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Paris Riots Fuel French Presidential Campaign Rhetoric

Inti Landauro and
Stacy Meichtry

Updated Feb. 13, 2017 11:22 a.m.
ET

PARIS—A week of social unrest at the edges of France's capital has begun to resonate on the campaign trail as Marine Le Pen of the far-right National Front seized on the violence to rail against the country's ruling class.

Stone-throwing rioters, smashed storefronts and burning vehicles have become a nightly ritual across Paris's *banlieues*, the belt of downtrodden suburbs that surrounds the manicured capital. Police detained 21 people, many of them minors, late Sunday as rioting continued for the seventh straight night.

"All this is the result of complacency in French society, which is the fault of politicians who have governed us for years," Ms. Le Pen said on Sunday.

France's suburbs, where large numbers of France's minorities live in housing projects, have long been a powder keg for social unrest. High

unemployment and widespread drug dealing often lead to clashes with police, who locals accuse of brutality.

The latest violence erupted in response to the Feb. 2 arrest of a 22-year-old man, identified as Theo, who claimed police used a baton to sodomize him. Prosecutors opened an investigation into the four officers involved in his arrest, and Theo was hospitalized for injuries that included damage to his rectum.

Peaceful protests demanding "Justice for Theo" have deteriorated into dangerous rioting, including the torching of cars. One vehicle was set alight on Saturday with a young girl inside who had to be rescued.

Past violence has ended up handing a megaphone to hard-line politicians. In 2005, rioting inside Paris's *banlieues* spread across the country, prompting then-Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy to demand a cleansing of "scum" with a high-powered hose. The comments helped fuel support for Mr. Sarkozy and carry him to a presidential victory in 2007.

Polls predict Ms. Le Pen will win the first round of the presidential election in April but lose out to a more mainstream candidate in the May runoff.

Over the weekend, François Fillon, the conservative presidential candidate who served as Mr. Sarkozy's prime minister, blamed the Socialist government of President François Hollande for allowing the violence to erupt.

"The government must not let the violence express itself. The first victims are always the residents of the *banlieues*," he said.

So far, the violence hasn't spread to other cities, as it did in 2005. The government and its defenders have tried to strike a balance, calling for an end to the rioting while also demanding accountability for alleged police brutality.

Mr. Hollande, who isn't running for re-election, has made a bedside visit to Theo, pledging a thorough investigation.

Benoît Hamon, the Socialist Party's presidential candidate, accused Ms. Le Pen of trying to foment more

violence with her comments. He also called on police to "be exemplary whenever they're on duty."

Police say rioters are using social media to coordinate their activity across different suburbs, keeping authorities off balance.

This weekend, a call for action issued over social media brought dozens of youth to the doorstep of "la Dalle D'Argenteuil," a housing project north of Paris. There, they clashed with police, burning a car and pelting a bus with stones.

Police were then called to the nearby suburb of Goussainville, where a car and dumpsters were set on fire.

"I'll be inflexible with all officers who don't work in perfect conditions of ethics," said Interior Minister Bruno Leroux. "On the other hand, I'll be intransigent with hooligans who today call for hatred against police on social networks."

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A black man accused French police of raping him. Police claim it was an accident.

<https://www.facebook.com/peter.holley.923>

By the time Théo arrived at a French emergency room on Feb. 2, he was covered in blood.

Doctors discovered that his primary injury had been caused by a police truncheon, one that had been forced inside the man's rectum during a violent encounter with multiple officers in Aulnay-sous-Bois, a suburb north of Paris.

Théo, a 22-year-old French youth worker whose last name has not been released, maintained that the injury — which required major surgery to repair — was inflicted intentionally and that he was the victim of a horrific sexual assault.

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

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More than a week later, after protests have roiled residents where the incident occurred, French investigators have reached an entirely different conclusion: The violent sodomy was accidental and occurred when the officer's expandable baton happened to slip into the victim's anus.

Protests were held across Paris and other parts of France following a violent encounter between Théo, a 22-year-old youth worker, and a group of police officers (Thomas Johnson/The Washington Post)

Protests were held across Paris and other parts of France following a violent encounter between Théo, a 22-year-old youth worker, and a group of police officers (Thomas Johnson/The Washington Post)

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

Despite those conclusions, French Interior Minister Bruno Le Roux announced Sunday that one officer faces aggravated rape charges and three others have been charged with aggravated assault, according to the Independent. The men deny the charges and have been suspended from the police force, the paper reported.

[After Louvre attack, France foils another terrorist plot]

Theo maintains that the incident began after he witnessed an officer slap someone and approached a group of officers, according to Huffington Post. He claims that the group took him around a corner and attacked.

"I didn't try to run away. I told the officers, 'You've torn my bag,' to which they replied that they didn't give a damn," he said, Huffington Post reported. "They all tried to grab me. I asked them why they were doing this, but they just continued to throw insults at me."

"He told me to put my hands behind my back. They put handcuffs on me and then they told me to sit down," he added. "They sprayed tear gas in my face, and then I had a pain in my buttocks. My trousers were lowered. I was in serious pain."

During the violent encounter, Théo said, officers spit on him and called him such names such as "Negro" and "bitch."

Police claim that during the interaction, Théo's pants "slipped down on their own."

A police source told the Local that video taken at the scene and being reviewed by investigators shows a policeman "applying a truncheon

blow horizontally across the buttocks."

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

Hollande's visit did little to quell the fury of rioters, who in recent nights have "aimed large fireworks at police and set fire to cars and garbage bins" in the "working-class region northeast of the French capital with a large minority population" known as Seine-Saint-Denis, according to the Associated Press. Between Wednesday night and Thursday morning alone, the AP reported, police arrested 26 people.

On Saturday, protests continued, with hundreds marching in demonstration, according to the AP. Some protesters reported lit a vehicle afire, while others threw projectiles at police. Officers responded with tear gas.

Théo and his family are urging the community to act peacefully.

"I would like to ask the residents of my neighborhood to calm down," he told the French news station BFMTV. "I ask them to stop the hostilities because I love my city and I want to find it the way I left it."

"Violence is not the way to support me," he added. "Justice will do its job."

Bruno Beschizza, the conservative mayor of Aulnay-sous-Bois, has described Théo as a "respectable" young man whose family has been "psychologically destroyed" by their relative's suffering.

In a statement posted on Facebook Thursday, Beschizza acknowledged that "tensions remain palpable" in Aulnay-sous-Bois and called for peace.

"Justice has been seized," the statement said. "The indictments were decided. Lawyers have been chosen. The presumption of innocence is respected. The Case will be judged in respect for the rights of each of the parties."

"So we are now in the judicial time concerning the case of Théo," the statement added. "This time must be respected. Justice must be able to work in complete transparency and in complete serenity."

Yasser Louati, a French human rights and civil liberties activist, told Al Jazeera that the riots are fueled by the fact that the police are now viewed "as an occupying force, not a force of protection for the weak and against crime."

"There is an atmosphere of open defiance to the state ... the fear is that this might spark riots before the election, [which] may be a blessing for the right and far right," he added.



Le Pen Calls Rioters Scum as Violence Roils Paris Suburbs

13 février 2017 à 09:42 UTC-5

- National Front leader fans backlash against riots near capital
- Paris ghetto violence erupts after police attack on young man

Marine Le Pen, the anti-immigration candidate in France's election, unleashed a social-media campaign attacking minority communities after successive nights of violence in the ghettos around Paris.

Some satellite towns around the capital have seen violent protests almost every night since Feb. 5 when four policemen were charged with attacking a young black man in Aulnay-sous-Bois, close to where riots erupted 12 years ago. Police have made multiple arrests, including last night, Agence France-Presse reported.

"Security forces have been the target of gangs of scum that nothing seems to be able to stop anymore, and certainly not the courts in a overall context of decadence," Le Pen said in a statement.

With fears about immigration and public security providing the

backdrop to the French election campaign, Le Pen started an online petition to support the police as her aides and supporters used social media to condemn the protesters and heap blame for problem on the Socialist government.

"Look at this scum!" Le Pen's closest adviser Florian Philippot wrote on Twitter Sunday, repeating the attack in television appearances the following day. "If they're foreigners, immediate deportation -- or prison for life."

His comments have been quoted and republished by pro-Le Pen accounts including WithMarine, MLP Presidente 2017 and by supporters using hashtags like #JeSoutiensLaPolice -- meaning 'I back the police.'

"This is their stock in trade," said Richard Ferrand, a Socialist lawmaker who's secretary general of independent front-runner Emmanuel Macron's campaign. "They use crimes, drama and violence to spread fear and draw the French towards them."

'An Excuse'

Three officers were charged with battery and a fourth with rape over the attack on a 22-year-old man

identified as Theo after a spot check on Feb. 2.

"Support for Theo is an excuse to attack the cops," Marion Marechal Le Pen, a National Front lawmaker and the candidate's niece, said. "It's a pretext to throw opprobrium on an entire profession."

While polls indicate Le Pen is likely to win the most votes in the first round of France's presidential election on April 23, they also project that she will lose the run-off two weeks later by at least 12 percentage points.

Peaceful marches by several hundred residents in the past days in Aulnay-sous-Bois and Bobigny north-east of Paris were followed by some youngsters vandalizing restaurants and setting garbage cans and cars on fire. Violence erupted yesterday in other suburban towns including Argenteuil and Drancy.

"Once more she's throwing oil on the fire," Socialist candidate Benoît Hamon said in a statement Monday. "Once more she's creating disorder, she's encouraging violence with her hate speech." Hamon is running fourth in the polls.

Grainy Footage

While Le Pen praised the police for its work to protect France in a statement Monday, Republican candidate Francois Fillon blamed the Socialist government for allowing the demonstrations in a Feb 12 statement.

The victim, whose first name is Theo, said in a video recorded by his lawyer and shown widely on French media that he had cooperated with the police before they started insulting and attacking him. Grainy scenes filmed by witnesses show the police surrounding and hitting the man as he falls to the ground.

Aulnay-sous-Bois is just 6 kilometers away from Clichy-sous-Bois, where the death of two boys fleeing a police spot check in October 2005 led to several weeks of rioting in troubled neighborhoods across France and a state of emergency being imposed in parts of the country.

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CNBC : Why the French far-right is wrong and the country should stick to the euro

Silvia Amaro

Aurelien Morissard | IP3 | Getty Images

France's far-right leader Marine Le Pen appears to be on course to win the first round of the upcoming presidential election.

Though she is unlikely to win the mandate to become the next French president in the second round of

voting, it is worth noting there is increasing support for the anti-euro and anti-European party.

One of Le Pen's campaign pledges is putting the country's membership of the euro zone to a referendum, arguing that the common currency hasn't benefited the French people.

Analysts have told CNBC that such an argument is nonsense and that in fact, the second-largest euro zone

economy has been one the main beneficiaries of the single currency.

"Interest rates were much higher pre-euro," Gilles Moec, chief European economist at Bank of America Merrill Lynch, told CNBC over the phone on Friday. "It's thus hard to argue France has been a victim of the monetary union," he said.

"In fact, France has been one of the main beneficiaries of the lower rates," he added.

The euro was introduced on January 1, 1999, with the European Central Bank taking control of monetary policy. As a result, the euro has removed most of the politics from currency markets in Europe and has boosted trade.

Vincent Juvyns, global market strategist at JPMorgan Asset Management, told CNBC that he doesn't see any ground to blame the euro for the subdued economic growth in France.

"The economy is picking up at the moment," he noted, adding that French companies have seen exports rise because of the single currency.

According to data released by the European Commission, France is set to grow 1.4 percent this year, 0.2 percentage points higher than in 2016. The country has struggled to expand its economy, while reducing

its government spending. In fact, France's deficit is set to increase from this year to the next, from 2.9 percent of gross domestic product to 3.1 percent in 2018 – above the EU's threshold.

However, according to Juvyns from JP Morgan, the solution to boost the French economy is not returning to the franc as Le Pen supports.

"I don't think this is a very good economic plan," he said, commenting on Le Pen's plan to convert the 1.7 trillion euros (\$1.81 trillion) into francs.

Looking at the main economic indicators pre and post euro

membership, it is clear that exports rose since the country began using the euro and the economy has grown at a faster pace, despite a higher deficit and a stagnation in unemployment.

Furthermore, some analysts believe that France has potential to grow further.

"France's demographics are a comparative advantage over other EU countries," Bank of America Merrill Lynch said in a note last month.

"France can still benefit from 0.1-0.2 percent natural growth per year on average over 2018-25, while Germany's natural growth will turn negative to 0.4 percent absent further immigration acceleration," the bank added.

The same research noted also that each hour worked in France creates 52.4 euros of real gross domestic product, above the 47.9 euros registered in Germany.

"What's missing is stronger total factor productivity," the bank said, calling for labor market reforms.

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Switching Debt to Francs Would Cost France Dearly

Mark Gilbert

The prospect of Marine Le Pen becoming president of France is spooking investors. The recent jump in French borrowing costs undermines her claim that opting to repay the bulk of the nation's debts in francs, rather than euros, wouldn't inflict any financial suffering on the country. And so does bond-market history.

QuickTake The Euro's Existential Crisis

Le Pen's chances of becoming president have climbed to a record 32 percent, according to the website Oddschecker.com, which compiles betting odds from bookmakers. While she still trails Emmanuel Macron's 45 percent, the shift in candidates' fortunes in the past few months is striking:

Le Pen's Rising Fortunes

Probability of winning the French Presidential election

Source: Oddschecker.com via Bloomberg

No matter how adamant pollsters are that she'll lose the second round of the country's two-stage election set for April and May, bondholders have decided they need some insurance against a Le Pen presidency. They drove French 10-year yields to a four-year high last

week against those of Germany, the euro region's benchmark borrower:

Insuring Against a Le Pen Presidency

How much extra yield investors demand to own French 10-year bonds rather than German debt

Source: Bloomberg

It's Le Pen's anti-euro stance that's worrying bondholders. In a two-hour television interview on Thursday, Le Pen repeated her plan to take control of the Bank of France and print new French francs to meet the government's debt obligations. "I can't implement my promises of intelligent protectionism and industrial policy with the single currency," Le Pen said on Sunday. "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."

Her chief economic adviser, Bernard Monot, met with central bank governor Francois Villeroy de Galhau in September to outline the proposal. Villeroy on Monday told France Inter radio that quitting the euro could increase France's annual debt-servicing costs by as much as 30 billion euros (\$32 billion). "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.

Le Pen insists that with about 90 percent of the country's debt governed by French law, redenominating it into francs comes without a penalty. But here's a chart showing what France's 10-year borrowing cost was relative to Germany's prior to the euro's introduction at the beginning of 1999:

Membership Has Its Privileges

Gap between French and German 10-year bond yield in the approach to the euro's introduction

Source: Bloomberg

The chart above tracks a decade of expectations for whether the euro would actually succeed in being introduced. The French spread to German bonds declined from 1990 to 1992, then climbed as Italy, Spain, Portugal and Ireland all devalued their currencies between 1992 and 1993. It climbed again at the start of 1996 as volatility surged for the Italian lire, before easing in the three years prior to the euro becoming a financial reality.

Euro membership was designed to impose greater economic discipline on the participants in the common-currency project, limiting budget deficits and restraining debt. While it's arguable how successful that's been -- the European Commission forecasts France's debt as a

percentage of its gross domestic product will climb to 97 percent by 2018, up from 96.4 percent this year and 92.3 percent in 2013 -- it seems inevitable that French borrowing costs would surge relative to those of Germany if Le Pen were to succeed in redenominating government debt into francs.

