.

Carafano, who has known the Gorkas for 15 years, said that Gorka is a serious scholar. Carafano said he's filled in for Sebastian Gorka at the Institute of World Politics. "I struggled to keep up with his curriculum," said Carafano, who also worked alongside Katharine Gorka on Trump's transition team for DHS.

Earlier this month, Gorka was cleared of a weapons charge filed after he attempted to board a plane at Reagan National Airport with a gun; Gorka has said he was carrying a gun because he'd received death threats.

During his conversation with POLITICO, Gorka defended himself—unprompted—against recent reports, including one that he overstated his role as an expert witness for the Department of Justice during the trial of Boston Marathon bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev. "I've got invoices claiming I wrote studies for [DOJ]," he said, but "they just never put me on the stand."

The Gorkas have been clear about their desire to position themselves and their ideas in the public eye. During his Florida talk last November, for the right-wing Freedom Center, Sebastian Gorka described how his wife encouraged him to market *Defeating Jihad*—a how-to manual for fighting terrorism which fills 244 large-type pages, about a third of which consist of appendixes, recommended reading, and an index.

"I'm going to write about what I do for our war fighters, what I teach them in the class, how to understand the enemy, the A-Z of national security and counterterrorism," Sebastian described telling Katharine.

"My wife, she said, 'Are you crazy? I mean, don't you want to sell books, or we just want to sell them to works?'" Sebastian told the audience. "She gave me some very sage advice, and this is to all you budding authors out there: If you want the people to read your book, especially Americans, you must have a good story. You have to connect."

The New York Times Conflicts Trump Sons Forge Ahead Without Father, Expanding and Navigating

Eric Lipton and Susanne Craig

President Trump's old office on the 26th floor of Trump Tower in

Manhattan sits unoccupied now, unofficial storage space for the

gathering trove of memorabilia that his two oldest sons say they hope

will eventually be turned over to their father's presidential library.

But just one flight down, in Eric and Donald Trump Jr.'s cramped offices, their father is ever-present — in the seven copies of a recent issue of Golf Digest with his photo and the headline "Golfer-in-Chief" on the cover stacked on Eric's desk; in his visage looping endlessly on CNN (yes, they watch CNN); in the cardboard cutout of the president watching from behind a stash of blueprints in the corner.

This is the conundrum facing the two brothers as they assume control of the empire their father built: How do they move forward, and navigate the ethical shoals, at a business predicated entirely on the brand of the man they have vowed to distance themselves from?

"His DNA will always be in the company in a big way," Eric said, during nearly five hours of interviews over two days last week at Trump Tower. "His DNA built the company. His DNA also built us. We're extensions of him in so many ways."

Both he and Don Jr. insist that they do not need their father's input to run the company — the apprentices have become the boss. And even as questions remain about potential conflicts of interest, they say, unapologetically, that they plan to forge ahead with expanding the Trump Organization's footprint, both in the United States and abroad.

A cardboard cutout of President Trump in Eric's office at Trump Tower. "His DNA will always be in the company in a big way," Eric said of his father. Credit: Todd Heisler/The New York Times

On Saturday, in fact, they will cut ribbon at their company's newest branded property, billed as a "magnificent golf course" in the booming United Arab Emirates city of Dubai, before hundreds of Emirati power brokers.

A week later they will head to Vancouver, British Columbia, for another opening celebration, of the latest Trump International Hotel and Tower, one of a dozen major international projects still underway, from the Dominican Republic to India.

Back home in the United States, they are planning to open a new boutique hotel chain, Scion, in perhaps 30 cities.

With the aggressive push forward, though, comes the persistent thrum of ethical qualm.

Just last week, news that Eric had traveled to the Dominican Republic to restart a stalled project there

prompted controversy, given the Trump Organization's pledge of no new overseas deals. The Washington Post reported that when Eric visited Uruguay on business in January, the trip cost taxpayers nearly \$100,000 in hotel bills for the required Secret Service agents and for embassy staff members. Also echoing through the office at Trump Tower was the dust-up over the decision by Nordstrom and several other retailers to stop selling their sister Ivanka's clothing line.

Don Jr. called that "disgusting," and both brothers said their father was right to take Nordstrom and other retailers to task publicly in Ivanka's defense.

"He's Papa Bear," Eric said.

Despite pressure to do so, President Trump has not sold any of his assets, which include a stake in a half-dozen office buildings, more than a dozen golf courses and at least 15 hotels that the company owns or manages. Instead, he has signed over control of day-to-day operations of his privately held company to the two sons and Allen Weisselberg, a trusted lieutenant at the Trump Organization, with an agreement not to discuss company business.

The arrangement and the president's decision to not release his taxes have brought widespread criticism from liberal groups and even the federal government's top ethics watchdog, Walter M. Shaub Jr., the director of the Office of Government Ethics. President Trump has continued to frequent his commercial properties, including over the weekend in Florida, bringing them global media attention and potential new customers.

But the brothers say they are convinced that they and their father have taken sufficient steps to create a management structure that will allow them to avoid creating the kind of appearance of conflict of interest that plagued Hillary Clinton as secretary of state while her husband continued to operate the Clinton Foundation. The measures they have taken, they say, have included explicit instructions to their domestic and international business partners not to reach out to anyone in the United States government for help.

The brothers' expressions tightened and their voices rose when they were asked, in separate interviews, about suggestions that their father was using the presidency as a way to enhance the family's profits.

"Who in their right mind would try to enrich themselves by spending a

fortune to run against 17 seasoned politicians on the Republican side, to then go up against the Clinton machine, Wall Street, Hollywood, P.C. culture?" Don Jr. asked. "To use that as the way to enrich yourself is laughable."

The family, he added, would face heat whatever it did. If the Trump Organization sold its assets, there would be allegations of impropriety, as foreign investors would most likely be involved. If it liquidated and put the cash into the bank, he said, his father would be accused of artificially inflating interest rates for personal gain.

For critics, though, particularly Democrats in Congress, the continuation of the global operations of the Trump Organization — even if President Trump is not directly involved — is fraught with problems, with even some Republican observers questioning whether the brothers can steer clear of trouble, regardless of their intentions.

Even with no new foreign deals, the company is in a position to get tax breaks and other business inducements from state and local officials. While such incentives are hardly unusual for growing businesses, with this family business they will unavoidably raise questions of whether different players involved might be seeking special White House favors.

"People are going to offer them sweetheart deals," said Peter Schweizer, the conservative author whose book "Clinton Cash" argued, among other things, that Mrs. Clinton had used her position as secretary of state to favor donors to the foundation.

"It is just the way it works, as it comes down to the fact that people want access to national leaders in the country, and unfortunately in the past, be it Billy Carter, Neil Bush or Roger Clinton, relatives become vehicles to accomplishing that," Mr. Schweizer added, referring to relatives in past administrations who drew scrutiny because of their business activities.

The two oldest brothers have worked in various roles at the Trump Organization for much of their adult lives, but without their father's daily presence — and with the departure of Ivanka from the company offices — their responsibilities have grown. Eric Trump, 33, oversees construction and says he, not his father, is now the named officer on hundreds of Trump companies. Don Jr., 39, is in charge of commercial leasing, as well as many of the remaining companies.

And while they share a certain younger-version-of-their-father look, their personalities are distinct. Don Jr., the Trump child with the clearest memory of the divorce that split up his family, is the most publicly confident, and the most politically conservative.

Eric appears more cautious, more worried about how what he says will be perceived. Yet neither is particularly shy.

"There has never been a Trump that is introverted," Eric said, laughing.

What is it like — after a lifetime as the sons of Donald Trump, and now business executives in their own right, and even co-stars in a reality television show — to be the sons of the president of the United States?

"It's bigger, it's bigger," Eric said, struggling for the right word, then turning to a superlative, a habit inherited from his father. "This is really the biggest thing in the world."

For all the talk of its global reach, the Trump Organization still has a family feel to it.

The small offices assigned to Eric, Ivanka and Don Jr. are lined up in a row, with Ivanka's, like her father's, sitting unused since she left the company and moved to Washington with her husband, Jared Kushner, who is serving as a senior White House adviser.

A hat in Eric's office adapted President Trump's campaign slogan to mention the company's luxury resort in Scotland, Trump Turnberry. Credit: Todd Heisler/The New York Times

During the recent snowstorm in New York — with schools closed for the day — Don Jr., who has five children, had his 9-year-old daughter in the office, sharing breakfast sent up from a restaurant downstairs. Trump Tower, by and large, seems back to normal since the building's most famous resident moved to Washington, though Secret Service agents are still stationed in the Trump Organization lobby and elsewhere.

Just days before his inauguration in January, Mr. Trump announced plans to resign from hundreds of entities he controls and place his assets in a trust. The move drew sharp criticism from ethics lawyers, who said the move was window dressing because Mr. Trump, as sole beneficiary of the trust, still owns the assets, benefits financially from any money they might make and will quite likely get updates, Eric said, roughly every quarter on the financial health of the company.

Still, President Trump assigned control of the trust to Don Jr. and

Mr. Weisselberg, with Eric as the sole member of what he described as an advisory council. The three men have to vote unanimously, Eric said, to make decisions regarding new deals and other major business decisions.

To Don Jr., everything the company does these days seems to breed controversy. Much of it he says is unwarranted. For instance, people have questioned

why corporate records in Delaware do not show that the president has resigned from his companies registered there. Eric says that he has, but that it can take more than a year for records there to be updated.

And the brothers expressed irritation that their presence at their father's announcement of Judge Neil M. Gorsuch to fill the Supreme Court vacancy provoked media

reports that they were not honoring the agreement to stay clear of White House matters. In fact, they said, they were in Washington to visit the new Trump hotel in the Old Post Office Building on Pennsylvania Avenue and stopped by to say hello to their father and share in the historic moment.

Don Jr. said he knew his father was busy, and had called him only once since his inauguration. Eric said he

talked to his father "a few" times a week. But he insisted he knew which lines not to cross.

"In the next four years, do I ever expect him to say: 'Hey, how's Turnberry? How's the new green? How's the new 10th tee?'" Eric said. In a case like this, he said, he would probably say, "Dad, it's great" and "The property looks awesome."

The Washington Post

How Bannon's Navy service during the Iran hostage crisis shaped his views

By Michael Krashinsky and Craig Whitlock

(Alice Li/The Washington Post)

Stephen K. Bannon, chief strategist to the White House, has emerged as one of the most powerful figures in Washington. With a permanent seat on the National Security Council, he has a voice in critical decisions on defense and foreign policy. Much of his world views can be traced back to his seven years in the Navy and a failed hostage rescue. Stephen K. Bannon, chief strategist to the White House, has emerged as one of the most powerful figures in Washington. With a permanent seat on the National Security Council, he has a voice in critical decisions on defense and foreign policy. Much of his world views can be traced back to his seven years in the Navy and a failed hostage rescue. (Alice Li/The Washington Post)

It was just after midnight on March 21, 1980, when a Navy destroyer navigated by Stephen K. Bannon, a junior officer, met with the supercarrier USS Nimitz in the Gulf of Oman. The convoy headed near the Iranian coast, where a secret mission would be launched a month later to rescue 52 U.S. Embassy hostages held in Tehran.

Bannon's ship, the USS Paul F. Foster, trailed the Nimitz, which carried helicopters that would try to retrieve the hostages. But before the mission launched, Bannon's ship was ordered to sail to Pearl Harbor, and he learned while at sea that the rescue had failed. A U.S. helicopter crashed into another aircraft in the Iranian desert, killing eight service members and dooming the plan to liberate the hostages.

"I have the perfect word" for how the crew felt upon learning that the mission failed, said Andrew Green, one of Bannon's shipmates. "Defeated. We felt defeated."

As Bannon has told it, the failed hostage rescue is one of the defining moments of his life,

providing a searing example of failed military and presidential leadership — one that he carries with him as he serves as President Trump's chief strategist. He has said he wasn't interested in politics until he concluded that then-President Jimmy Carter had undercut the Navy and blown the rescue mission.

Bannon, a former Goldman Sachs investment banker best known for his time as chairman of the conservative website Breitbart, has become one of the most powerful figures in Washington as chief strategist for Trump. Moreover, in an unusual move for a political operative, Bannon secured a permanent seat on the National Security Council, giving him a voice in critical decisions on defense and foreign policy.

Bannon served seven years in the Navy, with two deployments at sea and then three years as an underling in a Pentagon office dealing with budgets and planning. White House press secretary Sean Spicer cited Bannon's naval service as justification for giving him a seat on the Security Council, saying during a Jan. 29 appearance on ABC's "This Week" that such service gave him "a tremendous understanding of the world and the geopolitical landscape that we have now."

A review by The Washington Post of Bannon's naval career, based on interviews with more than 25 shipmates and an examination of deck logs stored at the National Archives, found that his service was steady but unremarkable. Bannon's naval service is the least-known part of his career, and many details have not been previously reported. The records show that his deployments never involved warfare, and the closest he came to conflict may have been his brief experience at the edge of the hostage-rescue fiasco.

Still, the experience shaped his thinking. He saw the military buildup under President Ronald Reagan,

and the hostage-taking in Tehran continues to inform his view about that region of the world, as well as the role of U.S. military power and its commander in chief.

In recent years, Bannon has spoken in apocalyptic terms about Islam. In 2007, he outlined a movie in which radical Muslims take over the United States and turn it into the "Islamic States of America." In 2014, he delivered a talk in which he said, "We're now, I believe, at the beginning stages of a global war against Islamic fascism."

Bannon declined to be interviewed.

As a White House official, Bannon played a key role in writing the executive order on immigration that targeted seven countries, including Iran. He has urged abandonment of the Obama administration's nuclear deal with Iran. Bannon's seat on the Security Council will continue to give him extraordinary power to influence the administration's policies.

Grueling duty, but no combat

Bannon, who grew up in a Democratic family in Richmond, signed up for the Naval Reserve in 1976, after graduating from Virginia Tech, and then arrived at age 24 at the Navy's training center in Rhode Island in 1977. The next year, he shipped out on the Foster, on which he would travel mostly in the Pacific and Indian oceans from 1978 to 1980, stopping at ports in countries such as the Philippines and Singapore. It was an anti-submarine destroyer whose mission was to trail aircraft carriers and keep them safe.

He was an ensign and then a lieutenant junior grade, assigned to a windowless, two-bed stateroom with desks and a wardrobe area, a comfortable accommodation compared with the warren of bunks where most sailors slept.

His first job gave him responsibility for engineering, including air conditioning, hydraulics and electronics. It was "all the inelegant work of the ship," said Edward

"Sonny" Masso, a retired rear admiral who served with Bannon. "Not just anybody succeeds in that job."

Bannon later became a navigator, guiding the ship — at times with a sextant when the electronic system lost contact with satellites — and writing reports.

Not once during Bannon's deployments at sea was the ship involved in combat, but it was grueling duty, full of tedium and drills, according to shipmates and logs. At times, the Foster would play cat-and-mouse games with Soviet vessels, trailing and testing each other, shipmates said.

Scott Brubaker, an enlisted sailor who served with Bannon, said that experience "will change you forever. . . . You pull into Hong Kong and go to Victoria Peak. You go to Singapore. There are the smells, sometimes the stench, sometimes the abject poverty. . . . We learned we had a very big world, and one that certainly had its inherent risks."

Bannon is remembered by many of his shipmates as a quiet, proficient and studious officer.

William Keating, who was Bannon's roommate for two years, called him "a good guy who did his job," and he had no recollection of political discussion. The portrayal of Bannon today as a far-right nationalist "is not the individual that I knew," Keating said.

On one occasion, Keating recalled, Bannon proudly brought his father aboard and gave up his bed so his father could sleep in the stateroom. "I remember the two of them together," Keating said. "They had a really good father-son relationship."

Some shipmates had more critical recollections of Bannon.

"He wasn't the best engineer we had, but he wasn't bad. He was basically an above-average officer," said Robin Mickle, a retired Navy captain.

Mickle said he did not get along personally with Bannon and found him “obnoxious” at times.

“His only problem was that he wasn’t in it for the long run. He never really wanted to stay. He told us it would look good on his résumé if he went into politics. The politics part didn’t impress any of us.”

Bannon told Bloomberg Business Week in 2015 that “I wasn’t political until I got into the service and saw how badly Jimmy Carter f---ed things up. I became a Reagan admirer.”

Greg Garrison, who served as an engineer on the Foster, said: “What I remember was he was kind of uppity; he didn’t get along with enlisted men. He just kind of stuck his nose up at us.”

Bannon is remembered as much for his skill at sports as for his work on the ship’s deck. When the Foster docked at ports around the world, the ship’s basketball team often lined up games against local competition. Bannon’s nickname was “Coast,” short for coast-to-coast, because on the basketball court he’d never pass the ball, Mickle said. Bannon also excelled at baseball, although shipmates ribbed him for being called out three times in one inning, recalled David Ziemba, who spoke warmly about his former roommate.

Bannon, meanwhile, scoured newspapers such as the Wall Street Journal for what turned out to be a lucrative sideline. He put money into commodities such as gold and silver, advising shipmates, Masso said, and presaging his career as an investment banker.

“He was like our investment *sensei*,” Masso said, referring to a teaching role.

‘A little bit of a hell-raiser’

Bannon’s patrols became more tense after Iranians in 1979 took control of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and seized hostages, and the streets filled with protesters chanting slogans such as “Death to America.” The Cold War still dominated military thinking, but military planners also put more emphasis on anti-terrorism measures.

The presidential campaign in the United States focused much attention on Iran’s seizure of U.S. Embassy officials. Carter, a Democrat, was blasted by Republicans for allowing the hostage saga to have taken place. A nightly news program was called “America Held Hostage,” and Reagan, a Republican, vowed to strengthen the country’s military.

Back on the Foster, crew members said they were aware of the growing tensions, and they were eager to be part of whatever action might come.

In late November 1979, however, the Foster’s sonar dome — a crucial piece of equipment used for navigation and detection — was damaged. Bannon, in his role as navigator, wrote in the deck log: “Slow to 5 Kts to reduce damage to Sonar Dome.” The logs do not indicate what caused the damage, and no blame was assessed.

Traveling at about one-third of its normal speed in stormy seas — during which the Foster was hit with 20-foot-high waves — the vessel detoured to Guam for repairs.

Then, after nearly two months at Guam and weeks more of travel, Bannon’s ship linked up on March 21, 1980, with the USS Nimitz. Three hours after the rendezvous, “Bannon assumed the deck” to help navigate, according to the logs of his ship.

The Nimitz, one of the world’s largest supercarriers, already was involved in preparation for the hostage rescue mission. Ziemba, the Bannon roommate, noticed helicopters stored on the Nimitz that he later realized were to be used in the rescue mission.

Bannon’s ship operated from an area called Gonzo station, according to deck logs that use the Navy shorthand for Gulf of Oman Naval Zone of Operations. Bannon’s ship trailed the Nimitz around the gulf, part of which borders southern Iran. Then the Foster was ordered to sail to Pearl Harbor.

What happened next is unclear because all of the deck logs for April 1980 are missing from the National Archives. (Officials said that records for that month were not

among the documents it originally received.) It was on April 24 that the rescue mission was launched and resulted in the eight deaths in the desert.

Larry Benson, an enlisted sailor who remembered Bannon as “a little bit of a hell-raiser,” said he was told later that the Foster would have played a further role in the rescue if the mission had been completed. “This was classified. A lot of people didn’t know we were part of the process,” Benson said. But other sailors said they had no knowledge about that.

The deck logs resume on May 1, and they show that Bannon navigated as the Foster sailed from Pearl Harbor to San Diego.

Some of Bannon’s shipmates recalled that the crew was given a ribbon for its modest role. But Bannon and many other crew members were livid at Carter for the botched rescue.

“It shattered his confidence in President Carter,” Masso said. “It made him all the more in the tank for Reagan.”

In October 1980, with the Foster in port at Long Beach, Bannon went to Masso’s home to watch a Carter-Reagan debate. “He watched that debate like a prizefight,” Masso said.

Three months later, after Reagan won the election, Bannon was working for the new president, serving as an assistant in the office of the chief of naval operations at the Pentagon. He watched with satisfaction as Reagan increased the military budget and strengthened the Navy, with most of the focus on combating the Soviet Union. He served for three years and simultaneously studied national security and earned a master’s degree at Georgetown University.

Peter Harris, who served with Bannon at the Pentagon and also was in the Georgetown program, recalled that Bannon persuaded him to join the Toastmasters program, which teaches public speaking. “We did a lot of briefings, and we wanted to polish our public speaking skills,” Harris said.

Harris said Bannon was “an excellent officer” and described their Pentagon duties as “being down the food chain quite a bit . . . but [we] were exposed to a lot. We were all very involved in the Navy budget, working with the senior admirals. It was a good time to understand how the Navy formulates its policies and looks at the force structure 20 years out.”

Today’s WorldView

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Patrick McKim, who also served with Bannon at the Pentagon and has remained a close friend and sometimes writes for Breitbart, said that the period is crucial to understanding Bannon’s development. When Bannon arrived at the dawn of the Reagan era, McKim said, the military was still trying to emerge from the post-Vietnam era and the failed hostage rescue.

“People made you ashamed to be an officer,” McKim said in an interview arranged by a Bannon associate. Reagan’s arrival and the military buildup changed that view, and Bannon idolized the new president. Two years before Bannon left the military in 1983 and headed to Harvard Business School, he told McKim that he had a vision of his future.

“He mentioned that he’d go to Harvard and come back and be secretary of defense,” McKim recalled.

Bannon did not get the top job at the Pentagon. But 34 years after revealing that ambition, Bannon’s Navy career can be seen in a different light: It launched him on a path to Trump’s side, which may prove to be an even more powerful position.