"Marine Le Pen clearly could become French president," former British deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg told Bloomberg Television's Francine Lacqua on Friday. "She's an accomplished political performer." Given the failure of soothsayers to predict either the election in November of Donald Trump or the U.K. vote last June to quit the European Union, investors are probably right to seek a yield cushion against a Le Pen victory in France.

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

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Business Insider: Where the 2 leading French presidential candidates stand on the major issues

Elena Holodny

As we edge closer to the unpredictable French presidential election, it's worth taking a look at what the current favorites stand for — and how the markets are feeling about it.

Recent opinion polls suggest that center-right candidate François

Fillon might be knocked out in the first round, which is scheduled to take place around late April, in light of a recently surfaced scandal involving his wife's work as a parliamentary assistant.

And so, as things stand right now, analysts are arguing that it looks increasingly likely that the final

showdown in May will be between far-right Marine Le Pen, the leader of the nationalist Front National, and centrist Emmanuel Macron, who is running as an independent.

In terms of policy, Le Pen recently outlined a plan to overhaul France, including her intention to hold a referendum on France's

membership in the European Union if the EU does not agree to redesign the union as a loose coalition of nations without a common currency or a border-free area. Additionally, she has stated her intention to exit the euro. On the flip side, Macron has presented himself as both pro-European and pro-business.

Below, their views on the economy, immigration, and Europe in general, courtesy of Capital Economics. Capital Economics

Notably, markets are feeling a bit wary of Le Pen's proposals.

"Le Pen's announcement of her radical vision for France unnerved euro-zone financial markets last week, with the gap between French and German 10-year government

bond yields widening to its biggest since 2012," Jessica Hinds, European economist at Capital Economics, wrote in a note. "Macron is certainly the more reassuring choice."

"Perhaps unsurprisingly, we are skeptical that the [National Front] plan will revive the French economy," she continued. "Moreover, the economic and

political chaos that would ensue from France leaving the euro and redenominating its debts and the associated rise in borrowing costs would probably discourage investment."

Additionally, Hinds added that Le Pen's plan does little to address longer-run problems in France's economy such as the aging population.

The first round of France's elections will be on April 23 and the second round will be on May 7.

Polls suggest that Le Pen would come out on top in the first round, but that she would be defeated in the second round — although, of course, things in politics could change quickly and it would be wise to regard opinion polls with a degree of caution.



Bershidsky : France's election is becoming a mud fight

The final round of the French

presidential election is just three months away, but the race is already dirtier than the one in the U.S. last year. All three front-runners — independent center-left politician Emmanuel Macron, center-right candidate Francois Fillon and nationalist populist Marine Le Pen — have faced accusations of financial wrongdoing.

French voters are cynical about their politicians. Last summer, a survey by Harris Interactive for the French office of Transparency International found that 54 percent of the French believe their country's elite to be corrupt, for the most part. That share goes up to about three-quarters for local and European legislators, the president and the national government. Scandals are part of daily life, and they won't necessarily affect the outcome of the election, but the circus is in full swing, anyway.

Earlier this week, Fillon announced grimly that he'd stay in the race despite revelations that he'd paid his family members about \$1 million out of his parliamentary budget for services opponents claim were never rendered. Juicy details just kept coming: He'd paid his wife Penelope a severance fee after laying her off as his aide; he'd employed his sons for legal services though they hadn't been qualified lawyers; he'd paid them all more than the going rates for parliamentary aides. All this from someone who took the high moral ground as he fought for the center-right nomination, using their own financial scandals against rivals Nicolas Sarkozy and Alain Juppe. Fillon said he regretted the actions, but explained it had all been legal (indeed, France has lax rules on nepotism) and accepted custom at

the time; 65 percent of French voters were unconvinced.

Fillon, scarred and pushed back in the polls by "Penelopegate," is now being extra careful about observing campaign finance laws. After all, Sarkozy has just been ordered to stand trial for the campaign spending violations in his failed 2012 campaign, and Fillon would rather be outspent than faced with another scandal.

Le Pen faces her own ethical problems. The biggest of these comes from Brussels, where she too, is accused of paying fake parliamentary aides. Le Pen is a member of the European Parliament, and as such, she is given a (\$25,700 (24,164-euro) monthly budget for payments to staff. The staff members, however, are meant to work on the European agenda and to live in Brussels, and, according to the conclusions of a European Parliament investigation, Le Pen and other legislators from her National Front party have misused the funds by essentially paying people to work for the party in France. The European Parliament is trying to recover about half a million euros from the parliamentary group that includes Le Pen and her fellow party members — a lot of money for Le Pen, given the National Front's highly publicized financial difficulties. Le Pen is now suing the European Parliament, claiming that the investigation was inspired by a political foe, former speaker Martin Schulz, a German Social Democrat.

There's potential trouble for Le Pen in France, too, involving the way the National Front funded its previous campaigns. The party employed the companies of Le Pen's close friends to print campaign materials and set up websites, allegedly at inflated prices, and then got the government

to reimburse the expenses, as it is obliged to do when a party meets a certain threshold of support. The National Front also took out expensive loans from Jeanne, a microparty set up by Le Pen, and had them repaid from government coffers after the campaigns ended. Le Pen hasn't been charged with any wrongdoing or even interrogated, but there's still plenty of time for this to blow up before the election — just as there's time for a potential scandal involving the property declarations of Le Pen and her father, National Front founder Jean-Marie Le Pen. They are being investigated for allegedly undervaluing their properties listed in the declarations.

Even political novice Macron, whose experience in government is limited to a short stint as economic minister, is under a cloud. In a recently published book, he was accused of using ministry funds to start his presidential campaign. Both he and government officials have vehemently denied the charge and it has not led to an investigation, but it's still out there for Macron's enemies to use.

The attacks have also been personal. He is married to his high school French teacher, 24 years older than he is, but his rivals on the right have hinted more than once that he might be gay. Last year, Sarkozy described him as "a little male, a little female, the fashion of the moment — androgynous." A nasty rumor campaign against him has been waged through chain emails and social networks accusing him of having an affair with a man. Closer, a sensationalist publication known for revealing President Francois Hollande's affair with actress Julie Gayet, published a suggestive piece about Macron that it later removed from its website.

Macron has sought to deflect the rumors with a joke, telling an audience in Paris that his wife Brigitte wonders how he could lead a double life if he's with her all the time. In a country with something of a macho political culture and a dearth of openly gay politicians, the former banker managed to respond to the rumors without sounding homophobic. So far, the polls still have him beating Le Pen in a runoff.

So far, Fillon has suffered the most from the dirt eruption, probably because of the virtuous image he had tried to cultivate before the payments to his family came to light. Euroskeptic Le Pen may end up benefiting from her spat with the European Parliament — her usual defense, that corrupt, cosmopolitan elites are against her, has worked well with that electorate so far. As Americans saw with Donald Trump, attempts to accuse a nationalist candidate of corruption can backfire. Le Pen is immunizing herself by playing Joan of Arc in slick videos like the one released this week.

It's likely that the candidates will be showered with more mud in the remaining time before the vote, and DSGE, the French intelligence service, expects Russia to support Le Pen's candidacy with attempts to compromise her rivals using social networks. French voters will yet need to draw on their reserves of cynicism, and outside observers need a big bowl of popcorn.

Leonid Bershidsky is a Bloomberg View columnist. He was the founding editor of the Russian business daily Vedomosti and founded the opinion website Slon.ru. Follow him on Twitter: @bershidsky

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Emmanuel Macron Steps Into France's Political Void

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."



French Candidate Macron Says He Would Be Tough in Brexit Talks

French presidential candidate Emmanuel Macron said he would be a firm negotiator with the U.K. in talks regarding its withdrawal of the European Union.

"I will be pretty tough on it because we have to preserve the rest of the European Union," Macron said in an interview with the U.K.'s Channel 4 News. "It's not to be punished but to be consistent with such a decision. You don't get a

passport and you don't get access to the single market when you decide to leave."

The remarks are broadly in line with the thinking of most leading French politicians, who favor strengthening European ties at a time when post-World War II alliances are fraying. The main exception to that attitude is Marine Le Pen, who is calling for France to drop the euro as its currency and return to the French franc.

"If she wants to implement what she proposes on the EU, she will leave - she will kill the single market," Macron told Channel 4.

Macron also discussed the "dozens" of cyber attacks that his campaign has experienced daily and the "crazy rumors" about his private life. "They claim I was a homosexual, which is not a shame in itself," he said. "But I am married and I love my wife."

The 39-year-old former minister currently trails Le Pen in polls for first round voting, though all surveys indicate that he would beat her in the run-off in France's 2017 presidential election. Le Pen has 26 percent support in the first round, compared with 19.5 percent for Macron and 18 percent for Republican Francois Fillon, according to Ifop's latest daily rolling poll.



Macron Urges EU Pressure on Russia as Campaign Suffers Cyber Hit

- French front-

runner blames Kremlin for attacks on IT systems

- Le Pen, Fillon have called for reconciliation with Russia

Emmanuel Macron is calling for the European Union to stand firm against Russia as his French election campaign is targeted by computer hackers.

The front-runner to be France's next president wants to maintain dialogue with Russia but insists the EU must take a hard line on any potential

interference in European elections, a campaign official said last week, asking not to be named because it's not his role to speak publicly.

Emmanuel Macron

Photographer: Guillaume Souvant/AFP via Getty Images

Macron's campaign chief Richard Ferrand on Monday blamed the Russian government for perpetrating cyber attacks on his team's computer networks in an interview on France 2 Television. The candidate suffered another attack Tuesday, leaving his website down

for 9 minutes, according to Agence France-Presse.

Macron takes a tougher stance on Russia than his main election rivals and has seen his campaign hit by multiple cyber attacks in recent weeks. He has called on the French government to take action.

"These attacks are coming from the Russian border," Ferrand said. "We want a strong Europe. That's why we're subject to attacks on our information system from the Russian state."

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov denied that Russia had any involvement in hacking the campaign in a conference call on Tuesday. He said there is no

possibility that the Russian government had any connection to the attacks and that the accusations were "absurd."

An official at cyber defense unit of France's national security agency would neither confirm nor deny the Russians were behind the attacks when contacted on Monday. An official at President Francois Hollande's office said the government is increasingly concerned about cyber security during the election cycle and it will be discussed at one of Hollande's weekly defense briefings.

Clinton Hacked

European officials are on high alert ahead of elections across the

continent this year after U.S. intelligence agencies concluded that Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered a campaign to damage Hillary Clinton's chances in last year's U.S. election

With President Donald Trump now weighing a thaw in relations with Putin, Macron argues that EU nations need to stick together in dealing with their eastern neighbor. While sanctions should be lifted in the long term, they must be kept in place if Russia is meddling in Europe's democratic processes or using its energy exports as a form of geopolitical blackmail, the official said.

Whereas National Front leader Marine Le Pen has called EU

sanctions on Russia "completely stupid" and Republican candidate Francois Fillon has repeatedly opposed them, Macron was part of a government that helped impose the measures and has labeled Fillon a "Putinopile" or Putin fan.

"I don't believe in French people saying that great-power France should be speaking to great-power Russia -- good luck with that," Macron said in January in Berlin. "Russia is indeed in Europe geographically and historically speaking. We have lot of passions together, literature. And Russians live as Europeans. But you have Russian leaders who don't share our values and our views."

NPR : In France, Some Muslims Seek To 'Adapt' Islam To Secular Culture

Eleanor Beardsley Facebook Twitter Instagram

Tareq Oubrou, an imam in Bordeaux, delivers a sermon in French and Arabic at the city's grand mosque. Most imams in France speak only in Arabic. **Eleanor Beardsley/NPR hide caption**

toggle caption

Eleanor Beardsley/NPR

Tareq Oubrou, an imam in Bordeaux, delivers a sermon in French and Arabic at the city's grand mosque. Most imams in France speak only in Arabic.

Eleanor Beardsley/NPR

The carpeted prayer hall at the grand mosque in the French city of Bordeaux is full on a recent Friday afternoon. Behind a sculpted wooden railing on a small raised pulpit, Tareq Oubrou, a popular imam, is delivering his sermon in French as well as Arabic.

Bilingual sermons are rare in French mosques. Most Muslim clerics in France are foreign and speak in Arabic, which most young French Muslims don't understand. Oubrou says that's one reason why Muslim religious leaders are out of touch with a generation of French Muslims.

The interpretation of Islamic scriptures is often out of sync with modern times, too, he says. He's working to change that. Oubrou says a reformation is long overdue, and he's become a leading force in working for change.

France has suffered two major terrorist attacks in recent years, both carried out by home-grown Islamist extremists. The country is home to Europe's largest Muslim population, and many French Muslims like Oubrou believe it's time to create a

uniquely French brand of Islam — one that is compatible with the country's secular values and responds better to the needs of modern Muslims.

"We have to rethink Islamic doctrines in light of our times," says Oubrou. "One of the reasons for the violence is that some people are interpreting these medieval canons literally. So we have to take Islam out of the context of ancient Arab-Muslim civilizations and adapt it to a modern, globalized, secular society, like France."

Oubrou has received death threats from radicals who don't agree with him, but he has so far refused the French government's offer of protection.

"Everyone in France feels threatened by terrorists," he says. "Why should I get protection?"

In any case, he is not scared. And he wants to be free. "It's their goal to create terror and fear," he says. "As long as people keep their rhythm and serenity, it is a victory over the terrorists."

Oubrou came to France from Morocco when he was 19, originally to study medicine. Now 52, he's raised four children in France and says he's proud to be French.

The French model of society is based on the teachings of enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau — it's one of assimilation, Oubrou says, where all differences are meant to be erased. He says France emphasizes equality rather than liberty. This, he says, is the opposite of Britain and the U.S.

"In the Anglo-Saxon model, there's a preference for liberty," says Oubrou. "So the system doesn't promise equality and equal salaries. France promises equality, but falls short.

And this is what creates the frustration that can lead to violence."

Oubrou says young Muslims face discrimination and often don't feel they're fully French. He says their Muslim culture is one reason for the discrimination.

"We're living in the most secular country in the world on the most secular continent, Europe," says Oubrou. "Any kind of religion in the public sphere is suspect, because French secularism was won by opposing the Catholic Church. People fought to liberate themselves from religion."

Oubrou says the French thought they'd solved the problem of religion in the public sphere when religion and the state were officially separated in 1905, and the Catholic Church's pressures receded from public life.

Tareq Oubrou has received death threats from radicals who disagree with his reform efforts, but has so far refused the French government's offer of protection. "Everyone in France feels threatened by terrorists," he says. "Why should I get protection?" **Eleanor Beardsley/NPR hide caption**

Then, in the 1970s, Muslim immigrants arrived from North Africa, with religion a part of their culture. "So the old demons have been awakened," he says, "and French society views the Muslim faith as a threat."

Oubrou says young Muslims are often ignorant of the spiritual side of their faith but some embrace Islam as a cultural identity — and as a shield, to protect themselves from what they see as a hostile society that considers them second-class citizens.

"Religion is supposed to be for sharing. And once we transform it

for protection, we are confiscating God and spirituality," he says.

For young French citizens with Arab origins, "If you want to express a revolt [against French society], you are a fundamentalist Muslim," says Hakim El Karoui, a Muslim writer and business consultant.