Alice Crites contributed to this report.



Speed Limits on Trump’s Infrastructure Drive: Federal Laws, Rare Species and Nimbys

David Harrison

Updated Feb. 12, 2017 3:45 p.m. ET

Almost sixty years ago, officials at California’s transportation

department unveiled a plan to build a six-mile freeway extension in Los Angeles County.

They are still working on it.

During the 1960s, the road plan appeared on track. In the 1970s, new environmental laws required voluminous studies and sparked legal fights between the neighboring towns of South Pasadena and Alhambra, which lie along its

intended path. The project remains under review.

“I am totally for the national and statewide environmental laws,” said Hasan Ikhtrata, executive director of the Southern California Association

of Governments, who supports the extension project. Still, "sometimes it gets to be ridiculous."

Many lawmakers and economists agree with President Donald Trump that America needs to fix a backlog of infrastructure needs, which the Transportation Department pegs at \$926 billion. There's a similar agreement that conservation and preservation laws have helped mitigate damage on neighborhoods and the environment.

A tour through of the nation's thorniest infrastructure struggles shows how these two goals are often in conflict. As a result, long, costly reviews and legal battles will likely confront Mr. Trump's efforts, just as they delayed much of President Barack Obama's 2009 economic-stimulus efforts.

"You would have to fix some of these issues" said McKinsey & Co. partner Tyler Duvall, a DOT assistant secretary for policy in the George W. Bush administration, "in order to get the money into the system in a productive way."

The president has yet to reveal details of his plan. On Jan. 24, Mr. Trump issued an executive order calling for expedited reviews on "high priority" projects. Before signing, he said: "We can't be in an environmental process for 15 years if a bridge is going to be falling down or if a highway is crumbling."

Any significant new infrastructure-spending package would have to clear Congress. And executive orders alone won't do much to change a well-entrenched four-decade-old regulatory process, said Philip Howard, chairman of Common Good, a think tank favoring looser federal regulation. The White House didn't respond to requests for comment.

Presidents Obama and George W. Bush sought to accelerate projects with executive orders. The Obama administration was concerned prolonged reviews could hold back stimulus spending under the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, said Gary Guzy, general counsel at the White House Council on Environmental Quality under Mr. Obama, now a lawyer for Covington & Burling LLP.

The act devoted about \$48 billion to transportation, with a priority on "shovel-ready" projects. Getting money out the door took longer than expected. By January 2012, about \$33.5 billion had been spent. In 2015, Congress exempted some bridge replacements from environmental reviews.

Economists say well-designed infrastructure investments could increase economic productivity in

the long term by making it easier for businesses to ship products and for employees to get to work. In advanced economies, boosting infrastructure investment by 1% of gross domestic product can raise overall GDP by 1.5% four years later, an International Monetary Fund study found.

It can take decades to bring such investments to fruition. Reviews under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the National Environmental Policy Act of 1970, the Endangered Species Act of 1973 and other laws can involve multiple agencies before permits are issued.

Completing the process took an average of almost 10 years for major highway projects that received their final review in 2015, up from about five years in 2005, according to a study by Piet and Carole A. deWitt, retired Interior Department officials who have compiled some of the most comprehensive and frequently cited data on infrastructure-project reviews.

It took 16 years to get permits for the Army Corps of Engineers to dredge the harbor in Savannah, Ga. At least 10 federal and state agencies in Georgia and South Carolina weighed in. Work began in 2015.

In Mobile, Ala., local officials say a state proposal to bridge the Mobile River could expand business. Now, more than 73,000 cars daily cram a tunnel built for 36,000.

The Port of Mobile, on the bay's western side, opened a new container terminal in 2008. A less-congested crossing could entice businesses to use the port, said Brian Harold, managing director of APM Terminals, a port operator in Mobile, which runs the new facility. "When prospective companies look at the eastern side of Mobile Bay and into Florida, the tunnel is always a topic of concern for them."

The proposed \$850 million bridge would generate \$173 million to \$690 million annually in increased economic activity, the state estimates. After 14 years of reviews, it is years away from construction.

It is hard to compare project timelines before and after the 1970 environmental law because earlier projects weren't subject to the same reporting requirements. Anecdotally, it appears projects before that year moved more quickly.

Ten years after the Interstate Highway System's 1956 creation, the government had inaugurated 21,000 Interstate miles. That drove public capital spending to record

levels and helped boost the country's productivity, according to research by John Fernald, a senior research adviser at the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco.

The postwar U.S. construction boom eventually faced backlash among people who objected to the impact on neighborhoods, sensitive environmental locations and historical sites.

The 1970 National Environmental Policy Act, or NEPA, made planners issue environmental-impact statements for their most significant projects detailing how they would alter surroundings while offering ways to mitigate damage. NEPA gave environmentalists and conservationists a voice in planning, allowing them to sue if they believed developers weren't properly following the law.

Today, the law has become so deeply ingrained that officials often spend years working through every detail to avoid suits, even if an environmental-impact statement isn't required.

"There's a lot of defensive medicine built into it," said John D. Porcari, Maryland's former transportation secretary, who served in the Obama administration and is now an executive at Parsons Brinckerhoff Inc., an engineering and consulting firm.

Environmental groups have found themselves making the same case, on the grounds that more efficient reviews would let planners devote more energy to mitigating damage, according to Deron Lovaas, senior policy adviser at the National Resources Defense Council, an environmental group "I don't think unnecessary delay serves anyone."

Almost 100 NEPA-related lawsuits hit federal agencies every year. One, filed by North Carolina environmental groups, spent four years in court before a resolution last year let the state replace the deteriorating Herbert C. Bonner Bridge, which links Hatteras Island to the mainland.

Since opening in 1963, the 2.7-mile bridge on the Outer Banks has been scoured by wind, water and hurricanes. State officials said it has reached the end of its life. Environmental groups challenging a \$246 million replacement said the new bridge would illegally disturb a wildlife refuge.

Construction, begun in 2016, is scheduled for 2019 completion.

In 2014, Oklahoma discovered cracks on a 79-year-old bridge between Purcell and Lexington, about 45 minutes south of

Oklahoma City. State officials launched an expedited effort to replace it. Because of the bridge's historical significance as a Depression-era project, they first needed to consult Oklahoma's historical-preservation office under the 1966 federal preservation act.

Then officials needed to find a way to protect the Arkansas River shiner, a threatened minnow under the endangered-species act. The state plans to begin work in 2018. "It's hard to explain that to our constituency," said Mike Patterson, director of Oklahoma's transportation department, "because for them it's illogical."

As an example of how things should work, Mr. Porcari, the former Maryland transportation chief, cites the renovation of the Woodrow Wilson Bridge connecting Maryland and Virginia. After years of lawsuits almost killed the project, officials revived it in 1999, inviting environmentalists and community groups to planning meetings to discuss how to offset the new bridge's effects.

They agreed to restore the nearby Anacostia River, including cleaning up an illegal landfill. The revamped review was completed in 2000 and the new bridge opened in 2006. Today, the landfill is a wetland where wild rice and cattails thrive. Cormorants, herons and egrets populate the cleaner river.

In Southern California, planning for the State Route 710 extension continues to divide South Pasadena and Alhambra.

During the 1960s, the state prepared by buying homes along its proposed route. After the 1970 environmental law, South Pasadena sued to block construction, saying the state hadn't followed the act's review process. Residents feared the highway would split the town in two. Neighboring Alhambra argued the highway would ease congestion.

The 1973 lawsuit touched off a 25-year effort to revise the proposal, which succumbed to another lawsuit in 1999 by South Pasadena.

Planning efforts since have focused on a tunnel, which state officials estimate would generate up to \$1.59 billion in net benefits over 20 years. The state is starting to sell the homes it bought 50 years ago for the roadway.

Opponents in South Pasadena worry a tunnel could weaken the ground under its historic Craftsman houses. "This is something that can never be built," said Joanne Nuckols, 73, a board member of a local preservation group who has been fighting the road for 30 years.

Alhambra council member Barbara Messina, 76, has been advocating for the extension since 1978. "God

forbid we had people like that when we had our major infrastructure

projects done," she said. "We would never have gotten anything done."

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Attorney General Signals Pullback From Obama Initiative on Transgender Bathrooms

Sara Randazzo

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Newly instated U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions has shown an early sign of backing away from an Obama administration initiative that directs schools to allow transgender students to use the bathrooms and locker rooms of the sex with which they identify.

The signal came in a Friday court filing from Justice Department lawyers withdrawing a request made last year by the Obama administration. That request came in response to a judge's ruling in a lawsuit challenging federal guidance to states on accommodating transgender students.

The guidance, issued by President Barack Obama last May, said transgender students are protected under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, a federal law that bars discrimination in education based on sex at schools that accept federal money. Some states dispute that interpretation of Title IX.

The filing, in the Fifth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals,

stems from a lawsuit filed by Texas and a coalition of 12 other states opposing the memo.

After a district court judge in August temporarily blocked the directive, Mr. Obama sought to limit the scope of the court's ruling to only apply to those states pushing the appeal. Doing so would mean the transgender-rights guidance would remain in effect in the rest of the country. A group of 12 states and the District of Columbia had sided with Mr. Obama and said they wanted the directive to apply to them.

The Friday filing said the Justice Department is no longer seeking to limit the ruling and that, "The parties are currently considering how best to proceed in this appeal." It is unclear whether the Trump administration will ultimately stop defending the directive.

Gay-rights advocates said the filing could be a sign of things to come.

"What we can infer from it is that the Department of Justice and Trump administration are unlikely to robustly pursue rights for

transgender people," said Sarah Warbelow, legal director for Human Rights Campaign, an LGBTQ-rights organization.

Others welcomed the move.

"I think the Obama administration had distorted federal law," said Gary McCaleb, senior counsel with conservative advocacy group Alliance Defending Freedom. He said schools shouldn't face the loss of federal funding if they refuse to comply with the guidelines. "It's a matter of respecting the differences between boys and girls and protecting the privacy for all students."

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton and a Justice Department spokesperson couldn't immediately be reached for comment Sunday.

In July, 10 other states filed a separate legal challenge to the transgender-rights guidance. That case is pending in Nebraska.

The development comes as transgender-rights challenges continue to embroil many parts of the country. The U.S. Supreme Court is scheduled to hear oral

arguments in late March in the case of Gavin Grimm, a transgender high school student whose Virginia school district stopped allowing him to use the male restroom, instead adopting a policy requiring students to use the bathroom of their birth gender or a single-stall restroom. Gavin was born female but identifies as male.

Meanwhile, Texas Republicans recently proposed a state bill that would require people to use the bathrooms of their birth genders in public schools, and in state and local government facilities.

The Texas legislation is similar to a North Carolina law that caused a backlash from the business community and a rebuke from the National Basketball Association, which pulled out of plans to host this year's All-Star game in Charlotte. Supporters say the law protects religious beliefs and public safety in bathrooms.