He's the author of a recent study titled "A French Islam Is Possible," published by the Montaigne Institute, an influential Paris think tank.

To complete the study, El Karoui and his team did something illegal in a country where everyone is supposed to be equal: They collected demographic statistics to find out how many Muslims live in France. The French population census does not note religion, race or ethnicity.

Hakim El Karoui, Muslim writer and business consultant author of a recent study titled "A French Islam Is Possible." **Courtesy of Hakim El Karoui hide caption**

toggle caption

Courtesy of Hakim El Karoui

"I don't know [how] you deal with a problem if you are not able to have a clear picture," says El Karoui. "So getting statistics to find out who French Muslims are was compulsory."

El Karoui says he and his team of researchers discovered there are fewer Muslims in France than people assume. He says there are around 4 million, and not the widely accepted and cited figures of 6 million to 8 million, or about 10 percent of the population.

For the purposes of El Karoui's study a Muslim was anyone who identified as such. The study found 1,000 out of 15,000 total

respondents self-identified as Muslim. Many French with one Muslim parent did not. El Karoui says about half of French Muslims are integrated into society and are more or less secularized — believing in French laws above all else — even if they fast during the month of Ramadan and avoid eating pork.

When his report came out last fall, one figure shocked people: that a quarter of Muslims in France do not believe in core French values, such as equality between the sexes and the separation of religion and the state.



TODAY

Air France touts updates as it marks anniversary of Paris hub

PARIS -- In advance of Valentine's Day, Air France celebrated the 20th anniversary of the creation of its hub at Paris Charles de Gaulle Airport that today handles more than 1,000 daily arriving and departing flights and more than 50% of CDG's annual traffic.

It was in 1996 that Air France says it adopted a true "hub-and-spoke" model at Charles de Gaulle (airport code CDG), morphing its operation there into the type of international-style hub now common among today's global carriers.

The carefully tended-to node is "the heart" of the airline's network, Air France-KLM Jean-Marc Janailiac said. He added that through twenty years of "investment and innovation," the hub has "managed to reinvent itself, stay flexible, [and] anticipate the demands of

"This group uses religion to send a message against French values," says El Karoui. "So of course, they are the ones that get all the attention of the media and politicians."

El Karoui says there are certainly some radicalized people within this group and most of them are young, under 25.

El Karoui's study proposes eight pragmatic solutions for developing a French Islam that is compatible with the country's values and free from foreign funding from Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Qatar and Saudi Arabia — which provide support to

imams and some large mosques with religious schools.

Some of the proposals include recruiting French-born imams and training them in France, and offering Arabic courses in the secular public schools — so kids can learn the language outside the mosque.

And El Karoui says that French political leaders should do more to embrace French Muslims.

"Saying you are French, you are not a foreigner, and you are a part of the national community is very, very important," he says. "It's important to remind the rest of the population

that Muslims are French, and that their problems are everybody's concern."

Oubrou, who says his four children are gainfully employed or studying and are all active in the life of Bordeaux, says there are tens of thousands of Muslims working in French hospitals, offices, universities and politics. "But they're invisible," he says. "We don't talk about them. We only talk about the delinquents."

Air France celebrates network 'heart' at Paris Charles De Gaulle Airport

Harriet Baskas, Special for USA

customers," he told journalists gathered at CDG last week for a behind-the-scenes tour.

Many of the hub investments, which Janailiac said had a price tag of 40 million euros in 2016 alone, have focused on using digital technology to improve the airport experience, including the installation of 56 self-boarding gates and 247 self-service kiosks and the equipping of every Air France employee at CDG with a tablet giving them access to customer files so they can offer "personalized and efficient support," said Janailiac.

Air France has also been steadily upgrading its eight CDG lounges (seven business lounges and one first-class lounge). In April 2016, the company opened a more than 3,000 square-foot "Kids Solo" center to serve the more than 60,000 unaccompanied minors (ages 10 to 17) that travel through the Air France hub at CDG each year.

The center has a game room with table football and Sony PlayStation video games, a rest area, a reading

room and an activities space for younger children.

"We intend to keep on investing — in our lounges, in digitization for our staff, and so on," Janailiac told Today in the Sky. "It's an ongoing process and the direction we are going is in parallel with improvements being made by the airport."

Some of the upgrades made by Groupe ADP, the company that manages CDG and 33 other airports worldwide, benefit all passengers there. In the core of the Air France hub is what's known as "Instant Paris," a huge, free, relaxation zone in Hall L, Terminal 2E that opened in November, 2016. It includes a restaurant, library, kids play area, comfortable seating nooks and an 80-room short stay transfer hotel, called YotelAir.

"When I came here in 2012, the 'Instant Paris,' idea was already on the books, but my team told me it was too expensive," Augustin de Romanet, Groupe ADP chairman and CEO, told Today in the

Sky. "But I'm happy we went ahead and spent \$16 million euros to create this lounge area which looks like a Parisian apartment and can accommodate three or four hundred people," he said.

Romanet said the airport has also invested in and started testing a facial recognition system that, if approved by the security authorities, will speed up and automate what can be very long lines at passport control.

"The machines will compare the photograph on your passport with your face in two seconds," said Romanet. "We been experimenting with it since last March and hope to have it in action the beginning of next year."

Harriet Baskas is a Seattle-based airports and aviation writer and USA TODAY Travel's "At the Airport" columnist. She occasionally contributes to Ben Mutzabaugh's Today in the Sky blog. Follow her at twitter.com/hbaskas.



Avalanche in French Alps Kills 4 Snowboarders

Benoît Morenne

Rescue crews searching for victims of an avalanche near the French ski resort of Tignes on Monday. Sylvain Muscio/Le Dauphine, via European Pressphoto Agency

PARIS — An avalanche in the French Alps killed four snowboarders, including an instructor, on Monday morning.

The four snowboarders — a 48-year-old man, his son, 15, and son-in-law, 19, and their 59-year-old instructor, all French citizens — were off-piste and preparing to descend a steep slope at the Tignes ski resort in the Vanoise range when the avalanche hit, officials said.

The accident occurred around 10 a.m., Nicolas Martrenchard, a representative of the national government in Albertville, a nearby city, said at a news conference.

Emmanuel Dubost, a National Police rescue worker in the nearby town of Courchevel, said in a phone interview that ski patrollers had first been alerted around 10:20 a.m. and reached the area of the accident shortly after. Other rescue workers, using a helicopter, landed at the site less than an hour later. Over 40 rescue workers, along with search dogs, were involved.

The snowslide came tumbling down from 7,900 feet above sea level, to an area about 7,000 feet above sea level, where the snowboarders were killed.

The four victims, who were not identified by name, had been equipped with beacons that can send and receive radio signals in case of danger; it was unclear whether they were killed upon impact. Their bodies were found buried under more than six feet of snow near ski runs at Tignes Le Lavachet, a small resort in the Claret Valley. The resort itself was not threatened by the avalanche.

The avalanche most likely was caused by shock waves across a thick slab of snow packed by strong winds, Mr. Dubost said. The Tignes tourism office said in a statement the avalanche was up to 100 feet wide and spread across an area of nearly 1,300 feet.

The snowboarders were known to the instructor and were experienced in the sport, Mayor Jean-Christophe Vitale of Tignes said at the news conference. "There's always a risk," the mayor said.

Mr. Martrenchard, the government representative, said that avalanches had occurred before in that zone, which is known to experienced skiers as an off-piste path.

The four had been off-piste in that zone earlier in the day, the tourist office said in a statement, but they had not met any danger.

A fifth snowboarder, identified only as a teenager, was with the group moments before the avalanche struck. He had apparently made it farther down the slope and was

waiting for the group. Investigators were interviewing him, Mr. Martrenchard



Avalanche kills 4 in French Alps

Bart Jansen ,
USA TODAY

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An aerial view of rescue crews searching for victims of an avalanche near the French ski resort of Tignes on Feb. 13, 2017. (Photo: SYLVAIN MUSCIO/PHOTOPQR/LE DAUPHINE, EPA)

At least four people died in an avalanche in the French Alps on Monday, and rescuers were digging

said, as part of an inquiry into the precise details of the accident.

for others, according to news reports.

There was "little hope" of finding five people still missing alive at the resort near the town of Tignes, Emmanuel Dubost from the French National Police's general reserve, told CNN. The Associated Press said the people were skiing; the BBC said they were snowboarding.

A ski instructor and three members of a family of five were among the dead, CNN reported.

The risk of avalanche on Monday was at three on a scale of one to

The avalanche — in terrain about 330 feet wide and 1,300 feet long — struck at about 6,900 feet in elevation off the formal, compacted ski runs in an area called Toviére, according to AP.

The group of nine people had been enjoying the area with a guide when the avalanche hit, according to the Republican Company for Alps Security in the town of Albertville.

five, according to MeteoFrance's website.

The dead and missing are believed to be French and were equipped with locator devices, AP said.

An Alps Security rescue worker told AP the bodies of the four dead had been retrieved by early afternoon. Five others were located and were "in the process of being extracted" from the snow, but it wasn't clear whether any were still alive, according to AP.



Editorial : The West's challenge: an 'axis of fear'

The Christian
Science Monitor

February 13, 2017 —This week, many of President Trump's national security officials, including Vice President Mike Pence, will be meeting with other Western leaders for the first time at a gathering in Germany. The forum is the Munich Security Conference, a prestigious body that has influenced transatlantic relations — indeed the global order — for more than half a century. In a prelude report for the 2017 meeting, organizers warn that the world is "more volatile today than at any point since World War II."

While the report cites critical issues with Russia, China, and the Middle East, the main concern is an "axis of fear" forming in both the United States and Europe. Nationalist leaders are emerging who play to

voter insecurities and grievances about terrorism, migration, and the global economy. The leaders threaten to throw off many established alliances and trade deals, possibly eroding the West's pillars of cooperation.

These trends are creating "maximum unpredictability," the forum organizers say. Britain is exiting the European Union while France holds a presidential election this spring that could bring an anti-EU party, the far-right National Front of Marine Le Pen, to power. Elections in the Netherlands in March and perhaps in Italy could also see anti-establishment parties winning or gaining ground.

Meanwhile, Poland and Hungary are moving to restrict liberties and are bucking the EU on many policies. Current European leaders are eager to see if Mr. Trump's security team

will fit this pattern, especially in defining what the new president means by his slogan of "America First."

"Populist parties are now part of the government in about a dozen Western democracies," the report stated. "And even in countries where populists only received a small share of the vote, they often exert a defining influence by shifting the debate or pressuring mainstream parties to adopt different policy agendas."

Perhaps the key figure at the conference will be German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who also faces an election later this year. Through one crisis after another in Europe over the past decade, she has been its calm center, taking the long view and sticking to the democratic values that define the West. Her role in Munich, as well as

a probable meeting with Trump at a Group of Seven summit in Italy, could sway the West's future.

Often when asked about voter fears, Ms. Merkel gives this response. "Fear is not a good adviser in politics." She also makes the point that countries driven by fear will not control their future.

Both the EU and the US are now in the midst of changing their policies on terrorism, migration, and trade — as much in response to rapid changes in those areas as to the rise of populist parties. Merkel's advice in Munich will likely be that the West must deal with such problems with the same principles, trust, and cooperation that have guided Western democracies for more than seven decades — not fear. Perhaps her message will keep 2017 from being so uncertain.



Italy's Vaccination Rates Raise Government's Concern

Pietro Lombardi

Updated Feb. 13,
2017 12:46 p.m. ET

ROME—Italy is the latest front in Europe's growing antivaccine trend, fueled in part by groups that oppose mandatory injections and raise doubts over their safety.

The share of Italian 1-year-olds immunized against measles has dropped by at least 5 percentage points since 2012, according to the World Health Organization, slipping below the comparable rate for India.

The country's 2015 immunization rates were the lowest in Western Europe, WHO figures show, roughly on par with those in Serbia and Romania.

As part of its effort to reverse the trend, Italy's Health Ministry is considering compelling local

authorities to require vaccinations for school enrollment, sparking heated protests in some quarters. COMILVA, Italy's leading antivaccination group, alleges the injections are linked to autism and other diseases. In the group's hometown, Rimini, coverage against measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) among two-year-olds has dropped to below 80%.

The opposition has spilled over to the political arena. Italy's antiestablishment 5 Star Movement, which now holds the mayor's seat in Rome and is considered a contender to win possible national elections later this year, has said that while vaccines are safe, any attempt to make them mandatory would be unconstitutional. Antiestablishment parties surging in other parts of Europe haven't made an issue of vaccinations.

Italy's vaccination rate has dropped amid confusion and, critics say, misinformation associating the shots with alleged health risks. A large body of scientific evidence has concluded that vaccines are safe and save lives, while extensive studies show no link between vaccines and autism.

But some parents don't vaccinate at all, while others delay the shots because they believe the recommended schedule is dangerous. The impression that diseases such as measles have been eliminated has also left some parents less likely to vaccinate their children, experts and campaigners say.

Authorities elsewhere in Europe face antivaccination sentiment but immunization rates haven't dropped as precipitously as in Italy. The country's health authorities say the

national MMR vaccination rate for two-year-olds stands at 85%, well below the 95% threshold immunologists say has to be reached to confer "herd immunity" on a population as a whole. MMR coverage in the U.S. for one-year-olds is 92%, according to the WHO, whose figures show vaccination rates in Italy for polio, tetanus, whooping cough and hepatitis B have also fallen in recent years.

"We still have children dying of measles and whooping cough," said Alberto Villani, head of the Italian Society of Pediatrics, despite the WHO's effort to highlight Italy's falling rates of measles vaccinations. Outbreaks of almost-vanquished diseases such as diphtheria can be especially risky, since drugs to treat them often aren't immediately available and have to be imported.

The flare-up in Italy reflects a broader skepticism toward vaccines in Europe that some surveys suggest surpasses that of the U.S.

Among 67 countries surveyed last year by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, six of the 10 countries where skepticism about vaccine safety ran strongest were in Europe. In France, where vaccination rates are higher than in Italy, more than 40% of those questioned didn't agree that vaccines were safe, compared with 21% in Italy and 14% in the U.S.

Despite some pockets of fierce resistance against vaccinations, Americans' overall attitude toward vaccines is more positive than in Europe, according to researcher Heidi Larson, who led the London project.

Scandals such as the discovery of tainted blood supplies in Italy and France in the late 1980s and early 1990s have contributed to Europe's higher skepticism toward public-health authorities, experts say.

But much of the antivaccine sentiment originates from a 1998 study by British physician Andrew Wakefield that suggested a link between the MMR vaccine and autism. His study was later debunked and the British medical authorities stripped Dr. Wakefield of his medical license, but its impact is still being felt, according to Ms. Larson.

"It led to a drop of vaccination in England, and it took 15 years to recover," she said. "In those 15 years, the MMR anxieties have traveled to Europe and other

countries, most recently Malaysia and India."

Since January 2016, Romania has seen thousands of measles cases resulting in 15 deaths, after its measles vaccination rate fell to 86% in 2015 from 94% in 2012, according to Romanian health authorities and the WHO.

Italy's political battle on the issue has become fierce. Legislators of the 5 Star Movement have proposed a bill, now stalled in parliament, to restrict mandatory vaccinations for public servants. Meanwhile, some regional authorities have recently passed laws requiring vaccinations in schools and local medical authorities have launched disciplinary proceedings against doctors who oppose vaccinations.