The law continues to be the subject of court challenges.

The Washington Post

Their camp turning into a pit of mud, Dakota pipeline protesters packing up to leave

By Joe Heim

CANNON BALL, N.D. — The main camp here, once home to thousands of Native Americans and their allies who gathered to protest the completion of the Dakota Access crude-oil pipeline, is quickly turning into a gooey pit of mud.

Unseasonably warm weather over the weekend melted giant mounds of snow, and many of the remaining 200 or so pipeline protesters — self-described "water protectors" — are gathering their possessions and making plans to get off the 80-acre property, which sits in a flood zone near the Missouri River. The rising waters, and a federal eviction notice for Feb. 22, have forced their hands.

Others say they will stay and fight the Army Corps of Engineers, which decided last week to allow completion of the 1,172-mile pipeline. After President Trump cleared the way, the corps granted an easement to Energy Transfer Partners to drill under a reservoir less than a mile from the Standing

Rock Sioux Tribe's reservation. The drilling began last week.

[Trump administration approves final permit for Dakota Access pipeline]

The tribe has argued in court that this short stretch of the \$3.8 billion pipeline threatens its water supply, crosses sacred burial grounds, and violates long-standing treaties between the Native Americans and the federal government. But the path forward for the fight is unclear; many are pinning their hopes on court challenges, including one scheduled Monday in Washington seeking a temporary restraining order to stop the political — and actual — machinery. The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe has joined a motion by the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe to halt the drilling.

Horses still run free in the camp. Small packs of dogs dart about, tussling in the snow, their barks drowned out by the incessant whine of a snowmobile that wends its way through the slushy mess. Everything is white, brown, gray.

The only flashes of color come from weatherworn tribal flags, banners that were jubilantly raised last summer and now, some in tatters, snap to and fro in the ever-changing wind.

In the slurry running through camp are the remains of a mostly abandoned mini-city: an unopened packet of Top Ramen, a broken shovel, a mud-soaked glove, a pacifier.

One day soon, all of this will be gone: the tepees packed away, the yurts pulled down, the abandoned tents and sleeping bags and boxes of belongings scraped up by bulldozers into waiting dumpsters and hauled off to landfills.

The question for the camp's inhabitants and visitors and supporters is whether its dismantling becomes a catalyst for renewed Native American activism or fades into the hazy nostalgia of uprisings past.

Josh Dayrider, a member of the Blackfeet Nation of Montana, has been at the camp off and on since

early last year. The 30-year-old isn't quite ready to leave, but he knows departure is inevitable.

"We're still in the fight," Dayrider said. "And we've accomplished something amazing. We woke the world up by showing how the oil companies treat the land and the people. We're still standing. We're still fighting."

Tanya Olsen stood next to her mini-camper, pulling out a mattress that had been soaked by rising waters.

"The plan is to stay until the last minute," said Olsen, a member of the Yankton Sioux Tribe of South Dakota. She arrived here in November. "I was never an activist. I knew very little about pipelines. But what really caught my attention was the mistreatment of the Natives here. I thought, I've got to go there. I need to stand with my people."

As she prepares to leave, Olsen says she takes solace from the impact the year-long protest has had on tribes.

"It has brought the people of all of our nations together," she said. "It has awoken the children, the seventh generation, and it has been a learning experience for us as culture. It's sad that they went and allowed them to drill, but this hasn't been all for nothing."

From across the camp, there's a yell: "Mni Wiconi!"

Loosely translated from the Lakota language, it means "water is life," and it has become the protesters' rallying cry. The yell is picked up and repeated from different corners of the camp for a minute or so, echoing up to a snowy bluff overlooking the encampment where state and local police sit in a fleet of law enforcement vehicles, monitoring comings and goings. Quiet returns.

For the Standing Rock tribe and its supporters, the decision to allow completion of the pipeline without a promised environmental impact study came as one more slap in the face. Particularly upsetting to Standing Rock Chairman David Archambault II was that he had traveled to Washington on Tuesday for a White House meeting with a Trump administration official the following day; he believed he would have one more chance to plead the tribe's case. But he arrived at Reagan National Airport to learn that final approval had been granted while he was en route.

[Standing Rock Sioux chairman: 'I was slighted. I was disrespected.']

The snub was a sharp insult to the tribe's 16,000 members. On Friday night at the Standing Rock High School gym in Fort Yates, 25 miles down the road from the protest camp, several hundred fans from the reservation gathered to watch

the home Warriors girls basketball team take on the New Salem Holsteins.

Cheers and the squeak of sneakers filled the gym, where banners hang from the rafters touting the reservation's champion teams and athletes going back to the 1940s.

In the lobby, members of the Standing Rock high school band were holding a bake sale. Their teacher, Kim Warren, a tribal member, said she made regular visits to the main camp in the fall, believing the protest was a necessary and valuable one.

"We can't give up, especially with this new administration," said Warren, who has been teaching at the school for 18 years. "We can't give up. That's what I tell my students every day. Every struggle that they have, I tell them don't give up, keep going."

Despite assurances from the pipeline's owners that it is safe and is using the most advanced technology available, there is almost universal belief among Standing Rock tribal members that an accident is unavoidable and that their drinking water will be contaminated.

"Pipelines break all the time," said Charles Bailey, 46, a tribal member, as he stood outside the gym. "Everybody knows that it's going to break at some point. At my age, I'm thinking about how is this going to affect our youth, my daughters."

As legal options dwindle and the prospect of a completed pipeline that could begin transporting more than 500,000 barrels of crude oil a day in two to three months appears more likely, its opponents are taking stock.

Dallas Goldtooth has been one of the leading voices of the protest, filing regular Facebook Live feeds to share the most recent developments. An environmental activist who is an Isanti Dakota from Minnesota, he wants supporters to know that their participation has not been in vain, no matter what the outcome.

"Some feel it is all or nothing, but we cannot adopt that frame of thinking," Goldtooth said. "We've seen defeat as indigenous people, but we still persist, we're still striving. Whether we get a win here or not, we've pushed the boulder down the hill and it's running. The fight never stops. It builds. It moves. It grows."

Some activists have called for more protesters to come out to the site, but the Standing Rock tribe has discouraged that, asking that opposition be directed at the local level and at a March 10 march planned for Native American rights in Washington.

The relationship between the camp's remaining inhabitants and the Standing Rock tribe has at times been prickly. The tribe welcomed the 200 or so Native tribes that gathered here in late summer and fall to help their cause, and it welcomed the national and international support that followed. But the ongoing protest, at times involving violent clashes with law enforcement from neighboring Morton County, has drained the tribe's attention and resources.

One of the reservation's leading sources of revenue, the Prairie Knights casino hotel and concert venue, has taken a financial hit as the main road between the casino and Bismarck — normally an hour's drive — has been blocked off by

state police for months, forcing patrons to make a lengthier trip.

[Sheriffs ask Trump for federal help with Dakota Access pipeline protesters]

The ongoing protest also has strained an already tense relationship with Morton County law enforcement officials, who have arrested more than 700 protesters in recent months, including members of the Standing Rock tribe. And the unrest has led to the introduction of bills in the North Dakota legislature that create severe penalties for protest activities, a move that Amnesty International said "would undermine the rights to peaceful protest and freedom of expression."

Joe Plouff, 67, a former Wisconsin state representative and an Army veteran from Prairie View, Wis., stood outside his tent near the entrance to the Sacred Stone camp, which sits across the frozen Cannonball River from the main camp. He's not hopeful at this point that the pipeline can be stopped, but since arriving here in December, he says he has drawn inspiration from the movement and from the number of young people involved.

"Will they be demoralized if they lose this battle? Yes. Depressed? Yes? Hurt? Yes. But I see a lot of young people here and I think they will take it as a start," he said. "There's optimism because the Native Americans here have brought forward an issue that most of us have not paid attention to, and that is the safety of our water. They've taken a local issue and made it a national one."

**THE WALL
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COMMENTS

Editorial : Voter Fraud and Punishment

Feb. 12, 2017
6:09 p.m. ET 145

Voter fraud is a bigger problem than the media claim, but even if you think the government should do more to stop it, does fraudulent voting deserve eight years in prison? That's the sentence that a permanent U.S. resident in Texas received last week for illegally voting.

A Tarrant County (Fort Worth) jury convicted 37-

year-old Rosa Maria Ortega on two felony counts, and the punishment is eight years in the slammer and a \$5,000 fine. Ortega was born in Mexico and brought illegally to the U.S. as a baby before she became a green-card holder as an adult. Her lawyer says Ortega has a sixth-grade education and didn't understand that legal residents don't have the right to vote. "If I knew, everything would have been done the correct way," Ortega testified. "All my life I was taught I was a U.S. citizen."

The jury clearly didn't believe that, and it saw all the evidence, but there is still the matter of proportion. Ortega was indicted in November 2015, but her trial and sentencing come amid the polarized national debate over voter fraud since Donald Trump's election. Ortega's lawyer told the press that he had worked out a deal with Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton to drop the charges in return for Ortega testifying to the state legislature on voting procedures,

but local district attorney Sharen Wilson nixed it.

Someone needs to revisit this harsh punishment. Whatever the deterrent effect on others from such a severe sentence, an individual case of voter fraud is not a violent felony. Ortega wasn't running a voter-fraud ring. If a judge can't intervene, Governor Greg Abbott should commute Ortega's sentence to time served after a decent interval with a warning that Texas is taking fraud seriously.

**The
Washington
Post**
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Editorial : GOP hypocrisy on election aid

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

ONE WOULD imagine that, with President Trump and other Republicans questioning the integrity of the nation's election

systems, Congress would create an agency to help state and local officials run clean and efficient polls. In fact, the Election Assistance

Commission (EAC) already exists. At least for the moment: Despite all the GOP rhetoric about flawed elections, a GOP House committee

voted along party lines last week to kill the commission.

Created in response to the 2000 presidential election's recount controversy, the EAC has since diligently provided grants and other aid to state and local election officials to help them improve often archaic voting equipment and procedures.

But House Administration Committee Chairman Gregg Harper (R-Miss.) argues that the EAC has outlived its usefulness, because it has finished distributing the funds that the 2002 Help America Vote Act set aside to help local election officials modernize. Republicans also point out that the National Association of Secretaries of State — representing chief state election

officials across the country — has long called for dissolving the EAC.

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They are wrong, and it is a bad idea. The EAC does more than simply distribute grant funding. It performs a variety of small but important tasks, such as testing and certifying voting equipment, which help states pick reliable machines; formatting voter registration forms; and translating voter instructions into various languages. It is a vital clearinghouse for information about common election problems and effective ways they have been

addressed. With lots of voting equipment requiring replacement across the country, these functions are as essential as ever.

EAC critics nevertheless argue that anything of value the agency still does can be transferred to the Federal Election Commission (FEC). In fact, the EAC does much more of value than they appear to acknowledge, and the FEC is a deeply dysfunctional agency focused on addressing much bigger issues than voter form formatting.

The EAC performs its work, meanwhile, on a meager \$10 million budget. State secretaries of state are divided on whether to keep it, but concerns among red state officials that the EAC exists to federalize election administration

have not been borne out. In other words, this is not a federal agency gobbling up resources or screaming for reform.

The House's EAC bill is just another instance in which Republicans have acted based on a warped view of what is wrong with U.S. elections. As study after study has shown, fraud is not a major problem. Access to the ballot box — whether inhibited by discriminatory voting laws or long lines and malfunctioning equipment — is. If anything, Congress should give the EAC more support to help states tackle these real issues.

The Washington Post
gtonpostopinions

Editorial : An immigration policy worth ending

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

PRESIDENT TRUMP says he wants to tighten those aspects of our nation's immigration laws that reward low-priority entrants or pose threats to national security. He also insists that his critics have no reason to worry that his family's far-flung business interests will have an impact on his administration's policies. Well, a bipartisan pair of senators has just given him a golden opportunity to prove his bona fides on both points.

We refer to a freshly introduced bill co-sponsored by Charles Grassley (R-Iowa), the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, and Dianne Feinstein (Calif.), the committee's ranking Democrat. Their proposal would abolish the EB-5 visa program, which began a quarter-century ago as a well-intentioned plan to attract international capital to the United States, but has morphed into a

scandal-ridden embarrassment. The program awards permanent residency to a maximum of 10,000 foreigners per year who agree to pump at least \$500,000 into a U.S. business, creating at least 10 jobs directly or indirectly. In September 2015, the Bipartisan Policy Center estimated that 44,000 people, a third of whom are foreign investors and the rest family members, had qualified for visas since the program began in 1992. A disproportionate number of those admitted recently come from communist China, whose nontransparent economy makes the origins of their wealth difficult to trace. A 2015 Government Accountability Office report found that the Department of Homeland Security lacked the capacity to vet EB-5 applicants from China and elsewhere adequately, let alone in the "extreme" manner now in vogue at the White House.

In return, the Bipartisan Policy Center report found, the U.S. economy got 77,150 full-time jobs and approximately \$4.2 billion in

investment — paltry results, given that the United States has a total labor force of 150 million and \$200 billion in annual foreign investment. To be sure, EB-5 has created a lot of jobs for consultants, lawyers and lobbyists, who get paid to entice wealthy foreigners into applying for the visas, and to persuade Congress to renew it each year. Alas, some EB-5 promoters have bent or broken the rules, as shown by a string of scandals, including the April 2016 federal seizure of an EB-5-funded project in Vermont that government lawyers called "rampant with fraud."

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Even when the program functions honestly, its benefits skew heavily to big-city real estate developers, who use it to obtain financing more cheaply than they could from

investors who were motivated by rate of return, not migration. Among the business owners to take advantage of EB-5 was Mr. Trump's son-in-law and adviser, Jared Kushner, whose erstwhile company (he has now separated himself from it) raised \$50 million for a Trump-branded apartment building in Jersey City from Chinese EB-5 applicants.

Getting strongly behind the Grassley-Feinstein bill would be a good way for Mr. Trump to show that his immigration policies reflect consistent principles, not his and his family's involvement in the real estate business. The president has said he wants to be sure all new Americans come because they "love" the country. There are many ways to show that love, no doubt; but surely one of the least worthy of governmental favor is subsidizing hotels and apartments with one's murky obtained wealth.

The New York Times

Editorial : A Rare Republican Call to Climate Action

The Editorial Board

Luke Sharrett/Bloomberg

The most important thing about a carbon tax plan proposed last week may be the people behind it: prominent Republicans like James Baker III, George Shultz and Henry Paulson Jr. Their endorsement of the idea, variations of which have been suggested before, may be a breakthrough for a party that has closed its eyes to the perils of man-made climate change and done everything in its power to thwart efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

This gang of Republican elder statesmen — they call themselves the Climate Leadership Council — is not made up of the usual environmentalists, which is why their proposal might gain traction, though probably not right away.

Their proposal would tax carbon emissions at \$40 a ton to start and would be paid by oil refineries and other fossil fuel companies that would pass costs on to consumers with higher gas and electricity prices. The money raised would be returned to Americans through dividend checks; a family of four would get about \$2,000 a year to start. This would help people adjust to higher energy prices and give

them an incentive to reduce consumption or switch to renewable sources of energy. Most lower-income and middle-class families would get back more than they pay in taxes. To avoid placing American industry at a disadvantage, imports from countries that do not impose a comparable tax would be subject to a per-ton tax on the carbon emitted in the production of their products, while exports to those nations would not be.

Scientists and economists have long argued that putting a price on carbon would encourage conservation and investment in renewable energy. Ireland, Sweden and British Columbia already have

carbon taxes. The European Union, Quebec, California and Northeastern states like New York and Massachusetts have adopted cap-and-trade systems that use emission permits to lower emissions over time.

The last serious effort to impose a national price on carbon came in 2009 with cap-and-trade legislation by Edward Markey and Henry Waxman, both then Democratic House members. The bill passed the House, but never received a vote in the Senate. Since then, Republican control of one or both houses of Congress has thwarted ambitious climate legislation. As a result, President Obama turned to

administrative actions to reduce emissions, including the Clean Power Plan and higher fuel-economy standards for cars and trucks. Those regulations and standards are now on the chopping block under the Trump administration.

The new Climate Leadership Council argues that conservatives should support a carbon tax because it is a more market-friendly approach than Mr. Obama's

regulations. And after a carbon tax is put in place, the council says, the government should eliminate most of those rules, since they won't be needed. But there are legitimate fears that the tax alone might not achieve emission reductions on the scale needed to save the planet from out-of-control warming, and that regulations and other policies like public investments in renewable energy will be needed, too.

Neither President Trump nor Republicans in Congress have embraced the proposal. Many conservatives believe they'll be able to dismantle Mr. Obama's regulations through administrative, legal or legislative maneuvers, without compromising. Plus, many are philosophically opposed to, and politically fearful of, any new taxes.

Their dismissal of the council's proposal is myopic and puts their party out of step with the country. A

large majority of Americans want the government to address climate change — 78 percent of registered voters support taxing emissions, regulating them or doing both, according to a Yale survey conducted after the election. The Republican elders are offering their party an opening to change the conversation. They should take the cue.



Editorial : Court darkens Trump White House

The Editorial Board, USA

TODAY

The White House on Feb. 9, 2017. (Photo: Jim Lo Scalzo, epa)

Three weeks into Donald Trump's presidency, the courts are already sending him a message that his power is not absolute. Now the question is whether he will heed that message.

On Thursday, a unanimous three-judge appeals panel rebuked the president on two key points:

- The judges refused to reinstate his temporary ban on refugees and on travel from seven predominantly Muslim countries, finding that the administration gave the court "no evidence" that applicants from the seven nations presented a terrorist threat to the USA.
- The judges made clear that the president's claim that his order was unreviewable by the courts "runs contrary to the fundamental structure of our constitutional democracy."

While judges have long given deference to presidents on matters of immigration and national security,

their authority does not disappear. And democracy is better for that divided power. Trump's reaction, however, did not provide much hope that he grasps this. He initially called the ruling a "political decision" and issued a combative "SEE YOU IN COURT" declaration via Twitter. On Friday, he termed the decision "disgraceful."

The battle over the president's poorly conceived immigration order has the potential to escalate into a dangerous confrontation over the critical role courts play in a democracy. The Founders, who knew all too well the dangers of a monarch with unassailable power, created independent courts as a check on executive and legislative actions that defied the Constitution.

This structure and the grudging respect for it accorded by the executive branch have served the nation well in times of crisis for more than 240 years. Richard Nixon obeyed the Supreme Court's 8-0 order to turn over the Watergate tapes, knowing that it was likely to end his presidency.

While previous presidents have voiced anger about court rulings — President Obama famously criticized the *Citizens United* decision during a State of the Union address with the justices arrayed in front of him — no modern president has shown the disdain for the courts

that Trump has exhibited during his early days in office.

Trump has gone so far as to call a federal judge in Seattle who ruled against him a "so-called judge." Even his own nominee to the Supreme Court — appellate Judge Neil Gorsuch — told senators during private meetings that he was disheartened by "demoralizing" attacks on fellow judges. Good for Gorsuch.

As for the executive order at the heart of the court battles, there is no evidence that it kept any bad "dudes" out of the country during the brief, chaotic period it was in effect. But it did stop green card holders (people who have lived legally in the U.S. for some time), as well as foreign college students, tech workers, college professors and a 4-month-old Iranian baby on the way to Oregon for urgent heart surgery. After interventions by politicians and human rights groups, the baby was granted a waiver.

This is not to say that vetting of refugees and visitors from Syria and other nations in chaos could not be improved. But Trump's slapdash, overly broad order is strangely arbitrary. Most prominently, while the 9/11 terrorists were from Egypt, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, all of those countries are exempt from the order.

If this is really about preventing terrorism, as Trump asserts, he could quickly revise his order in ways that might better enable it to pass constitutional muster, and then improve whatever procedures he believes are lacking. That's the way to ensure the nation's safety.

Despite its early losses in court, the White House still could prevail on appeal. Thursday's ruling was on the narrow issue of whether a court can temporarily halt his order. The outcome of the long-term battle over the order's constitutionality could go either way. And it might well involve a long slog through the courts. Trump would do well to make it clear that he'll abide by the ultimate outcome, rather than leave the impression he's willing to provoke a constitutional crisis right out of the gate.

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Krikorian : Judges shouldn't control borders: Opposing view

Mark Krikorian
5:37 p.m. ET

Feb. 12, 2017

Demonstration in Los Angeles on Feb. 4, 2017. (Photo: David McNew, Getty Images)

If the court challenge to President Trump's executive order is ultimately upheld, the American people will have lost the power to control their borders to unelected judges.

A panel of appellate judges from the 9th Circuit (the most aggressively

anti-constitutional part of the federal judiciary) objected to the administration's claim that the executive order was unreviewable — i.e., that the judges had no business getting involved in the first place.

The ruling went on at length about previous cases related to foreign policy and immigration, but seemed to have deliberately ignored the main point: Congress has specifically authorized the president, any president, to act as Trump did. The law is explicit and not subject to interpretation: 8 USC

1182 (f) says the president may "suspend the entry of all aliens or any class of aliens as immigrants or non-immigrants," for as long as he wants, if he decides that their admission "would be detrimental to the interests of the United States."

A president can suspend the entry of foreign citizens who are redheads or poker players or cat lovers or even Muslims. He can and should be held responsible for such actions — by Congress and by the voters. But the courts have no business reviewing his reasons.

And no competence, either. U.S. District Judge James Robart, who issued the ruling freezing the executive order, noted during the hearing that it was based on the assertion that "we have to protect the U.S. from these individuals coming from these countries, and there's no support for that."