When Italian Health Minister Beatrice Lorenzin had her infant twins vaccinated last year, she made sure news cameras were on hand to broadcast it. "You can't put the results of decades by scientific research on the same plane as the opinion of any old blogger," she said recently.

Antonella Salimbene, a 39-year-old accountant whose daughter died in 2014 of meningitis after she opted not to vaccinate the girl against a strain of the disease, has become a vocal advocate of vaccines.

"I am my daughter's killer," she said.

Corrections & Amplifications
Romania's measles vaccination rate fell to 86% in 2015 from 94% in 2012. A previous version of this article incorrectly gave 2012's rate as 96%. (Feb. 13, 2017)

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

EU Raises Growth Forecasts Despite Risks From Brexit, Trump

Emre Peker

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BRUSSELS—The European Union on Monday raised economic growth forecasts for 2017, predicting growth across the bloc even as it faces mounting political risks and uncertainties.

In its first economic forecasts since U.S. President Donald Trump took office, the European Commission, the EU's executive arm, said the bloc had shown its economic resilience to shocks last year, when the U.K. voted to leave the union.

The commission, which updates its projections three times every year, said that the 19-country eurozone economy is expected to grow 1.6% this year—slightly higher than its 1.5% November forecast.

EU officials expect 2016 eurozone growth to be 1.7%—in line with their previous estimate—and raised their outlook for 2018 to 1.8% from 1.7%. Growth throughout the 28-country bloc is seen at 1.8% this year, up from 1.6% forecast previously.

The EU's economic recovery is taking hold, with the three years from 2016 through 2018 marking the first time since 2008 that all member states are forecast to increase their gross domestic product, the commission said. Private consumption will continue to underwrite economic expansion, while a global recovery could boost

European exports, according to the commission.

Still, global uncertainties driven by Mr. Trump's still opaque stance on key policy areas and Britain's plan to trigger talks in March to exit from the EU mean that "downside risks have increased" to the bloc's forecasts, the commission said, citing potential disruptions to trade.

"Mr. Trump has been president only for a short time, things are moving very fast, and there have been quite dramatic developments," said Pierre Moscovici, commissioner for economic and financial affairs, taxation and customs. "We do need to be cautious and we also have to ensure a spirit of cooperation."

Adding to the risks are a potential showdown between the bloc and Greece over its debt, as well as elections in Germany, France and the Netherlands, where anti-EU parties are gaining in the polls.

In France, National Front leader Marine Le Pen has made pulling out of the eurozone a key pillar of her presidential campaign, seeking to tap voter anger over low growth rates in the currency union's second-largest economy behind Germany.

The commission forecasts French and Belgian GDP will each expand by 1.4% this year, with only Italy and Finland among the eurozone economies growing at a slower pace. The commission forecasts the Italian economy will expand 0.9%—

the lowest rate in the eurozone — adding to Rome's woes as it grapples with its own anti-EU insurgency.

"At this point, you have political forces coming into the mainstream that you didn't have before," an EU official said Monday.

While the commission evaluates the risks of potential policy shifts, its forecasts are based on the assumption that the current framework will remain intact, the EU official said.

Mr. Moscovici said "anti-European populism" was creating political risks for the bloc and that discontent with globalization was affecting electoral choices and hampering the EU economy. He said that should Ms. Le Pen win the presidency, a move to exit from the euro would be a "tragedy for the eurozone and a catastrophe for France."

Yet the commission's latest forecasts also showed how the strength of the U.K. economy in the second half of 2016 wrong-footed many economists. Britain didn't suffer as forecast from the uncertainty triggered by the vote to exit from the EU—consumers carried on spending much as before, making the U.K. the fastest-growing of the Group of Seven advanced economies in 2016.

Still, the commission said it expects the U.K.'s GDP expansion to slow to 1.5% in 2017 and 1.2% in 2018, from 2% in 2016. In November, it

had forecast growth of just 1% in 2017.

Meanwhile, European public deficits will continue to decline, the commission said, adding that EU countries continued to benefit from exceptionally low interest rates. The deficit in the eurozone is seen declining to 1.4% this year from 1.7% in 2016 while dropping to 1.7% from 1.9% for the whole EU bloc.

Eurozone inflation will accelerate to 1.7% this year from 0.2% in 2016, the commission said. But inflation is seen slowing to 1.4% next year—remaining below the close-to-2% targeted by the European Central Bank.

Unemployment in the 19-country monetary union is expected to fall from 10% last year to 9.6% this year and 9.1% in 2018, a slightly improved outlook over earlier forecasts. For the whole of the EU, unemployment is seen at 8.1% this year, down from 8.5% in 2016 and falling to 7.8% next year.

The EU's official forecasts serve as the foundation for budget negotiations between EU authorities in Brussels and the bloc's governments.

"Growth is continuing, though it is being buffeted by uncertainties," Mr. Moscovici said.

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INTERNATIONAL

Trump's Big Mouth Has Already Weakened America

During Barack Obama's presidency, Republicans complained, with good reason, about the Potomac River-wide gap between the president's words and his actions — in particular about his failure to enforce the "red line" over chemical weapons use in Syria. But under Donald Trump the gap has expanded to the size of the Grand Canyon — large enough to swallow his presidency and the country's international reputation with it.

No, Trump hasn't moved the U.S. Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, which as recently as December Kellyanne Conway had called a "very big priority" for the president.

No, he hasn't designated China a "currency manipulator" as he vowed to do on his very first day in office. He hasn't slapped a 45 percent tariff on Chinese goods either, and, humiliatingly, he has had to affirm the "One China" policy without getting any concessions in return as he had once pledged to do. ("I don't know why we have to be bound by a 'One China' policy unless we make a deal with China having to do with other things, including trade," he said in December.)

He has not retooled or abandoned NATO, which he has repeatedly called "obsolete." He hasn't renegotiated basing agreements for U.S. troops in South Korea, Japan, or Germany that he once slammed as a rip-off. ("They do not pay us what they should be paying us because we are providing a tremendous service, and we're losing a fortune," he said during the first presidential debate.) Instead, Trump just held a love-in summit with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in which he reaffirmed the U.S.-Japan alliance without getting any pledges from Abe to pay more for the basing of U.S. forces.

He hasn't taken any concrete steps to force Mexico to pay for the \$21 billion border wall that he is building, notwithstanding his temper tantrum at Mexico's pro-American president, Enrique Peña Nieto. He hasn't torn up NAFTA either, even though he calls it "the single worst trade deal ever approved in this country."

He hasn't established better relations with Russia, won Russian cooperation in the fight against the Islamic State, or lifted sanctions in spite of his nonstop praise for Vladimir Putin.

He hasn't lifted the ban on the use of torture despite his paeans to the joys of waterboarding. ("We have to fight fire with fire," he says, even

though the normal way of fighting fire is with water.)

He hasn't scrapped the nuclear agreement with Iran, which he calls "the worst deal I've ever seen negotiated." Instead, the administration has recently reaffirmed its support for the agreement.

He has repeatedly said, "Real change begins with immediately repealing and replacing the disaster known as Obamacare," but he hasn't yet moved to scrap the Affordable Care Act. The problem, of course, is that contrary to what Trump claimed on Jan. 14, he doesn't actually have a plan to replace Obamacare while maintaining "insurance for everybody."

Oh, and he hasn't imposed a "total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country's representatives can figure out what is going on," as he infamously promised to do on Dec. 7, 2015. Even his much more limited attempt to ban all refugees and all entrants from seven Muslim-majority nations has now been put on hold by the courts.

In fairness to Trump, it's true that Rome wasn't destroyed in a day,

In fairness to Trump, it's true that Rome wasn't destroyed in a day, and it will take him more than three weeks to undo 70 years of American foreign policy and trade relations. It is quite possible, even likely, that he will move to implement more of his campaign pledges as more political appointees join the executive departments. (Currently, the State Department and the Defense Department each have only one Senate-confirmed Trump official.)

But for the time being the 54 percent of Americans who didn't vote for Trump — and the roughly 95 percent of the world that was horrified by his campaign — should be breathing a sigh of relief that his actions are not turning out to be quite as radical as his rhetoric.

Yet that is not the sentiment of the day. Americans and the rest of the world continue to be as alarmed about Trump as if he had actually implemented his whole deranged agenda on day one. Trump's approval rating at home continues to hit new lows while in Europe surveys show that he — and the country he leads — is about as popular as an infectious disease. He can't even visit the United Kingdom, America's closest ally, for the time being because of protests,

led by that country's lower house speaker, against letting him speak before Parliament. So irony of ironies: Trump is as feared and loathed by America's allies, notwithstanding the cynical genuflections of Shinzo Abe and Theresa May, as if he had actually carried out his full isolationist agenda. Which he hasn't. Yet.

Why is it that no one is giving Trump any credit for his (relative) moderation in action? Because his words are so immoderate. He continues to engage in fraudulent rhetoric and unhinged personal attacks — he especially loves to tweet in UPPERCASE LETTERS! — that create an unsettled environment of crisis, uncertainty, and concern. His own babble and bluster does more than any critic to discredit him.

Look at Trump's reaction after a federal judge in Seattle blocked his immigration order and the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals had to decide whether to allow the restraining order to stand. Instead of letting Justice Department lawyers make legal arguments in favor of the administration — which actually has a strong case — Trump stepped front and center with his hyperbolic oratory. On Twitter, he thundered: "The opinion of this so-called judge, which essentially takes law-enforcement away from our country, is ridiculous and will be overturned!" And then: "Just cannot believe a judge would put our country in such peril. If something happens blame him and court system. People pouring in. Bad!" Nor did he spare the 9th Circuit judges, saying that the arguments they entertained were "disgraceful" and that even a "bad high school student" would rule in favor of his "beautifully" written order.

No less than Trump's own Supreme Court nominee, Neil Gorsuch, felt compelled to criticize these comments as "demoralizing" and "disheartening," and you can bet that all of the judges involved took full note as well. Trump turned what should have been a routine case about statutory interpretation into a full-blown test of the separation of powers. The judges knew that if they ruled in the administration's favor, they would have been seen as caving into presidential intimidation. This may help to explain why a three-judge panel of the 9th Circuit, including a George W. Bush appointee, ruled unanimously and completely against the government in spite of concerns from dispassionate observers such as Jeffrey Toobin

that the plaintiffs may not even have standing to pursue the case.

Or look at the brouhaha over the "One China" policy. There is nothing unusual about a U.S. president affirming that Taiwan is, in theory, part of China; every president since the 1970s has said just that. If Trump had simply agreed with the settled policy from day one, there would not have been any news. But after the election he took an unprecedented call from Taiwan's president, arranged by Taiwanese lobbyists in Washington. After Trump was criticized for this unusual act, he felt compelled to hint that this was all part of some brilliant grand strategy that, in retrospect, was as nonexistent as his plan to replace Obamacare. "Everything is under negotiation, including One China," he grandiosely told the Wall Street Journal. This led to outrage in Beijing — and a climb down by Trump in a phone call on Feb. 9 with Xi Jinping. "Trump lost his first fight with Xi, and he will be looked at as a paper tiger," crowed an advisor to the Chinese government. Another totally unnecessary defeat for Trump because of his own lack of rhetorical discipline.

If the White House wants to advance the Trump agenda, it should muzzle Trump.

If the White House wants to advance the Trump agenda, it should muzzle Trump. But that, of course, will never happen. The narcissistic real estate developer ran for the presidency precisely because of the megaphone it affords him, and he will continue to pop off on matters big and small, like denouncing Nordstrom's "terrible" decision to drop Ivanka Trump's product line, falsely claiming that the murder rate is at a 47-year high, impugning the intelligence of Mark Cuban, and accusing war hero John McCain of "embolden[ing] the enemy." Naturally, Trump's mini-me's — Sean Spicer, Kellyanne Conway, Stephen Miller — feel compelled to parrot his "alternative facts," for example about imaginary voter fraud or Nordstrom's supposed vendetta against Ivanka, thus contributing to the alarming impression that this White House is unmoored from reality.

As a Trump skeptic, all I can say to the president is: Keep it up. The best defense against your crazy ideas turns out to be your own big mouth.

Beijing Watches for How Trump Handles North Korea

Chun Han Wong

Updated Feb. 13,

2017 3:01 p.m. ET

BEIJING—As the Trump administration confronted its first challenge by North Korea, a weekend ballistic-missile test, China largely stayed on the sidelines, watching how the new leadership in Washington would react.

China's government waited a day before expressing its opposition to the test and urging Washington and Seoul to do more to curb Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions.

"The roots of the North Korean nuclear-weapons issue stem from differences between North Korea and the U.S., and between North and South Korea," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said Monday. "We hope that all relevant parties will shoulder their due responsibilities and do what they can."

Mr. Geng noted that the test was a violation of United Nations Security Council resolutions, and China has regularly criticized North Korea for conducting weapons tests. But some academics said Beijing appeared more reserved in its latest remarks, particularly when compared with admonishments it

issued against Pyongyang's nuclear tests last year.

"Since Donald Trump came to power, China's approach has been to wait and see—letting him do what he wants before deciding how to respond," said Huang Jing, an expert on U.S.-China relations and Asian security issues at the National University of Singapore.

"North Korea has done China a favor, providing an opportunity to test Donald Trump's policy intentions," he said.

Mr. Trump commented on the test later Monday during a press conference with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. He said that North Korea is "a big, big problem" that he would deal with "very strongly."

Several U.S. presidents have tried to stop North Korea from developing ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons, under Washington's longstanding commitment to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula.

Mr. Trump's predecessor, Barack Obama, repeatedly urged Beijing to apply more financial and diplomatic pressure on Pyongyang. China has historically resisted taking steps that could destabilize its impoverished neighbor.

After Pyongyang conducted a series of nuclear and ballistic-missile tests last year, however, Beijing backed tougher U.N. sanctions that impose deep cuts into Pyongyang's annual coal exports.

Mr. Trump hasn't outlined his own specific plans for dealing with North Korea. On the campaign trail last year, he hinted he was willing to negotiate a rapprochement directly with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, breaking from a past emphasis on multilateral talks with the dictator. In January, as president-elect, Mr. Trump said Beijing wasn't putting enough pressure on Pyongyang.

But in some cases, Mr. Trump has appeared to pull back from some of his more unconventional campaign pledges and adopt positions aligned with decades of U.S. diplomacy.

The upshot, some academics say, is Beijing's reluctance to commit to any specific course of action over North Korea.

"China may need to adjust its approach in accordance with U.S. attitudes, so China is watching what the Americans do," said Shi Yuanhua, a professor at Fudan University's Institute of International Studies in Shanghai.

"Will Trump continue Obama's strategy on the Korean Peninsula, take firmer action against North Korea, or listen to China's advice and resume negotiations?" Mr. Shi said. "The U.S. has yet to make its position clear."

Beijing has suggested that Washington bears a greater burden in dissuading Pyongyang, arguing that North Korea won't budge without some guarantees for its national security.

"If Washington keeps cracking down on Pyongyang's nuclear development while turning a blind eye to North Korea's concerns, their current confrontation will develop into an absurd struggle," said a Sunday editorial in the Global Times, a nationalistic tabloid run by the Communist Party's flagship newspaper, People's Daily.

"Seoul, Washington and Tokyo have been asking Beijing to pile more pressure on Pyongyang," the newspaper said. "The reality is that they are treating a secondary issue and not the root cause."

—Kersten Zhang
contributed to this article.

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Missile Test Advances North Korea's Offensive Posture

Jonathan Cheng

Feb. 13, 2017 6:14 a.m. ET

SEOUL—North Korea's weekend rocket launch wasn't the one that many diplomats had feared: a long-range ballistic missile capable of eventually delivering a nuclear warhead to the U.S. homeland.

But it did highlight new technological developments that experts say put Pyongyang on track to greatly enhance the stealth and reliability of future long-range missile launches that are of particular concern to the U.S. and its allies South Korea and Japan.

North Korea's state media on Monday claimed Sunday's launch tested a new type of medium-to-long-range ballistic missile that boasts a solid fuel-powered engine—a modification of a similar engine it used in a launch from a submarine last year. If true, it would be the country's first longer-range missile using the enhanced system.

The new missile will help ensure "speed in striking," said North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, according to state media. He said

the new system, dubbed Polaris-2, would allow the army to "perform its strategic duties most accurately and rapidly in any space: under waters or on the land."

Experts say Sunday's launch marks an advance for the North Koreans because solid fuel allows a nimbler launch process, with quicker fueling times, fewer support vehicles and greater reliability. More advanced powers like the U.S. have used such technology for decades. Using the technique would prevent radar technology from picking up advance signs that North Korea is planning to launch a missile from, say, the back of a truck, experts say.

"North Korea is emphasizing stealth and surprise," said Go Myung-hyun, an analyst at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies in Seoul.

The test launch presented the Trump administration with its first major challenge to his administration by a foreign leader. It sparked calls in the U.S. and South Korea for quicker deployment of a planned U.S. missile defense system in South Korea. One of South Korea's largest daily newspapers, the JoongAng Ilbo,

said on Monday it was "time to deploy Thaad," as the system is known.

The U.S., Japan and South Korea on Monday requested an urgent meeting of the United Nations Security Council to discuss the launch.

North Korea's only major ally, China, offered a muted response to the test as it awaited signs over how the Trump administration would react.

"The Chinese side opposes relevant launch activities by North Korea that violate United Nations Security Council resolutions," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said Monday at a regular news briefing.

The missile that the North fired over the weekend isn't capable of reaching the U.S. mainland or even Guam. North Korea hasn't test-launched an ICBM that could potentially do so, though Mr. Kim said last year the country was close to carrying out such a test. Pyongyang also has reported making progress on a solid fuel rocket engine.

But Pyongyang has made developments more quickly than many experts have expected and is likely to rapidly extend the range of its solid-fuel missiles, said Jeffrey Lewis, a director at the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies in Monterey, Calif.

"Once they get this missile working, they'll make a bigger one," Mr. Lewis said. "This is the path to a solid-fueled intercontinental ballistic missile."

The launch came as the Trump administration finds its bearings and conducts a policy review on North Korea. Mr. Trump, who took office three weeks ago, hasn't outlined specific plans for dealing with North Korea, though most observers expect him to stand by Washington's longstanding commitment to denuclearize the Korean peninsula.

Among other things, the U.S. administration must decide whether to expand annual joint military exercises with South Korea this spring in response to North Korea's missile program. President Donald Trump was meeting with Japanese

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Sunday when the missile was fired.

"The North is poking the Trump administration to see their reaction

to a lesser provocation now, and depending on that they'll probably calibrate their next move," Mr. Go

said. "They're leaving room for escalation down the road."

—Chun Han Wong in Beijing contributed to this article.

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Why North Korea may present Trump's toughest international issue

The Christian Science Monitor

February 13, 2017 —North Korea's Sunday missile test may have been an important step toward developing an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) that could threaten the United States. It was also a reminder that Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions may be the new Trump administration's single most difficult foreign-policy challenge.

So far President Trump has reacted with restraint. He hasn't tweeted out a slam of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un or repeated his past vow that a North Korean ICBM "won't happen." Mr. Trump's initial response, instead, was to simply stand next to visiting Japanese premier Shinzo Abe and vow support for Tokyo in the face of North Korea's aggressive weapon testing.

The Trump team may find it has few appealing options as it weighs a response to the missile launch. Sanctions have already choked the North Korean economy. Shows of force don't seem to deter North Korea's leadership. Meanwhile, the clock keeps ticking on a problem that has bedeviled all recent US chief executives.

"It's a big deal," says Thomas Karako, a senior fellow in the International Security Program at the Center for Strategic and International Security, referring to Sunday's test. "It remains to be seen how big in the immediate term."

Switch to solid-fuel missiles

The importance of Sunday's test does not lie in the performance of the North Korean missile per se. It flew only 300 miles or so before splashing down in international waters.

It stems instead from the missile's apparent use of solid-fuel technology. North Korean state media on Monday boasted that that weekend test had used a solid-fuel engine derived from an existing submarine-launched missile, and released a video that seemed to document the claim.

South Korea's military has issued a statement saying that the missile "appears" to use solid fuel. US experts concur, saying among other things that the trajectory appeared to match a prior launch of the KN-11 submarine-launched missile.

Solid-fuel missiles can be launched much more quickly than liquid counterparts and require fewer support vehicles. That makes them more difficult for overhead surveillance — read "US spy satellites" — to spot. In addition they are more reliable.

"North Korea is switching over to solid-fueled missiles, which are far more threatening than liquid-fueled Scuds, Nodongs and Musudans," tweeted Jeffrey Lewis, director of the East Asia Nonproliferation Program at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey, on Sunday.

Currently North Korean missiles could hit South Korea and Japan. Some experts think the medium-range Musudan, at the upper end of

its range, could reach US military forces on the island of Guam.

At the moment that's the limit of Pyongyang's reach. But stacking solid-fuel motors could be North Korea's easiest path to a true ICBM that could hold the US itself at risk.

"They could well be testing the constituent parts of a longer-range missile," says Dr. Karako of CSIS.

US "strategic patience" with regard to North Korea has now failed, according to Karako. He says that means the US should push ahead with plans to deploy a US missile-defense system known as THAAD in South Korea, despite objections from China.

It could also mean the US needs to further develop the military ability to strike at North Korean launchers and command and control sites in the event of a failure of deterrence.

Trump's options

Trump officials have vowed to be more assertive in their policies toward North Korea than their Obama-era counterparts. But it's not clear exactly what that means.

It's likely the administration will look at ways to further tighten financial controls, for instance. But North Korea is virtually shut off from the world economy already.

It is possible Trump might opt for secondary sanctions that would target Chinese banks and firms that do business with North Korea. Trump has long said he would push China, North Korea's only friend, to

do more to curb North Korean nuclear and missile programs.

But Beijing might be reluctant to go along, given Trump's insistence that China cheats the US on trade, steals US jobs, and manipulates its currency. It is hard to envision China cooperating in this area if Trump imposes stiff tariffs on Chinese goods entering the US, as he has threatened to do.

Indeed, a Chinese Communist Party newspaper on Monday said that it is futile for the US to continue its sanctions and other measures against North Korea without acknowledging North Korea's own security concerns.

"The military threat it faces looks very real," said the Global Times newspaper, according to an Associated Press report. South Korea's military is backed up by some 28,000 US troops stationed in the country.

Meanwhile, the US, Japan, and South Korea requested that the UN Security Council meet to discuss the matter. Closed-door talks were set for Monday afternoon.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres strongly condemned North Korea's latest ballistic missile test and called it a "troubling violation" of existing sanctions.

"The secretary-general appeals to the international community to continue to address this situation in a united manner," said UN spokesman Farhan Haq.



Editorial : The United States needs a new strategy for North Korea

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IF THERE is one lesson that all nations with successful ballistic missile programs have learned, from the dawn of the missile age until today, it is that practice makes perfect. Testing is essential, and no one succeeds without it. North Korea's latest missile launch did not reach the intercontinental range that its leader Kim Jong Un had threatened on New Year's Day, but the event did show that North Korea is steadily testing and harvesting the know-how. The United States needs a new and serious strategy to meet this challenge.

The latest launch was a solid-fuel missile, lofted in a high trajectory, that flew 310 miles before splashing down in the Sea of Japan, also known as the East Sea. That's a sufficient range to worry both Japan and South Korea, vital U.S. allies. The missile may be an adapted version of one known as the KN-11 that North Korea test-fired from a submarine last year. North Korea is clearly making progress in the technology of solid-fuel missiles, which are quicker to launch and require less in the way of support facilities. The weekend test was carried out on land from a mobile launching vehicle with tanklike tracks; mobility could give the missile more capability to evade

detection. As always with North Korea, there are important unknowns, such as whether the solid-fuel engines or designs are indigenous or somehow imported.

Prudently, President Trump refrained from a rash response of the kind he delivered in January, when he tweeted: "North Korea just stated that it is in the final stages of developing a nuclear weapon capable of reaching parts of the U.S. It won't happen!" There is nothing to be gained right now by drawing red lines. In a brief appearance before reporters late Saturday, Mr. Trump wisely emphasized the United States' support for Japan while standing

alongside Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. The tone of their meeting, as well as the recent phone call to President Xi Jinping of China, suggest Mr. Trump is attempting to soothe worries in Asia over his isolationist campaign rhetoric.

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Now, Mr. Trump needs to focus on creating a strategy to deal with North Korea. On Monday he acknowledged it is "a big, big problem" and vowed to deal with it

"very strongly." There is no plausible military solution that does not risk a major war on the peninsula. This points toward negotiation. Two recent studies — one by the Council on Foreign Relations, the

other by the Asia Society and the University of California at San Diego — have suggested an approach of pressuring North Korea to freeze its nuclear and missile programs. The United States must be willing to use sticks — such as sanctions and

deploying missile defenses in South Korea — as well as carrots to end the North Korean threat. These studies, and many others, have emphasized how China is central to any such strategy. Mr. Trump, with his oft-touted dealmaking skills,

enjoys a fresh chance to put the matter high on the agenda with China and tackle one of the world's most pressing security problems. He should waste no time in doing so.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

U.S. Eyes New Tactic to Press China

Bob Davis

Feb. 13, 2017

8:02 p.m. ET

WASHINGTON—The White House is exploring a new tactic to discourage China from undervaluing its currency to boost exports, part of an evolving Trump administration strategy to challenge the practices of the U.S.'s largest trading partner while stepping back from direct confrontation.

Under the plan, the commerce secretary would designate the practice of currency manipulation as an unfair subsidy when employed by any country, instead of singling out China, said people briefed on or involved in formulating the policy. U.S. companies would then be in a position to bring antisubsidy actions themselves to the U.S. Commerce Department against China or other countries.

The currency plans are part of a China strategy being assembled by the White House's new National Trade Council, which seeks to balance the goals of challenging China while still keeping relations with the country on an even keel. To do that, measures taken against China would also apply to other nations.

The administration would avoid, at least for now, making confrontational claims about whether China is manipulating its currency for trade benefit, the people said.

The move could be a sign the Trump administration is softening its stance on China. During his presidential campaign, Donald Trump threatened to label China a currency manipulator on the first day of his administration, which he didn't do. He also threatened to slap 45% tariffs on Chinese goods, an idea he hasn't raised recently.

During a phone call with Chinese President Xi Jinping last week, President Trump backtracked on a threat involving the "One China" policy, which recognizes Beijing

sovereignty over Taiwan. Mr. Trump said the U.S. would honor the "One China" policy, according to the White House, after he earlier threatened he might not do so unless China made big concessions on trade.

But the currency move, if put into effect, is bound to be controversial because it may violate World Trade Organization rules. Other countries are also sure to take similar measures against U.S. exports and could argue that Federal Reserve policies that weaken the dollar qualify as subsidies. The Obama administration, concerned about such consequences, decided against naming currency practices as a subsidy.

The individuals who have been briefed on the White House thinking stress that the currency plan and other changes need to be reviewed by cabinet officials including Steven Mnuchin who was confirmed as Treasury secretary late Monday and Commerce Department nominee Wilbur Ross Jr. who is awaiting confirmation.

A White House spokeswoman declined to comment. A representative for the Chinese embassy in Washington didn't respond to requests for comment.

China's currency practices have long been a source of controversy between the nations with the world's two biggest economies. Twice a year, the Treasury issues a report examining whether countries pursue policies that keep their currencies undervalued. Designation as a currency manipulator is mostly symbolic. Still, it has long been seen in Beijing as a possible prelude to punitive measures, a threat that Mr. Trump made explicit in a late 2015 opinion piece in The Wall Street Journal.

The Treasury last labeled China a currency manipulator in 1994 during the Clinton administration.

A string of corporate executives have told the Trump White House that China no longer is pursuing an

undervalued currency and has run through \$1 trillion in foreign reserves trying to stem the yuan's persistent decline.

In an interview with the Journal in January, Mr. Trump rejected that claim, saying Chinese leaders talk about supporting their currency "because they don't want us to get angry."

Currency manipulation is "not on top of agenda of the American business community in China," said James McGregor, China chairman for APCO

Worldwide, a communications and lobbying firm. Last week he visited the White House and other government offices as part of a delegation of U.S. business officials from China.

Categorizing currency manipulation as a subsidy would give U.S. companies a new measure to use in case China reverts to a more mercantilist approach. Companies routinely bring antisubsidy suits to the Commerce Department against imports which they argue are being improperly subsidized by foreign governments. If the U.S. firms prevail, Commerce often assesses heavy duties on those imports, which sharply limits imports.

"It's a great first move," said Dan DiMicco, former chief executive of steelmaker Nucor Corp., who has been advising the Trump team on trade issues. "It allows companies to use trade laws to consider currency manipulation, which is rampant in the world, especially in China, as a subsidy."

Prominent Democrats, including Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York and Ohio's Sherrod Brown, have long argued for previous administrations to make such a change.

The Trump administration is also looking to tighten oversight of foreign acquisitions of U.S. firms that have access to important technology. The Committee on Foreign Investment in the U.S., or CFIUS, an interagency committee

that reviews foreign acquisitions, would get broader scope to reject deals that threaten national interests, said individuals involved in discussions with the White House.

The White House is also examining the creation of an additional panel to look more broadly at the transfer of U.S. technology overseas, whether by acquisition, license or joint venture, these people said.

U.S. companies routinely complain that Beijing insists that they create joint ventures with Chinese firms to get access to the vast Chinese market and to give their partners access to the latest technology.

Several individuals involved in the discussions said the new panel, dubbed "SAFE," would operate as a "free-floating" intelligence-gathering operation and be staffed by people from economic and security agencies, plus outside experts. It's unclear how the panel would interact with CFIUS and other agencies.

Beijing has traditionally counted on American corporations to blunt U.S. government policy offensives on the Chinese economy. But that support may be weakening. According to a survey last month by the American Chamber of Commerce in China, 81% of member companies feel that foreign businesses are less welcome in China.

"The American business community in China welcomes a pushback because China has overreached," said Mr. McGregor, the APCO official. "But it has to be smart and well thought-out and focus on real issues between the two countries, such as techno-nationalism and the step-by-step closing of market access for foreign companies in China."

—Ian Talley contributed to this article.

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Shelton : Currency Manipulation Is a Real Problem

Judy Shelton

Feb. 13, 2017

7:16 p.m. ET

Passionate defenders of the "global rules-based trading system" should be wary of thinking their views are more informed than President Trump's. He has been branded a

protectionist and thus many conclude he is incapable of exercising world leadership. Meanwhile, those who embrace the virtues of global free trade disregard

the fact that the "rules" are not working for many American workers and companies.