Actually, there is "support for that" — plenty of it. According to data collected by the Senate Subcommittee on Immigration and the National Interest, 72 people born in the executive order's seven dangerous countries have been

convicted on terrorism-related charges since 9/11. At least 17 came as refugees. Their crimes included use of a weapon of mass

destruction, conspiracy to commit a terror act, and more.

Last week's ruling was the action of politicians blocking a policy they dislike, not judges applying the plain words of the law.

Mark Krikorian is executive director of the Center for Immigration Studies.

The
Washington
Post

Rogin : Tillerson must bridge the gap between his workforce and the White House

By Josh Rogin
Global Opinions February 12 at 7:23 PM

One of Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's most crucial missions is to ensure that the State Department he leads becomes an integral and influential part of the Trump administration and not an outpost of opposition to a White House set on radically altering U.S. foreign policy priorities. That strategy is playing out in his selection of key officials to manage his agency, including his new chief of staff.

The State Department workforce has good reason to be concerned about its relevance in Trump's world. Trump's executive order on immigration was crafted without significant State Department input, and Tillerson was reportedly baffled about not being consulted. When more than 900 department employees signed a dissent cable about the order, White House press secretary Sean Spicer said they should "either get with the program or they can go."

Enter Margaret Peterlin, who State Department officials confirmed is Tillerson's new chief of staff. Peterlin was with Trump before Tillerson came on to the scene. She helped guide Tillerson through his confirmation process, and the two developed a rapport. Now she will have the most important job at the State Department when it comes to managing the relationship between the secretary and the thousands of bureaucrats he leads.

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Peterlin has a wealth of government and private-sector experience. After distinguished service as a naval officer, she graduated from the University of Chicago Law School and clerked for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 5th Circuit. She then went to work for House Majority Leader Dick Armey (R-Tex.), just days before the 9/11 attacks. Afterward, she helped negotiate and draft key pieces of national security legislation, including the authorization for the use of force in Afghanistan, the Patriot Act and the legislation that established the Department of Homeland Security.

"She's very substance- and policy-focused. She's not necessarily a political person," said Brian Gunderson, a State Department chief of staff for Condoleezza Rice who worked with Peterlin in the House.

Following a stint as legislative counsel and national security adviser for then-House Speaker Dennis Hastert, Peterlin moved over to the Commerce Department, where she served as the No. 2 official in the Patent and Trademark Office. There, she led delegations representing the U.S. government to countries all over the world.

"A good part of that job is focused on international policy and straight-up diplomacy," said Jon Dudas, who was director of the patent office at the time.

After she left government, Peterlin worked in the private sector, most recently for XLP Capital, a technology-focused investment firm.

The chief of staff at the State Department is the secretary's "ambassador to the institution," said David Wade, who was chief of staff to Secretary of State John F. Kerry. Tillerson's selection of Peterlin "sends a serious and reassuring signal to the building," he said.

That reassurance is badly needed. Most of the senior leadership team of the State Department was asked to resign during the transition before replacements were found, leaving large vacuums in administration. "The Trump administration has made a series of missteps with the State Department," said Nick Burns, a former undersecretary of state for political affairs. "Our foreign and civil service are professional and loyal. All they want to do is serve, but the White House has to show them respect."

Tillerson's first remarks to his employees this month acknowledged the problem at hand. "I know this was a hotly contested election and we do not all feel the same way about the outcome," he said. "Each of us is entitled to the expression of our political beliefs, but we cannot let our personal

convictions overwhelm our ability to work as one team."

Now all eyes in Foggy Bottom are focused on who Trump will nominate for the other crucial role, deputy secretary of state. Last week, Trump rejected the candidate Tillerson was reportedly pushing for the job, former State Department and White House official Elliott Abrams. They both met with Trump at the White House last week, but Trump reportedly couldn't forgive Abrams for speaking out against him during the campaign.

Abrams would have entered the State Department with a range of policy and management experience and would have found a workforce that would mostly welcome him with open arms. Now Tillerson's effort to build a team that can bridge the gap between the diplomatic corps and the White House leadership is delayed.

Tillerson has the experience to know he must heal the wounds between the professionals he leads and the president he serves. The White House should let Tillerson bring in people who can help him bring Foggy Bottom into the fold, rather than allow it to become another part of the opposition.

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The
Washington
Post

Dionne Jr : The next GOP assault on voting rights

<http://www.facebook.com/ejdionne>

When Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell silenced Elizabeth Warren last week as she was reading Coretta Scott King's 1986 letter denouncing Jeff Sessions, he jogged the memory of another Massachusetts Democrat, Rep. William R. Keating.

"I went to bed that evening seeing what was occurring," Keating said in an interview, "and when I woke up in the morning, my mind immediately went back to the outrage of an amendment that had been passed in the House," almost entirely with Republican votes.

The amendment, introduced by Rep. David Schweikert (R-Ariz.) and approved on May 9, 2012, was aimed at preventing the Justice Department from using its funds "to bring any action against any state for implementation of a state law requiring voter identification."

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In other words, even if the Department of Justice thought a voter ID law discriminated against African Americans or Latinos, it could not sue to protect them.

In defending the amendment, Republicans sounded like the old Southern segregationist Democrats who stood up for states' rights — meaning, among other things, their "right" to disenfranchise people of color. The segregationists loved to denounce Washington, and that's what Schweikert did that day.

"I'm tired of this," he said, "and I think the American people are tired of there being this battle between the federal government suing our states and costing the residents, the citizens of these states, these litigation costs."

The amendment never made it through the Senate, but for Keating, the episode underscored the

dangers that Sessions poses as attorney general. During the Obama years, the Justice Department tried to block state laws plainly aimed at suppressing turnout among minority groups. Now, voting rights advocates will no longer have the attorney general as their ally. "Acts of omission," noted Keating, a former prosecutor, are often as serious as "acts of commission."

Cutting off Warren under the irregularly observed Rule 19 was an outrage on many levels. Under the rule, senators cannot "impute to another senator or to other senators any conduct or motive unworthy or unbecoming a senator." But the confirmation of then-Sen. Sessions was the very focus of the

discussion. Carried to its logical conclusion, the idea that a senator can't speak ill of a president's nominee who happens to be a senator could shut down debate altogether.

But what Warren was reading when she was muzzled goes to the heart of the matter. Here is the key passage of King's letter opposing Sessions's nomination as a judge in 1986: "Anyone who has used the power of his office as United States attorney to intimidate and chill the free exercise of the ballot by citizens should not be elevated to our courts. Mr. Sessions has used the awesome powers of his office in a shabby attempt to intimidate and frighten elderly black voters."

**The
Washington
Post**

PALO ALTO, Calif.

Imagine a successful Trump presidency.

That is the assignment I gave myself this week as I met with research fellows at the Hoover Institution, a free-market think tank located here on Stanford University's campus, and with Stanford professors. Set aside the initial stumbles and Washington angst, and imagine how Donald Trump might build on his unexpected electoral victory.

"Well, it's sad," a conservative expert on politics replied when I asked the question. "Because he could have done something groundbreaking."

Could have? Past tense? Already?

Yes, this person replied. Trump took office with a unique opportunity to triangulate between the two parties. With Republicans he could have enacted tax reform and rolled back regulations. With Democrats he could have pushed through a giant infrastructure bill, dividing the Democratic coalition (trade unions from teachers unions, Midwesterners from coastal elites). Presto: a new working coalition.

But Trump's first three weeks were so disastrous and toxic to the opposition that he has made it impossible for Democrats to cooperate. "With all the noise about crowd size, the complaints about

The Senate rejected Sessions as a judge 31 years ago. But now that he is our chief law enforcement officer, holding him accountable for how he vindicates or undermines civil rights and voting rights is a central task. So is rallying against all efforts in Republican-controlled states to pass new laws restricting the franchise, as many of them already have. The Department of Justice can't be counted on to stop them.

And the struggle for democracy is also at stake in the fight over President Trump's nomination of Judge Neil Gorsuch to the Supreme Court. Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer told MSNBC's Rachel Maddow last week of "an eerie feeling" he had when he spoke with Gorsuch.

the march, the executive order, the attacks on judges — how can [Senate Minority Leader Charles] Schumer cooperate now?" he said. "He can't."

Undoubtedly the "resistance" has emerged far more quickly than anyone predicted. But surely, I thought, three weeks is a bit soon to say last rites over a 208-week presidency.

Unexpectedly, perhaps, a Never-Trump national security expert here, Kori Schake, agreed.

"I actually think there's a strong optimistic case to be made," she told me.

Government is so averse to risk, Schake argued, that many policies and processes have become "silted up." Buying weapons takes too long and costs too much. Innovators stay away.

Trump complains about allies freeloading more rudely than did his predecessors, Schake noted, but the complaint isn't new; maybe he can get somewhere. Similarly, he's hardly the first president to promise in a campaign to help those left behind by trade; maybe he will be the one to do something about it.

"There's a lot of stuff that needs fixing," Schake said. "He's going to break a lot of china, but there are opportunities to do things better."

In practice, experts here such as Richard Epstein hope that means fewer regulations and lower taxes, which they say could spur

"Here was a judge, well-groomed, intelligent, very polite, very, very articulate, who wouldn't give his views on anything," Schumer said. This reminded him of someone else.

"Justice [John] Roberts, then-Judge Roberts, assured us he would call balls and strikes," Schumer said. "He gets in office, and his court does Citizens United, a huge break with precedent that ruins, ruins the politics of America. He repeals, basically, the Voting Rights Act by eliminating Section 5 ... and I am very worried that Judge Gorsuch is similar."

The court's action on voting rights made it far harder to police abuses, while Citizens United undercut the regulation of big money in politics.

So if you wonder why there is skepticism among liberals about Gorsuch, consider what conservative Supreme Court justices have already done. Think also about what it would mean to have a Supreme Court, an attorney general and a Congress all prepared to gut what had long been the basic rules of democracy. Bill Keating is not alone in his nightmares.

Read more from E.J. Dionne's archive, follow him on Twitter or subscribe to his updates on Facebook.

Hiatt : Imagining a successful Trump presidency

<https://www.facebook.com/fhiatt1>

investment — providing that the positive effects are not swamped by Trump-initiated trade wars or Trumpian interference in market decisions, such as telling companies where and how much to invest.

Overseas, the administration might seek stability via understandings with Russia and China. China could promise fairer access to its market for U.S. firms, less theft of intellectual property, maybe even more direct investment and job creation in the United States.

What would Trump give in return? Certainly an end to the annoying-to-China U.S. habit of talking about human rights and democracy. Smaller countries in the Pacific worry that he might give up a lot more.

"I think we are at risk of the president making a large number of high-octane bad deals," Schake said. But setting "rules of the road for big-power behavior" has been a positive in past years and could be so again, she said.

Similarly, Russia might promise to withdraw gradually from eastern Ukraine, in return for a reduction of sanctions and America's recognition that Ukraine would never be in NATO or America's sphere of influence. Whether Russian President Vladimir Putin would honor such a promise is another question.