Certainly the rules regarding international exchange-rate arrangements are not working. Monetary integrity was the key to making Bretton Woods institutions work when they were created after World War II to prevent future breakdowns in world order due to trade. The international monetary system, devised in 1944, was based on fixed exchange rates linked to a gold-convertible dollar.

No such system exists today. And no real leader can aspire to champion both the logic and the morality of free trade without confronting the practice that undermines both: currency manipulation.

When governments manipulate exchange rates to affect currency markets, they undermine the honest efforts of countries that wish to compete fairly in the global marketplace. Supply and demand are distorted by artificial prices conveyed through contrived exchange rates. Businesses fail as legitimately earned profits become currency losses.

It is no wonder that appeals to free trade prompt cynicism among those who realize the game is rigged against them. Opposing the Trans-Pacific Partnership in June 2015, Rep. Debbie Dingell (D., Mich.) explained: "We can compete with anybody in the world. We build the best product. But we can't compete with the Bank of Japan or the

Japanese government."

In other words, central banks provide useful cover for currency manipulation. Japan's answer to the charge that it manipulates its currency for trade purposes is that movements in the exchange rate are driven by monetary policy aimed at domestic inflation and employment objectives. But there's no denying that one of the primary "arrows" of Japan's economic strategy under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, starting in late 2012, was to use radical quantitative easing to boost the "competitiveness" of Japan's exports. Over the next three years, the yen fell against the U.S. dollar by some 40%.

Last April, U.S. Treasury Secretary Jacob Lew cautioned Japan against using currency depreciation to gain a trade advantage and he placed the country on a "monitoring list" of potential currency manipulators. But in response, Japanese Finance Minister Taro Aso threatened to raise the bar, saying he was "prepared to undertake intervention" in the foreign-exchange market.

China has long been intervening directly in the foreign-exchange market to manipulate the value of its currency. The People's Bank of China announces a daily midpoint for the acceptable exchange rate between the yuan and the dollar, and then does not allow its currency to move more than 2% from the target price. When the value of the

yuan starts to edge higher than the desired exchange rate, China's government buys dollars to push it back down. When the yuan starts to drift lower than the desired rate, it sells off dollar reserves to buy back its own currency.

China's government has reserves that amount to nearly \$3 trillion. According to Mr. Lew, the U.S. should mute its criticism because China has spent nearly \$1 trillion to cushion the yuan's fall over the last 2½ years or so. In a veiled reproach to Mr. Trump's intention to label China a currency manipulator, Mr. Lew said it was "analytically dangerous" to equate China's current intervention policies with its earlier efforts to devalue its currency for purposes of gaining a trade advantage. China, he noted, would only be open to criticism that is "intellectually sound."

Whether China is propping up exchange rates or holding them down, manipulation is manipulation and should not be overlooked. To be intellectually consistent, one must acknowledge that the distortions induced by government intervention in the foreign-exchange market affect both trade and capital flows. A country that props up the value of its currency against the dollar may have strategic goals for investing in U.S. assets.

The notion that free trade should be based on stable exchange rates so that goods and capital flow in accordance with free-market

principles has been abandoned by technocrat elitists who simultaneously extol the benefits of globalization. But it makes no sense to devote hundreds of pages to carefully constructed trade terms that ratchet down tariffs a few percentage points when currency movements can wipe them out in a matter of days.

Mr. Trump is taking the right first step to address this issue by questioning why there aren't adequate rules in place to keep countries from manipulating their exchange rates.

The next step is to establish a universal set of rules based on monetary sovereignty and discipline that would allow nations to voluntarily participate in a trade agreement that did not permit them to undermine true competition by manipulating exchange rates.

Mr. Trump's penchant for identifying core problems and taking bold actions to resolve them is encouraging. He would do well to take the next step for the sake of free trade and to establish a system that ensures stable exchange rates.

—Ms. Shelton, an economist, is the author of "Money Meltdown: Restoring Order to the Global Currency System" (Free Press, 1994). She served as an economic adviser to the Trump transition team.



The Kremlin Is Starting to Worry About Trump

Paul McLeary | 1 hour ago

In 2016, a senior Russian official explained to a group of visiting foreigners why the government had decided not to celebrate the upcoming 100th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution. Yes, it was a turning point in Russian history, he argued, and, yes, President Vladimir Putin sees today's Russia as a successor to both the tsars and the Bolsheviks. But celebrating a revolution would send the wrong message to society. The Kremlin today is staunchly opposed to "regime change," the visitors were told, and thus skittish about eulogizing 1917. It plans to use the centenary, instead, to draw attention to the catastrophic consequences of resorting to revolution to solve social and political problems.

The last thing the Russian government expected was that 2017 would bring it face to face not with a revolution of the past but with a revolution of the present — the radical regime change taking place

in the United States as a result of the electoral victory of Donald Trump. It is Trump's electoral revolution that has captured the imagination, and fanned the fears, of Russian elites today.

The search for a key to Trump's mind-boggling and miscellaneous gusher of policy directives has tended to focus on his disturbingly erratic, vindictive, simplistic, narcissistic, insecure, and occasionally delusional personality, due exception being made for those conspiracy theorists who treat him as a kind of Manchurian candidate or sock puppet of the Kremlin. What most observers have been late to recognize is the extent to which, behind his mask as a showman, Trump views himself as a revolutionary insurgent with a mission to dismantle America's "old regime."

Trump's tactics certainly belong to the classic revolutionary playbook. His shock-and-awe style of executive action is designed to rattle Congress, catch his opponents unprepared, and incite

his base to wage war on the establishment. The extreme polarization he deliberately foments allows him to fend off an opportunistic alliance of the Republican elite with the Democratic Party in defense of the constitutional system, ensuring that protests will be largely impotent. In the words of White House strategist-in-chief Stephen Bannon, Trump is positioning himself as the global leader of an anti-global movement that is anti-elite, anti-establishment, anti-liberal, and nationalistic. "What we are witnessing now," Bannon told the *Washington Post*, "is the birth of a new political order, and the more frantic a handful of media elites become, the more powerful that new political order becomes itself."

Russian policymakers, obsessed as they are with the fear of "color revolutions," may understand better than Americans and Europeans the radical nature of the political change that has descended on Washington. Indeed, when it comes to the ongoing Trump revolution, Russian policymakers are in much the same

position as the German General Staff one century ago. In 1917, the German government concluded that the best hope for a German victory in World War I was for a revolution to erupt in Russia. It thus allowed some of the leaders of the Bolshevik party, Lenin among them, to pass through Germany and make their way back to Russia. The hope was that a revolution in Russia would pull the country out of the war — and the plan worked. But by the beginning of 1918, the German government started to fear that the virus of revolution that it had surreptitiously help spread to Russia might circle back calamitously to Germany itself.

Our conversations with Russian policymakers and experts indicate they are starting to have similar fears and doubts today.

There is no way of knowing if Russian interference contributed decisively to Trump's upset victory. But it's fair to say that the Kremlin viewed the outcome as a divine gift. Since at least 2011-2012, when Russia witnessed widespread

popular protests, and particularly after the Ukrainian Maidan uprising — events that elicited heartfelt praise and encouragement from then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton — Russia's leadership had been convinced that her election would spell disaster for Russia and that it might even lead to war. So Russians did what they could to prevent Clinton from getting into the White House. But while they welcomed her defeat, they were wholly unprepared for the ensuing regime change in Washington.

Now that Trump is in power, political elites in Moscow have stopped cheering.

Now that Trump is in power, political elites in Moscow have stopped cheering. They recognize that Russia's position has become abruptly and agonizingly complex.

It's true that Trump's accession opens up the possibility of "normalizing" Russia's relations with the West, beginning with a reduction or even elimination of sanctions. It also validates many of Russia's ideological criticisms of the liberal order and may perhaps foreshadow policy reversals that Moscow has long hoped for: from Washington's disengagement from the Ukraine crisis to its dissolution of the Cold War Western alliance. Russians also celebrate Trump's unfiltered stream-of-consciousness diatribes as signaling a welcome end to America's hypocrisy and condescension.

But Trump's revolution is also ushering in a period of turmoil and uncertainty, including the likelihood of self-defeating trade wars. Still

traumatized by the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russia's present leadership has no appetite for global instability.

With Trump in the White House, moreover, Putin has lost his monopoly over geopolitical unpredictability. The Kremlin's ability to shock the world by taking the initiative and trashing ordinary international rules and customs has allowed Russia to play an oversized international role and to punch above its weight. Putin now has to share the capacity to keep the world off balance with a new American president vastly more powerful than himself. More world leaders are watching anxiously to discover what Trump will do next than are worrying about what Putin will do next. Meanwhile, using anti-Americanism as an ideological crutch has become much more dubious now that the American electorate has chosen as their president a man publicly derided as "Putin's puppet."

What the Kremlin fears most today is that Trump may be ousted or even killed. His ouster, Kremlin insiders argue, is bound to unleash a virulent and bipartisan anti-Russian campaign in Washington. Oddly, therefore, Putin has become a hostage to Trump's survival and success. This has seriously restricted Russia's geopolitical options. The Kremlin is perfectly aware that Democrats want to use Russia to discredit and possibly impeach Trump while Republican elites want to use Russia to deflate and discipline Trump. The Russian government fears not only Trump's downfall, of course, but also the

possibility that he could opportunistically switch to a tough anti-Moscow line in order to make peace with hawkish Republican leaders in Congress.

It is emblematic that, in their first telephone call, Putin refused to press Trump on lifting the sanctions or on America's discontinuing support for Kiev. Moscow has also chosen to ignore some harsh anti-Russian statements issued by certain members of the new administration. The renewed fighting in eastern Ukraine might seem like a counterexample, but the Kremlin swears that the Petro Poroshenko government in Kiev is the guilty party, aiming at getting the attention of anti-Russian U.S. Congress members and thereby providing a potent argument against Trump's appeasement of Putin. In any case, Russia has been trying to find ways to accommodate the U.S. president, including, for example, echoing the White House's denials that Ambassador Sergei Kislyak discussed sanctions with Michael Flynn before Trump's inauguration as well as announcing plans to reconsider Trump's demand to set up safe zones inside Syria—a proposal that was initially rejected by the Russians.

Trump's presidency has also complicated Moscow's relations with China and Iran.

Trump's presidency has also complicated Moscow's relations with China and Iran. Moscow is interested in normalization with the West but not at the cost of joining a Washington-led anti-China coalition, which Trump seems insistent on creating. Moreover, Putin's Russia

hosts up to 20 million Muslims and therefore cannot indulge in the radical anti-Islam rhetoric adopted by Trump.

What is especially dangerous from the Kremlin's perspective is that certain nationalistic circles in Russia are falling in love with Trump's insurrectionary approach. In January, for the first time since Putin returned to the Kremlin in 2012, Putin was not the most frequently cited name in the Russian media; Trump was. And although most of Trump's Russian admirers, such as Alexander Dugin, are loyal to Putin personally, they also dream of purging the globalist elites who occupy the rooms adjoining their president's.

Anyone who spends any time in Moscow will quickly discover that ordinary Russians, in contrast with a majority of Europeans, feel surprisingly positive about Trump. One reason is that they are exhausted at Russia's confrontation with the West. Another is that they share Trump's cynical, borderline apocalyptic view of international politics. Like Trump, they never believed in win-win politics in the first place.

Most interesting of all, they readily compare Trump to an early Boris Yeltsin — impulsive, charismatic, trusting only his family, and ready to bomb the parliament if that works to cement his hold on power. The problem for the Kremlin is that Yeltsin was a revolutionary leader and Putin has decided to make 2017 a year for deploring, not celebrating, revolutions.



John McCain: Russia dissidents are our moral equals

John McCain
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Protesters in Prague, Czech Republic, on Jan. 21, 2017. (Photo: Martin Divisek, epa)

The courageous Russian dissident Vladimir Kara-Murza would like to see the governments of Russia and the United States become moral equals — to know that both protect their peoples' rights to liberty and equal justice, and that both are comparable forces for good in the world. He has dedicated his life to that end.

He now fights for his life in a Moscow hospital bed, poisoned by an as yet unknown substance likely on the order of a Russian regime that believes morality is weakness and an impediment to national greatness. The autocrat at

the head of that regime, Vladimir Putin, operates like the boss of an organized crime syndicate that robs and oppresses the Russian people, and causes immense harm and suffering in the world.

On Putin's order, Russian forces invaded Russia's neighbors, seized their territory and continue to undermine their independence.

On Putin's order, Russia intervenes in Syria not to fight terrorists but to abet the war crimes of the Assad regime. Russian bombers deliberately target aid workers and hospitals. They threaten Syrian freedom fighters trained by the U.S. They are allied with our enemies in the Middle East and trying to weaken our friendships there.

On Putin's order, Russian security services try to destabilize NATO allies the U.S. has sworn to defend. They interfered in our presidential

election and are conducting cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns to support Putin allies in European elections and destroy the European Union.

On Putin's order, corrupt apparatchiks and crony oligarchs rob Russians of their nation's wealth and resources.

On Putin's orders, brave dissidents, rival politicians, honest lawyers, truth seeking journalists and disobedient oligarchs have been jailed or murdered.

Putin's Russia is our adversary and moral opposite. It is committed to the destruction of the post-war, rule-based, world order built on American leadership and the primacy of our political and economic values.

From that world order, the United States has accrued vast wealth and power, and a greater share of

humanity than ever has escaped tyranny and poverty. Its preservation must remain the first security priority of the United States government.

There is no placating Putin. There is no transforming him from a gangster to a responsible statesman. Previous administrations have tried and failed not because they didn't try hard enough, but because Putin wants no part of it. He rejects our values and our vision of a free, stable, peaceful, prosperous international order.

Putin wants a return to a world of competing great powers, where tactical alliances and rivalries are formed to serve the narrowest national interests and shun the values Americans believe are universal. It is the world of the past, the world before the U.S. became a superpower. It is the world that produced two world wars, colonial

empires and dehumanizing ideologies advanced by oppression and slaughter. Its return would be a catastrophe for the United States and the world.

If he could speak, Vladimir Kara-Murza would make these same accusations and raise these same concerns. I've watched him fight to bring the Kremlin's crimes to world attention. I've listened to him urge the free world's opposition to Putinism and inspire his fellow Russians to demand their human rights be respected by their government.



Bershidsky

The future of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization may be in question thanks to U.S. President Donald Trump's dismissal of it as "obsolete," but NATO is still useful in at least one sense. Attitudes toward it form the most obvious border between the so-called "Russian World" -- a construct used by Russia to describe its desired sphere of influence -- and that part of the post-Communist world that no longer looks to Moscow for guidance and may never do so again.

A quarter of a century after the Soviet breakup, Russia is laying claim to superpower status again, using many of the same methods perfected during the Cold War. In some ways, it's too late to the party. Its old empire -- both the czarist version and the two-speed Eastern Europe built by the Communists, in which some nations were absorbed into the Soviet Union and others supported as its closest Comecon satellites -- has decomposed too much to be revived. President Vladimir Putin's Russia needed a new idea for restoring Russian power, and it appeared to find one in the "Russian World" idea espoused by the Russian Orthodox Church.