In any case, you can see something like a best-case scenario taking

place. I should make clear: I don't mean best-case in the sense of good policy. Personally I would not favor reducing regulations that, for example, protect stream beds in coal country. I don't think it's responsible to postpone entitlement reform, as Trump vows to do. Nor do I think that a values-free foreign policy is likely to be sustainable in the long term.

But you could imagine all of this translating into a reasonable short-term value proposition to voters three years from now: economic growth without too much inflation (for the moment), global stability, lower taxes.

The question is whether the administration has the discipline and finesse to pull off these difficult balancing acts. Was the lost opportunity of the first 20 days based on a strategic decision to double down on us-vs.-them, or on whim and resentment? And if the latter, will it become a learning opportunity?

"It will all come down to whether people feel like things are getting better for them," said Stanford political scientist Morris P. Fiorina. "He could blunder into a successful presidency. It could also be a disaster."

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**THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL**

Prakash and Yoo : Trump's 'So-Called' Judgment

Sai Prakash and John Yoo

Updated Feb. 12, 2017 8:46 p.m. ET

President Trump can't seem to control his impulse to question his critics' legitimacy. On Twitter he denounced the "so-called judge"

who issued a temporary restraining order against his immigration policy. Then, as the Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals reviewed the case,

he complained that “courts seem to be so political.” He declared that even “a bad high school student” would understand why his executive order was legal. When the Ninth Circuit ruled against him, he called it “a disgraceful decision.”

Meanwhile, Judge Neil Gorsuch, Mr. Trump’s Supreme Court nominee, told senators that he found “any criticism of a judge’s integrity and independence disheartening and demoralizing,” according to a statement on his behalf.

Yet the president has crossed no constitutional red lines. True, federal judges enjoy unique constitutional protections and thus a measure of independence. They serve for life so long as they maintain “good behavior.” Congress and the president can never reduce their salaries.

But there is no law that silences the American people, including the president, or shields judges from criticism outside the courtroom. No principle of democracy or judicial independence demands that we check our tongues, pens or tweets because the object of critique wears a robe. The fundamental right to criticize government applies no less to jurists than to presidents or members of Congress.

Mr. Trump’s attacks on the judiciary are mild compared with some of his

predecessors’. Upon assuming the presidency, Thomas Jefferson ordered all prosecutions under the Sedition Act dropped and pardoned everyone convicted under it, even though the courts had upheld its constitutionality. Andrew Jackson reportedly said of the chief justice that “John Marshall has made his decision; now let him enforce it.” Jackson vetoed reauthorization of the Bank of the United States because he believed the Constitution did not give Congress the power to create a bank, despite the Supreme Court’s decision to the contrary in *McCulloch v. Maryland* (1819).

Our greatest presidents have gone even further. Abraham Lincoln declined to apply the court’s infamous 1857 decision in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* to any new cases. At the outset of the Civil War, he defied Chief Justice Roger Taney’s order releasing a Confederate prisoner. Franklin D. Roosevelt accused justices who struck down his New Deal of living in the “horse-and-buggy” era and acting “not as a judicial body, but as a policy-making body.” He tried to persuade Congress to add six seats to the high court so that he could pack it with pro-New Deal justices. Lawmakers refused.

Nor was Mr. Trump’s immediate predecessor shy about attacking the courts. President Obama inveighed

against *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, a landmark free-speech case, during his 2010 State of the Union address, with several justices sitting right in front of him. Two years later, when the court was considering a constitutional challenge to the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, the president publicly declared that it would be an “unprecedented, extraordinary step” to strike it down, because it was passed by a majority of Congress. Mr. Obama’s critics saw that as an attempt to pressure Chief Justice John Roberts—who ultimately supported the administration’s position.

But if presidential attacks on the courts are nothing new, the history also underscores the smallness of Mr. Trump’s vision. Jefferson, Lincoln and FDR knew when to speak and when to keep silent. They invoked the great powers of the presidency to oppose the Supreme Court only when fundamental constitutional questions were at stake: the punishment of political dissent; secession and slavery; Congress’s power to regulate the economy. The occasion for Mr. Trump’s fury is a temporary restraining order of a temporary suspension of immigration from seven countries. Mr. Trump still has the opportunity to prevail on the merits. He hasn’t lost the case—at least not yet.

The Trump administration will often appear in court over the next four or eight years. It will lose plenty of cases, because, like its predecessors, it will push the legal envelope. If the president publicly vents every time he loses a ruling, his complaints will recede into background noise.

Questioning judicial decisions, and even the judiciary’s legitimacy, is entirely proper. But a wise president will reserve such attacks for extraordinary matters of state involving the highest constitutional principles. To do otherwise risks dissipating the executive’s energy, weakening the president’s agenda, and wasting his political capital. When criticizing the Supreme Court for upholding the Bank of the United States, declaring Dred Scott a slave, or striking down the New Deal, presidents were advancing constitutional agendas worthy of a fierce attack on the courts. Mr. Trump is upset about losing a minor procedural test of a temporary executive order. If he doesn’t learn to be more judicious, we’re in for a long four years.

Messrs. Prakash and Yoo are law professors at the University of Virginia and the University of California, Berkeley, respectively.

**THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL**

O’Grady : Texas and the Real Forgotten Man

Mary Anastasia
O’Grady

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ET

Donald Trump pledged in his inaugural address to stand up for the forgotten man and woman. But if the 45th president destroys the North American Free Trade Agreement in an attempt to rescue some Americans, millions more—including many who voted for him—could be added to the nation’s economically forgotten souls.

The very red state of Texas could suffer the most. Over 23 years it has worked to adapt to open commerce with its southern neighbor. Production sharing in manufacturing with counterparts across the Mexican border has boosted productivity, and a sharp increase in U.S.-Mexico trade at Texas land and sea ports has generated big export gains for the Lone Star State.

Nafta has made Texas more globally competitive. It hasn’t happened without some pain, particularly in border cities. Yet without the agreement, Texas

arguably would have found it more difficult, on the employment front, to adjust to the acceleration in manufacturing automation that hit the U.S. during the same period.

President Trump, who was a Democrat for most of his life, uses the metaphor of the forgotten man in much the same way President Franklin Roosevelt did during the 1930s. Both can be viewed as champions of the fellow who has fallen on hard times and cannot seem to recover. The Trumpian approach to helping the “little guy” would also be familiar to FDR: Make the economy less free.

Yet as Amity Shlaes explains in her 2007 book, “The Forgotten Man,” that term originated with Yale professor William Graham Sumner. In his 1883 essay the forgotten man is the one who is passed the bill—unnoticed—when do-gooders propose “measures of relief for the evils which have caught public attention.”

Sumner didn’t name names. He simply described the injustice of A and B getting together to help X with some new law. C isn’t in on the plan but he carries the burden.

“Such is the Forgotten Man,” Sumner wrote. “He works, he votes, generally he prays—but he always pays—yes, above all, he pays.”

In Mr. Trump’s war on globalism, Texas is brimming with Cs—hard-working Americans who have adjusted to freer trade and now find that A and B want to change the rules as a favor to X. There are millions more Cs all over the U.S.

Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas economist Jesus Cañas provides a useful profile of post-Nafta Texas in a 2016 report “Texas Border Cities Illustrate Benefits and Challenges of Trade.” The report says 710,000 U.S. jobs were lost between 1994 and 2014 “as a result of increased imports from Mexico and Canada or due to shifts in production.” Texas, Mr. Cañas writes, was the second most-affected state—in absolute numbers of jobs lost—behind North Carolina and ahead of California. Texas border cities, where manufacturing had been “heavily concentrated in low-value-added industries,” were hit hard.

Yet with more competition came increased trade, investment and technological change, all of which

helped reshape the Texas economy. And cities along the border “went on to gain far more employment than what they lost” due to changes from Nafta.

Texas’ exports to Mexico—measured not by where the products are made but by where their journey abroad begins—increased by 236% from 1994 to 2015. “A significant share of this trade,” Mr. Cañas writes, “is in intermediate products—goods destined for assembly or other processing after which they are imported back into the U.S.” Mexico is Texas’ top export market, taking 40% of what the state sends abroad.

Mr. Cañas notes that the blue-collar workers most affected by Mexican imports have “experienced substantially lower wage growth than their counterparts in other industries.” But he observes that the metropolitan areas that lost the most jobs due to Nafta have benefited the most from increases in foreign direct investment. They also benefit from “rising living standards on the Mexican side of the border,” i.e., new customers with money.

Like the rest of the country, Texas' employment is shifting from manufacturing to "other sectors such as business services," Mr. Cañas writes. The state's manufacturing employment is down 9% since Nafta implementation but

manufacturing output grew 4.1% per year between 1997 and 2015.

"Manufactured goods exports supported an estimated 990,000 jobs in Texas in 2015," the report says. The state "gained" more than four million jobs from 1994 to 2015,

a period of rising automation and free trade, while real per capita incomes grew to \$47,000 from \$30,000.

Mr. Trump's proposal to build new barriers to trade with Mexico ignores the harm that is sure to

come to the armies of American factory workers, entrepreneurs and suppliers of business services who buy and sell across the border. Mr. Trump forgets these men and women at his own political peril.

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Blinder : Washington Protects Wall Street at Ordinary Citizens' Expense

Alan S. Blinder

Feb. 12, 2017 6:12 p.m. ET

President Trump seems to be looking for places to direct his ire. Among his recent targets were consumers of financial services. That includes anyone with an individual retirement account, a bank account or a credit card.

His point man was Gary Cohn, director of the National Economic Council and former president and chief operating officer at Goldman Sachs. A fact-based outfit, many of us thought. So maybe Mr. Cohn would be the grown-up in the room. No such luck. It looked like Kellyanne Conway sent him out to face the press with "alternative facts."

Mr. Cohn's interviews previewing and lauding Mr. Trump's expansive Feb. 3 executive order on financial deregulation were the first steps toward undermining Congress's 2010 financial reform law, the Dodd-Frank Act. An accompanying presidential memorandum directed the secretary of labor (a post still vacant because the nominee only recently submitted his paperwork) to revise or rescind President Obama's rule establishing a fiduciary standard for retirement accounts.

That rule, which was six years in the making, was to go into effect in April. It requires brokers and advisers who manage retirement accounts like 401(k)s to adhere to what is called the fiduciary

standard—which means acting in their clients' best interests instead of their own. If you haven't followed this issue, you may be amazed that this is not already the law of the land. It isn't. They can (and do) fleece you legally.

What do Mr. Cohn and his boss think about the fiduciary standard? "We think it is a bad rule," he told the Journal. "This is like putting only healthy food on the menu, because unhealthy food tastes good but you still shouldn't eat it because you might die younger." Read those words again, and be glad Mr. Cohn doesn't run the school lunch program.