The concept is broad and nebulous. It includes interest in the Russian language and culture, but also adherence to conservative religious values and a cultural confrontation with the supposedly godless and dissolute West. In 2007, Putin set up a foundation to create Russian cultural centers overseas, similar to the U.K.'s British Council or China's

His is a voice of great moral clarity and compassion, and I hope we will hear it again summoning us to our moral duty. Americans, including our president, need to hear his voice. Russia needs to hear it. The world needs to hear it.

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

Vladimir had sanctuary with his family in the United States. He could have remained here in safety. He had been poisoned before. He knew the risks. But he took his values and his courage home to Russia to emulate and promote the example of his friend and comrade,

Boris Nemtsov, murdered in the shadow of the Kremlin.

Now those who fear Vladimir's voice have tried again to quiet it forever. I pray they haven't, and I ask Americans and righteous people everywhere to be his voice in his absence.

Oppose Russian aggression against the world we have built from the ruined cities and destroyed empires of World War II. Don't surrender the gains for our security and the progress for humanity that our Cold War victory achieved. Support the Russian people and their rights to

liberty and justice, not the corrupt leaders who betray them.

Vladimir Kara-Murza and all who risk their lives to free Russia from tyranny and corruption are our allies. They are our moral equals. And the president of the United States, the nation that has been the greatest force for good in human history, should be the first among us to recognize that.

John McCain, the senior U.S. senator from Arizona, is chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Bershidsky : A NATO of the Mind Limits Putin's Sphere of Influence

Leonid

Confucius Institute. The foundation, called Russky Mir, now has more than a hundred branches globally.

"The Russian world is an independent civilization that is capable of promoting certain ideals," legislator Vyacheslav Nikonov, grandson of Joseph Stalin's foreign minister Vyacheslav Molotov, wrote in a collection of articles published by the foundation. "The Russian world shouldn't be about memories of the past, but about dreams of the future."

There is a flip side to this vision: The apprehension of countries once ensnared in Russia's orbit and now wary of being dragged back in. As the Estonian intelligence service wrote in its recently released 2016 annual report:

Despite Vladimir Putin's declaration that the collapse of the Soviet Union was the biggest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century, the Kremlin's goal is not restoration of the Soviet Union. Using modern political, economic and military instruments for restoring its sphere of influence is considered a much loftier purpose.

The "Russian World," after all, is not only about soft power. It includes what is often termed "hybrid war": If a nation tries to leave its realm, Russia will fight to stop it through propaganda targeted at Russian speakers. It will also use force, as it has shown in Ukraine.

NATO, with its untested but powerful mutual security guarantee, is the only shield protecting potential "Russian World" countries from a forcible reinduction into Moscow's sphere of influence. At least for now, it limits Russian influence to soft power. So,

attitudes toward the military bloc are a good gauge of a country's attractiveness to Putin's Russian World project. If NATO is popular in a nation, the Kremlin will still pull all the strings available to it, perhaps even spread some cash or attempt to influence an election -- but it won't work as hard as it will in a nation where a negative attitude toward NATO gives it a bigger opening.

Gallup has released the results of a survey on NATO, taken in Eastern European countries in 2016. Viewed from a "Russian World eligibility" point of view, it provides some predictable results and some surprising ones.

NATO vs. "Russian World"

Answers to the question "Do you associate NATO with the protection of your country, a threat to your country or neither?" (percent)

Source: Gallup

Ukraine, despite three years of war waged on its territory by Russian-backed separatist rebels and, at decisive moments, by Russian troops, still has an anti-NATO plurality. It's easy to see why Putin is unwilling to desist in Ukraine: He still hopes to win the big prize.

The Baltic states, especially Estonia and Lithuania, are not as interesting to the Kremlin. They have pro-NATO majorities; a Russian hybrid invasion would be too costly and pointless for Russia to maintain. Even in Latvia, with its large Russian minority, almost half of the population is pro-NATO, which disqualifies the small nation as a potential part of the "Russian World" for anything but cultural purposes.

It's far more productive for the Kremlin to concentrate on the more anti-NATO post-Soviet states, such as Armenia and Moldova, and on Balkan nations such as Serbia and Montenegro. No wonder Russian activity in these countries has recently been on the increase. Even NATO members Bulgaria and Greece, where significant minorities see the bloc as a threat rather than a protection, are promising arenas for Russian influence-wielding -- whereas post-Soviet Georgia, where the anti-NATO minority is tiny, is probably a lost cause.

It's possible, then, that in trying to reconstruct Putin's strategy, experts are mistaken when they concentrate on post-Soviet nations in the moribund Commonwealth of Independent States as potential targets. The Estonian intelligence report, for example, states that "Russia's ambition is to strengthen its influence in the CIS area and ensure Russian-controlled integration therein via the Eurasian Union." That's probably obsolete thinking. Russia will seek to play a role everywhere people are not mentally "anti-Russian" enough to believe in NATO as a protective shield, and that includes, at least in the near term, the Balkans rather than the Baltics.

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**THE WALL
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Trump Plans Only 'Tweaking' of Canada Trade Pact

Damian Paletta,
Louise

Updated Feb. 13, 2017 6:24 p.m.
ET

WASHINGTON—President Donald Trump said he seeks only modest changes in the U.S. trade

relationship with Canada, pledging that the two nations would continue

Radnofsky and Paul Vieira

to work together on cross-border commerce and security issues.

Following meetings on Monday with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Mr. Trump said the U.S. would be "tweaking" its trade relationship with Canada as it considers how the North American Free Trade Agreement could be adjusted. The remarks contrast with Mr. Trump's harsh criticism of the current state of U.S. trade with Mexico.

"We have a very outstanding trade relationship with Canada," Mr. Trump said at a joint news conference with Mr. Trudeau. "We will be tweaking it, doing certain things with both of our countries."

His comments could set the stage for a two-tiered renegotiation of Nafta, with the Trump administration's focus squarely on Mexico. Mr. Trump said reiterated that Monday, saying trade with Canada "is much less severe situation than what's taking place" in Mexico.

"For many, many years, the transaction is not fair to the U.S. We will work with Mexico, and make it fair for both parties," Mr. Trump added.

Mr. Trump emphasized the close ties the U.S. has with Canada.

"We have before us the opportunity to build even more bridges, and bridges of cooperation, and bridges of commerce," Mr. Trump said.

Three-quarters of all Canadian exports, equivalent to 20% of the country's gross domestic product, are U.S. bound. Perhaps more important to Mr. Trump and his trade team, U.S.-Canada trade is roughly balanced. The latest data indicated a U.S. deficit in the trade of goods of \$11 billion, a fraction of the shortfall with China, Germany or Mexico.

"Millions of jobs on both sides of the border depend on the smooth and easy flow of goods, services and people," Mr. Trudeau said. "By working together, by ensuring the continued economic integration of our two economies, we are going to create opportunities for middle-class Canadians and Americans."

Some trade experts in Canada advised Mr. Trudeau to proceed with caution, despite the reassuring words.

"We should not have been panicking about Nafta before this meeting or too euphoric after it," said Mark Warner, a Toronto-based

trade lawyer. "One person's tweak is another person's rewrite."

Mr. Trudeau also spoke of "groundbreaking economic partnerships" and interdependent defense relationships between his nation and the U.S. He said the two countries had reached an agreement on border security to combat opioid trafficking.

Mr. Trudeau said relationships between neighbors could be "complex, and we won't always agree on everything."

"But because of our deep, abiding respect for one another, we're able to successfully navigate those complexities and still remain the closest of allies and friends," he said, after conversations with Mr. Trump over lunch and at a round-table for Canadian and American women entrepreneurs. "We know that more often than not, our victories are shared."

Mr. Trump characterized his administration's tougher line on deportations, travel restrictions and refugee policy as "a stance of common sense," adding, "We are going to pursue it vigorously."

Mr. Trudeau offered polite disagreement. "We continue to pursue our policies of openness to

immigration and refugees without compromising security," the prime minister he said, adding of his country's approach. Mr. Trudeau added he wasn't going to tell Mr. Trump how to do his job.

"The last thing Canadians expect is for me to come down and lecture another country on how they should govern themselves," he said. "My role and responsibility is to continue in such a way that reflects Canadians' approach and be a positive example in the world."

Mr. Trump said the two leaders also were working on ways to help female entrepreneurs on matters such as accessing capital.

"I'm focused and you are focused on the important role that women play in our economies," Mr. Trump said, addressing Mr. Trudeau. "We must work to address the barriers faced by women and women entrepreneurs."

—Michael C. Bender contributed to this article.

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**The
New York
Times**

Palen : When Canadian Scientists Were Muzzled by Their Government

Wendy Palen

Michael George

Haddad

VANCOUVER, British Columbia — Less than a month into the Trump presidency, and the forecast for science seems ominous.

Scientists at federal agencies have been hit with gag orders preventing them from communicating their findings, or in some cases, attending scientific conferences. Social media accounts and websites have been censored, and at least one agency was asked to identify personnel who worked on climate policies. Now there are proposals for slashing research budgets and gutting funding that could affect the training of the next generation of scientists. To top it all off, President Trump's cabinet nominees and senior advisers include many who are climate deniers or doubters.

Canadians experienced a similar assault on science a decade ago under Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

Just as the American science community is now struggling with whether to speak out and march or stay quiet and do its work, Canadian scientists wrestled with

the same questions. Ultimately, Canada's scientific community came together to save our research, galvanized support to fight back, and captured the attention and concern of the public. I hope our experience — in the spirit of science transcending borders — can be instructive.

Starting in 2007, shortly after Mr. Harper became prime minister, new rules were issued that prevented federal scientists from speaking freely with the media about their research without clearing it with public relations specialists or having an administrative "minder" accompany the scientists on interviews or to scientific conferences. More often, the government would simply deny permission for a scientist to speak with reporters if that person's findings ran counter to Mr. Harper's political agenda. Inquiries from journalists became mired in an obstinate bureaucracy, and media coverage of government climate research dropped 80 percent after the rules were imposed.

This censorship also had a chilling effect on scientific inquiry. A survey of federal Canadian scientists revealed that 90 percent felt they could not speak freely to the media about their work. If they were to

speak up about science that affected public health or the environment, 86 percent felt that they would suffer retaliation. Nearly half of the scientists knew of specific cases of political interference hampering efforts to protect the public.

One of the biggest blows came when research libraries were closed and historical data and reports, many unique and irreplaceable, were literally thrown into Dumpsters. This purge of environmental data was justified as a "cost-saving" measure. Additionally, many crucial data-gathering institutions were closed or saw their funding cut. To the outrage of the international science community, this included cutting all funding for the Experimental Lakes Area, a world-renowned research facility where scientists run experiments on pollution and environmental contaminants in more than 50 small lakes in northwestern Ontario. Other casualties included our northernmost Arctic monitoring station and our national census.

Reluctant to engage in politics, most scientists kept their heads down and tried to wait it out. It was when Mr. Harper's government passed a sweeping bill that eliminated or

amended our marquee environmental protection laws that we reached our boiling point.

Fearing the continued erosion of even the most basic protections for food inspection, water quality and human health, Canadian scientists filled Ottawa's streets in the Death of Evidence march. That theatrical mock funeral procession became something of a cultural touchstone. It was a turning point that galvanized public opinion against Prime Minister Harper's anti-science agenda. By the next election, Justin Trudeau's center-left government swept in on a platform that put scientists' right to speak and the promise of evidence-based decisions alongside job creation and economic growth.

So here's our advice as the Trump administration gears up. Spotlight and champion scientists' refusal to kowtow to intimidation. I'm encouraged by what has already emerged: When Mr. Trump's transition team circulated a questionnaire intended to identify staff members who had worked on climate change policies under President Obama, Department of Energy employees refused to release their names. When National Park Service employees were prevented from sharing information

on social media, they created alternative Twitter accounts overnight and tweeted the truth about climate change and pollution from dusk to dawn.

Scientists who usually shy away from political engagement are condemning President Trump for handing the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Energy and the State Department to a group of men who have denied climate change or questioned the extent to which humans are responsible for global warming. Now scientists from across the country are planning a March for

Science in the nation's capital.

In some quarters, scientists advise their colleagues to remain quiet, keep their noses to the microscope and at most venture out to local meetings so that the "average voter" will know that they're people, too, and that their work is valuable. But our experience leads to a different conclusion: Come together, speak up and speak out.

Scientists must recognize and fight political censorship, while they remain vigilant for political interference. Many federal science agencies have rules against political meddling in the scientific process. And whistle-blower protections

provide federal (and some state) scientists with an additional safety net to report unethical suppression of scientific information. Researchers should confirm that reports they submit are the same as those published, and if changes have been made for political reasons, let the public know.

Share documents widely and back up data in a secure location if the administration politicizes or interferes in research. Encrypted chats, phone calls from home lines and face-to-face meetings can help spread information without the fear of political meddling. Speaking out, especially through scientific organizations, tells colleagues they

need not be afraid. The warmth of community staves off the chill of censorship. Don't let science be silenced.

Evidence and objective reality are the foundation of successful policy and governance. Openness is as vital to science as it is to democracy. We cannot allow hard-won knowledge to be ignored or distorted. To fight the snuffing of the light of scientific inquiry, learn from your neighbors to the north. Reject interference. Stay vigilant and stay vocal. In other words, stay scientists.

**The
New York
Times**

Syria Used Chlorine Bombs Systematically in Aleppo, Report Says

Rick Gladstone

Syrian military helicopters systematically dumped canisters of chlorine gas, a banned weapon, on residential areas of Aleppo at least eight times late last year in the final weeks of the battle to retake the city from rebels, Human Rights Watch said in a detailed study released Monday.

The assertions in the study, if confirmed, would represent one of the most egregious uses of such outlawed weaponry in the war. It would amount to a new level of impunity by the Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad, who promised to never use chemical arms under an international treaty the government signed more than three years ago.

A United Nations panel that has been investigating reports of chlorine bombs and other chemical weapons in the Syrian war concluded last year that government forces had used them at least three times in 2014 and 2015. The panel is scheduled to provide an update this month.

Mr. Assad and his subordinates have repeatedly denied that their side has ever used chemical weapons, calling the evidence fabricated or inconclusive.

But the Human Rights Watch report suggested that Syrian officials had not only disregarded the United Nations findings but had decided to use chlorine bombs far more aggressively in the Aleppo campaign.

The report relied on interviews with emergency medical workers and

other witnesses, photographs that include what appear to show spent gas canisters and analyses of video. The report acknowledged that "identifying with certainty the chemical used in the attacks without laboratory testing is difficult."

This video accompanies a report by Human Rights Watch on what it described as systematic use of chlorine bombs by Syrian forces in the battle for Aleppo. If confirmed, the chlorine attacks would constitute a war crime. Video by Human Rights Watch

There had been anecdotal and unverified accounts of haphazard chlorine bomb use in Aleppo, the northern Syrian city that became the focal point of the war in November and December. But the report's conclusions pointed to a calculated government plan to use the poison indiscriminately to either kill inhabitants of contested neighborhoods or drive them out.

"The pattern of the chlorine attacks shows that they were coordinated with the overall military strategy for retaking Aleppo, not the work of a few rogue elements," Ole Solvang, deputy emergencies director at Human Rights Watch, said in releasing the report.

In all eight instances in which the report concluded chlorine bombs had been used, it said they were dropped in areas where government forces had planned to advance. The report said the attacks, from Nov. 17 to Dec. 13, when the combatants agreed to a cease-fire, killed at least nine civilians, including four children, and hurt 200.