The new executive order on financial deregulation, he said, is "a table setter for a bunch of stuff that is coming." His boss was blunter. During a meeting with business executives this month, Mr. Trump said he expects "to be cutting a lot out of Dodd-Frank." Watch out America. Congress enacted Dodd-Frank to ensure that we never suffer through a financial crisis like 2008-09 again.

At 2,319 pages, it's an imperfect piece of legislation, to be sure. But it achieved many important goals. Since space is limited, I'll mention just three.

Title II of the act provides a sorely needed mechanism for putting a dying financial giant out of its misery peacefully—in contrast to the violent way Lehman Brothers died, leaving so much collateral damage behind. Yet Mr. Cohn insists that the

Trumpian deregulation of financial markets "has nothing to do with Goldman Sachs" or other giants. Really? He even claimed that Dodd-Frank fails to provide "a solid process" for winding down a faltering financial giant. Sorry, it does.

According to Mr. Cohn, lending by American banks is inhibited because they are hamstrung "with literally hundreds of billions of dollars of regulatory costs every year." Well, it's true that banks must comply with more rules now. They must also hold more capital. Those requirements are indeed burdensome to banks. To the rest of us, they are insurance against a runaway financial system tearing down the economy again.

As for Mr. Cohn's specific claims, they are absurd on their face. Here are some real facts.

First, banks do not pay anything close to "hundreds of billions of dollars" per year to comply with regulations. The Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. reports that total noninterest costs of all banks over the first three quarters of 2016 were \$315 billion. Well under 10% of that cost goes for compliance, according to a survey by the Conference of State Bank Supervisors.

Second, bank lending is not shriveling up. Those same FDIC data show that total bank lending grew 7% over the past four quarters, more than twice as fast as nominal gross domestic product. Among community banks, growth

was even faster: 9.4%. The lending was profitable, too; net income rose 12%.

None of this is to argue against regulatory relief for smaller banks. They need some. (Goldman Sachs doesn't.) It is pretty clear, however, that the U.S. banking industry is not being choked by regulation.

Dodd-Frank also established the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau to make it harder for financial institutions like Goldman to cheat their customers. If you don't think consumers need such protection, read this newspaper daily. Yet Republicans have been looking to eviscerate the CFPB since before it opened its doors in July 2011.

As Mr. Cohn correctly observed, the administration doesn't need legislation to neuter the bureau. It needs only to replace its determined director, Richard Cordray, with a fox who won't guard the proverbial chicken coop. "Personnel is policy," Mr. Cohn warned. Hens beware.

Congress passed Dodd-Frank to protect ordinary citizens from rapacious Wall Streeters. Turns out that in Trumpworld, Wall Street needs protection from ordinary citizens. Who knew?

Mr. Blinder, a former Federal Reserve vice chairman, is a professor of economics and public affairs at Princeton University and a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution.

The New York Times

Krugman : Ignorance Is Strength

Paul Krugman

We see it on national security matters, where the president continues to rely on a chief adviser who, suspicious closeness to the Kremlin aside, appears to get his strategic information from right-wing conspiracy theorists.

We see it on education, where the hearings for Betsy DeVos, the education secretary, revealed her to be completely ignorant about even the most elementary issues.

We see it on diplomacy. How hard is it to ask someone from the State Department to make sure that the White House gets foreign leaders' names right? Too hard, apparently: Before the Abe flub, the official agenda for the state visit by Theresa May, the British prime minister, repeatedly misspelled her name.

And on economics — well, there's nobody home. The Council of Economic Advisers, which is supposed to provide technical expertise, has been demoted from

cabinet rank, but that hardly matters, since nobody has been nominated to serve. Remember all that talk about a trillion-dollar infrastructure plan? If you do, please remind the White House, which hasn't offered even a ghost of a concrete proposal.

But let me not be too hard on the Tweeter-in-chief: disdain for expertise is general in his party. For example, the most influential Republican economists aren't serious academics with a conservative bent, of whom there

are many; they're known hacks who literally can't get a number right.

Or consider the current G.O.P. panic over health care. Many in the party seem shocked to learn that repealing any major part of Obamacare will cause tens of millions to lose insurance. Anyone who studied the issue could have told them years ago how the pieces of health reform fit together, and why. In fact, many of us did, repeatedly. But competent analysis wasn't wanted.

And that is, of course, the point. Competent lawyers might tell you that your Muslim ban is unconstitutional; competent scientists that climate change is real; competent economists that tax cuts don't pay for themselves; competent voting experts that there weren't millions of illegal ballots; competent diplomats that the Iran deal makes sense, and Putin is not your friend. So competence must be excluded.

At this point, someone is bound to

say, "If they're so dumb, how come they won?" Part of the answer is that disdain for experts — sorry, "so-called" experts — resonates with an important part of the electorate. Bigotry wasn't the only dark force at work in the election; so was anti-intellectualism, hostility toward "elites" who claim that opinions should be based on careful study and thought.

Also, campaigning is very different from governing. This is especially true when the news media spend

far more time obsessing over your opponent's pseudo-scandals than they do on all actual policy issues combined.

But now things have gotten real, and all indications are that the people in charge have no idea what they're doing, on any front.

In some ways this cluelessness may be a good thing: malevolence may indeed be tempered by incompetence. It's not just the court defeat over immigration; Republican

ignorance has turned what was supposed to be a blitzkrieg against Obamacare into a quagmire, to the great benefit of millions. And Mr. Trump's imploding job approval might help slow the march to autocracy.

But meanwhile, who's in charge? Crises happen, and we have an intellectual vacuum at the top. Be afraid, be very afraid.

The New York Times **Blow : The Power of Disruption**

Charles M. Blow

Ninth Circuit rebuking the administration's lawyers like children.

Then, top Trump adviser Kellyanne "QVC" Conway, from the confines of the White House briefing room, said during a televised interview: "Go buy Ivanka's stuff is what I would say." She continued: "I'm going to give a free commercial here: Go buy it today, everybody; you can find it online."

Unethical is too kind a word for these classless cretins. Furthermore, Trump has nominated, and his Republican conspirators in the Senate have confirmed, a rogues' gallery of some of the least qualified, most questionable appointees in recent memory. Aside from some of them being the fiercest critics of the very agencies they are charged with leading, some have also been accused of bigotry, plagiarism, insider trading and overall vacuousness.

Trump's Muslim ban has also been an absolute disaster and has met some much-applauded resistance in court, most recently with the United States Court of Appeals for the

This administration is already manifesting as the disaster we knew it would be; the stench of its rot surrounds us. What is there to wait and see? A rose will never bloom from a weed; you must snatch that thing up at first sight, by the root.

That is why you are seeing so much grass-roots resistance from a multiplying array of groups. One of the most prominent is called "Indivisible." The Nation interviewed Ezra Levin, a former Democratic staffer and co-founder of the project and reported on the exchange: "Levin says that Indivisible built on the Tea Party's model of 'practicing locally-focused, almost entirely defensive strategy.' This, he adds, 'was very smart, and it was rooted in an understanding of how American democracy works. They understood that they didn't have the power to set the agenda in Washington, but they did have the ability to react to it. It's Civics 101 stuff — going to local offices, attending events, calling their reps.'"

I would add that these groups are practicing one of the most effective tactics of confronting power: disruption. Town hall meetings have been disrupted; protesters disrupted Education Secretary Betsy DeVos's plans to enter a Washington school.

Disruption works!

When Frederick Douglass attacked Abraham Lincoln by saying that he "seems to possess an ever increasing passion for making himself appear silly and ridiculous, if nothing worse," Douglass was being disruptive.

When women suffragists paraded through Washington, they were being disruptive.

When Rosa Parks refused to surrender her seat, she was being disruptive.

When civil rights activists marched across the Edmund Pettus Bridge, they were being disruptive.

When LGBT people fought back at The Stonewall Inn, they were being disruptive.

When Act Up flooded Times Square, they were being disruptive.

When Occupy Wall Street refused to move from their parks, they were being disruptive.

When Black Lives Matter took to the streets and ground traffic to a halt, they were being disruptive.

When Native Americans stood in resistance at Standing Rock, they were being disruptive.

When Elizabeth Warren persisted, she was being disruptive.

Disruption is not a dirty word; in this environment, it's a badge of honor.

Yes, it's important to show up on Election Day, but it is also important to show up on the hundreds of days before and after. This is what the resistance movements are saying to Trump and his America: Buckle your seatbelts, because massive disruption is in the offing.

Trump is not normal. He is not competent. And we will not simply sit back and suck it up.

The New York Times **Editorial : Haunted by Student Debt Past Age 50**

The Editorial Board

The experience of being crushed by student debt is no longer limited to the young. New federal data shows millions of Americans who are retired or nearing retirement face this burden, as well as the possibility of having their Social Security benefits garnished to make payments.

Americans age 60 and older are the fastest-growing age group of student loan debtors. Older debtors, many of whom live hand-to-mouth on fixed incomes, are more likely to default. When that occurs with federal loans, as happens with nearly 40 percent of such borrowers who are 65 and over, the government can seize a portion of their Social Security payments — even if it pushes them into poverty.

About 20,000 Americans over the age of 50 in 2015 had their Social Security checks cut below the poverty line because of student loans, with poverty-level benefits falling even further for 50,000 others, according to a recent report by the Government Accountability Office.

A report issued last month by the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau shows that the number of Americans aged 60 and older with student loan debt has grown fourfold over the last decade, to 2.8 million in 2015 from about 700,000 in 2005. The average amount owed by these borrowers has nearly doubled, to \$23,500.

Some older borrowers are carrying their own education loans, but most fell into debt helping their children or grandchildren, either by borrowing

directly or co-signing loans. As these borrowers age, they have increasing difficulty keeping up loan payments while also paying for food, housing, medication, and dental and medical care.

Adding to Poverty's Ranks

By 2015, a total of nearly 70,000 people age 50 and older had their Social Security benefits fall below the poverty line — or their benefits were already below and cut further — because of defaults on student debt.

People whose benefits were already below the poverty line; garnished Social Security income made them even lower.

The federal government needs to give priority to people who are struggling to survive over the companies that collect their loan

payments. That means ending the practice of seizing the Social Security benefits of poor or disabled student loan debtors.

Most federal student loan borrowers are eligible for income-based repayment plans under which distressed borrowers can pay as little as nothing per month. Many of those who enroll qualify to have the federal government pay part of their interest charges. And many are eligible to have loans forgiven after specified periods of time.

But loan servicing companies, which sometimes cheat borrowers outright, do a terrible job of enrolling people in this program. This deprives older borrowers of information about payment plans that would allow them to meet their loan obligations without skimping on medical or dental care.

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, which recently sued the nation's largest loan servicing company, is rightly pushing the industry to do a better job of informing borrowers of their rights

and enrolling them in the affordable payment program.

Still, the government should do more for older borrowers. For starters, it should automatically enroll them in income-based

repayment when their accounts become delinquent — but before they default. Those who have reached default should be enrolled in the rehabilitation plan, which offers affordable payments.

Meanwhile, Congress should exempt Social Security income from garnishment.