Chlorine, a common industrial chemical that can be fatally toxic, is not by itself illegal. But the Chemical Weapons Convention, the treaty that outlaws such arms, forbids the use of toxins to kill or injure.

The report said there had been no evidence that military forces of Russia, which helped Mr. Assad's side successfully retake Aleppo, were directly involved in any chlorine bomb attacks. Nonetheless, the report said, "as a military ally of Damascus, it benefited from the use of chemical weapons by Syria forces."

A remnant from a gas cylinder found in Aleppo Province after what Human Rights Watch said was a chlorine gas attack in December. Human Rights Watch

Russia, which helped pressure Mr. Assad's government to sign the Chemical Weapons Convention in 2013, has denounced any use of such weapons and voted with the United States and other United Nations Security Council members to ensure accountability if they were used in Syria.

Mr. Solvang exhorted the Security Council not to "let Syrian authorities or anyone else who has used chemical weapons get away without consequences."

The Human Rights Watch report was one of two detailed studies released Monday that severely criticize how the Syrian government recaptured Aleppo and the third in less than a week suggesting that Mr. Assad's actions toward adversaries constitute war crimes.

The Atlantic Council, a policy research group based in Washington, said in an analysis titled "Breaking Aleppo" that Syrian forces and their Russian allies had made heavy use of indiscriminate explosives, including cluster munitions, that targeted civilian structures, including hospitals. That report also asserted that the Syrians had used chlorine bombs.

The Russian military, which has been aiding Mr. Assad with airstrikes since September 2015 and has helped his side regain momentum in the war, has denied bombing hospitals or other civilian targets.

Last week, Amnesty International published a study asserting that up to 13,000 people incarcerated in Syria's Saydnaya Prison, most of them civilians suspected of opposition to Mr. Assad, had been secretly executed in mass hangings without trial between 2011 and 2015. Mr. Assad suggested that the Amnesty International study had been concocted and was "fake news."

The studies have come as President Trump is seeking an improved relationship with President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia, which could include some military coordination in the Syrian conflict, now six years old. But such a course by Mr. Trump would risk conferring greater legitimacy on Mr. Assad, an outcome that worries his opponents and many rights advocates.



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.



As Islamic State loses territory, it seeks to survive online

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=729171040>

Al-Qaeda's main affiliate in Iraq avoided extinction at the hands of U.S. and Iraqi forces a decade ago by backing away from military engagements and moving the remnants of its network underground until its reemergence as the Islamic State.

That successor organization, now confronting its own eventual fall, is devising a modified survival strategy that may involve surrendering control of its "caliphate" in Iraq and Syria but seeks to preserve a virtual version of it online.

That plan is described in a new report on the Islamic State's evolving media strategy as its physical territory shrinks. The study, published by King's College London, warns that it is premature to imagine a "post-Islamic State world at this time."

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"The organization has used propaganda to cultivate digital strategic depth," the study concludes, using a term that traditionally applies to a mountainous region or other terrain that a nation can retreat to and defend. "Due to this effort, the caliphate idea will exist long beyond its proto-state."

As part of this strategy, the Islamic State's media wing has already begun to repurpose videos, images and messages from its massive collection for new propaganda releases that depict the Islamist state it sought to establish as an idyllic realm destined to be restored.

"If compelled to, the group's true believers will simply retreat into the virtual world, where they will use the vast archive of propaganda assembled by the group over these past few years to keep themselves buoyant with nostalgia," the report said.

The plan reveals a level of desperation for a terrorist organization that has seen its

territory shrink rapidly over the past year. But it also serves as the latest example of the group's innovative approach to using the Internet and social media — first to draw recruits to the fight in Iraq and Syria and now to preserve the loyalties of its dispersed followers.

[They're young and lonely. The Islamic State thinks they'll make perfect terrorists.]

The King's Collegereport draws many of its conclusions from an Islamic State propaganda guidebook that surfaced online last year. Called "Media Operative, You Are a Mujahid, Too," the booklet equates propaganda teams with armed operatives in their importance to the terrorist group and provides guidance on how to - develop messages that exploit mainstream media coverage and advance the organization's ideology.

"Media weapons [can] actually be more potent than atomic bombs," one passage proclaims, according to the King's College report.

A video released by the Islamic State this month appears to be

drawn from the organization's evolving playbook. Titled "Building Blocks," the video mixes typical footage of fighters with scenes of workers paving streets, firetrucks leaving stations and shoppers perusing stocked shelves.

Charlie Winter, a senior research fellow at the International Center for the Study of Radicalization at King's College and the author of the new report, described the video as a "good example of the kind of pre-emptive nostalgia" that the Islamic State is seeking to elicit, one that "seems geared toward offering evidence of the good old days, of the caliphate that once was, even before it's lost."

Beyond losing territory under military pressure from the United States, Turkey, Russia, Syria and Iraq, the Islamic State has seen the flow of foreign fighters into its ranks plummet — from as many as 2,000 a month two years ago to as few as 50, according to recent assessments.

The group began altering its propaganda themes last year to prepare followers for the collapse of the caliphate, depicting its mounting

battlefield losses as noble and inevitable struggles, in contrast to the triumphant messages that had previously dominated its output.

The emerging media strategy faces significant challenges. The Islamic State's audience online has shrunk, though it is unclear by how much, in part because social media companies, including Facebook and Twitter, have more aggressively removed Islamic State supporters and their content.

Still, experts said the plan to maintain its

online following could enable the Islamic State to reemerge much the way its predecessor did when Syria fell into civil war.

The group is "trying to hold onto a much more ambitious version of itself than it did a decade ago," said Alberto Fernandez, a former senior U.S. State Department official and expert on Islamic State media. The organization is moving into "kind of a holding pattern," he said. "The question is, holding pattern for what and for where and for when?"

The Islamic State has sought to compensate for territorial setbacks by seeking to carry out terrorist plots in Europe and the United States as a way to demonstrate its relevance as a global force.

In Iraq and Syria, the network has already shifted toward more traditional insurgency tactics. It claimed credit for the recent bombing of a restaurant in Mosul and is likely to continue to mount such operations to destabilize territory the group has been forced to surrender — and also to provide

footage for new propaganda releases.

"Broadly speaking, we'll see the Islamic State reverting to type, looking more like a run of the mill terror group rather than a proto-state," Winter said. "They'll put a huge amount of effort into producing content, but also recirculating content. Their claims about just how utopian it was will become even more exaggerated."

**The
Washington
Post**

Turkey's Erdogan wants to establish a safe zone in the ISIS capital Raqqa

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BEIRUT — Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan took his proposal for a Turkish-backed assault against the Islamic State's self-proclaimed capital of Raqqa to the Sunni Arab states of the Persian Gulf on Monday, telling an audience in Bahrain that he wants to create a "safe zone" in that part of Syria.

Speaking on the first stop of a three-nation gulf tour, Erdogan said the safe zone would encompass 3,475 square miles and include the Syrian town of Manbij, which was taken from the Islamic State in August by Syrian Kurds working closely with the U.S. military.

The Turkish offer to participate in the Raqqa battle is not new, but it has been revived amid reports that President Trump has ordered an overhaul of the Obama administration's plan to arm the

Syrian Kurds to assault Raqqa. Turkey vehemently opposes the Pentagon's close military relationship with the Syrian Kurds, which became a major source of tension between Turkey and Washington during President Barack Obama's last year in office. The Syrian Kurdish militia, the People's Protection Units (YPG), has ties to Turkey's own Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which is designated as a terrorist organization by Washington and Ankara and is waging an insurgency in Turkey to secure autonomy for Kurds.

Today's WorldView

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Trump's promise to create a "safe zone" in Syria — long rejected by

the Obama administration — also appears to have encouraged Erdogan to resurrect an idea that had lapsed since the defeat of the Syrian rebels in Aleppo late last year. Originally promoted by the Syrian opposition, with Turkish support, the concept envisaged enforcing a no-fly zone to prevent the Syrian government from carrying out airstrikes against civilians.

How this latest proposal would work wasn't clear, but Erdogan said the zone would be used to give sanctuary to Arab and Turkmen Syrians and would be "terrorist-free" — an apparent reference to the YPG Kurds as well as the Islamic State.

Erdogan said Turkey envisions participating in the Raqqa offensive as part of the U.S.-led coalition, but he also has made it clear on a number of occasions that he expects Trump to sever

Washington's connections to the YPG.

There has been no indication from Washington that the United States intends to abandon its alliance with the Kurds, who have emerged as the Pentagon's most effective military partner in Syria. The Kurds have been making steady progress with a three-month-old offensive to isolate and encircle Raqqa and are within a few miles of the city.

Meanwhile, Turkish troops and their Arab Syrian rebel allies have been bogged down for the past two months in a fierce battle to capture the Islamic State-held town of Al-Bab, more than 100 miles away. Turkey intervened in Syria in August to help Syrian rebels push the Islamic State out of areas bordering Turkey and also to drive a wedge between two expanding areas of Kurdish control.

**THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL**

Hamas Puts Militant Yahya Sinwar in Charge of Gaza

Rory Jones in Tel Aviv and Abu Bakr Bashir in Gaza City

Updated Feb. 13, 2017 12:45 p.m. ET

Hamas has elected a former militant commander as its political leader in the Gaza Strip, an official for the Islamist movement said Monday, indicating the growing influence of the group's armed wing in the Palestinian enclave.

Hamas members in Gaza chose Yahya Sinwar, 55, who was arrested by Israel in 1988 for alleged terrorist activity, to head its political bureau, the official said, as the Islamist movement runs elections to revamp its leadership.

Mr. Sinwar was previously a senior member of Hamas's political leadership in Gaza and was one of the founders of a forerunner to the

group's current military arm, the Izz al-Din al-Qassam brigades.

Israeli security officials consider him one of the most hawkish members of Hamas. After his arrest, he was convicted of killing Israeli soldiers and sentenced to four life sentences. He was released as part of a prisoner exchange in 2011. The U.S. State Department added him in 2015 to a list of designated terrorists.

Mr. Sinwar will replace Ismail Haniyeh, a former prime minister of the Palestinian Authority. He has been a senior leader of Hamas in Gaza since it took control of the enclave after a short conflict with the Fatah faction in 2007.

Since then, Israel has fought three wars with Hamas in Gaza. In the last round of fighting in 2014, some 2,000 Palestinian civilians and militants and 70 Israeli soldiers and

civilians were killed, according to the United Nations.

Palestinians widely expect Mr. Haniyeh to contest the leadership of Hamas in its entirety, comprising four chapters: in Gaza, the West Bank, Israeli prisons and areas outside Palestinian territories.

The current leader of Hamas, Khaled Meshaal, is based in the Qatari capital Doha and expected to step down imminently. Hamas members elect officials every four years based on consensus in a secretive process.

The U.S. and Israel consider Hamas a terrorist group.

The appointment of Mr. Sinwar indicates that Hamas members are frustrated with the economic direction of the Palestinian enclave under the current leadership, said Ibrahim Abrash, a political science

lecturer at Al-Azhar University in Gaza.

"The political wing lost the elections because they failed in running Gaza on the economic and social levels," he said.

Amid tight Israeli restrictions on goods moving in and out of Gaza, the enclave's economy is in a dire situation. Some 11,000 homes were destroyed in the 2014 war, according to the Palestinian Authority. Reconstruction since then has been slow and more than half of the nearly 2 million Gazans receive some kind of humanitarian assistance from the U.N. and other aid agencies.

Tensions also have increased recently between Hamas and Israel. Israeli warplanes hit Hamas targets in the Gaza Strip multiple times in recent weeks after rockets were

fired from the enclave on Jewish communities near the border.

Israeli security officials estimate Hamas isn't looking to start another war with Israel in the near term, but

they concede that tit-for-tat exchanges could escalate into a wider conflict.

Write to Rory Jones at rory.jones@wsj.com

**The
New York
Times**

Eric Schmitt

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration is considering what to do about a Qaeda suspect being held in Yemen, a decision that presents an early test of President Trump's campaign pledge to send terrorism suspects to the military prison at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

The suspect, known as Abu Khaybar, was captured last fall in Yemen and is being held there by another country, according to four current and former senior administration officials. The circumstances of his detention are not clear, but he is wanted on terrorism charges in New York.

Mr. Khaybar, who is about 40, presents an important legal and policy test for Mr. Trump, who said the Obama administration was too soft on terrorists and promised to fill the prison in Cuba with "bad dudes."

Mr. Khaybar's suspected affiliation with Al Qaeda gives the United States clear authority to hold him in the military prison. Attorney General Jeff Sessions has repeatedly said that terrorists should not be prosecuted in civilian courts and, as recently as last month at his confirmation hearing, said the prison at Guantánamo Bay should be kept open.

The case could also prompt a decision as the Trump administration is considering an executive order that would make it clear that newly captured terrorism suspects would be sent to Guantánamo Bay. The United States has not sent a prisoner there since 2008.

But trying to send Mr. Khaybar to Guantánamo Bay would put the administration at odds with career Justice Department prosecutors and F.B.I. agents, who say the criminal courts have proved more adept than military commissions at handling terrorism cases.

**The
New York
Times**

SYDNEY, Australia — An Islamic State fighter who posted a photo of a beheaded Syrian soldier online has become the first dual national to be stripped of his Australian

Case of Captive in Yemen Could Test Trump's Guantánamo Pledge

Adam Goldman,
Matt Apuzzo and

The military tribunal system has been troubled by setbacks. A decade and a half after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, none of the men charged in that plot have even gone to trial.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions has repeatedly said that terrorism suspects should not be prosecuted in civilian courts. He favors keeping the prison at Guantánamo Bay open. *Al Drago/The New York Times*

"I think it would be extremely demoralizing to the efforts of prosecutors and law enforcement dedicated to eradicating terrorism around the world," said Glen A. Kopp, a former federal prosecutor in Manhattan.

The F.B.I. and the Justice Department declined to comment. Justice Department prosecutors have expressed confidence in internal discussions that they can win a criminal trial against Mr. Khaybar, according to one former senior Obama administration official who helped review the case.

Mr. Khaybar is one of many people the United States is trying to track, capture and prosecute. Two American security officials said Mr. Khaybar's case had come to a head first, with others expected to follow.

It is not clear whether Mr. Sessions has been briefed on the case since taking office last week. Under the system in place for the last several years, President Barack Obama decided whether to bring terrorism suspects to the United States after hearing from senior officials across the government. It is unknown whether the Trump administration will follow the same process.

It is also unclear how far Mr. Trump is willing to push his international counterterrorism allies. The forces of allies such as Yemen, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, among others, play a crucial role in the military campaign against Al Qaeda's branch in Yemen.

Many American partner nations are likely to resist being seen as helping to send a prisoner to Guantánamo Bay. Some allies, including in Europe, provide crucial intelligence to the United States and have sought assurances that their collaboration will not result in prisoners' being sent to Guantánamo.

The naval prison and the documented abuses that occurred there in the early years of the Bush administration have led to international condemnation and are recruiting symbols for terrorist groups.

Little is publicly known about Mr. Khaybar, who is believed to be Sudanese. Former intelligence officials say he has longstanding ties to Al Qaeda and was affiliated with the terrorist organization when he lived in Sudan. At some point, he made his way to Somalia and then Yemen around 2015, officials said.

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After his capture, Mr. Khaybar's identity was not immediately established. But eventually intelligence officials determined his name, and F.B.I. agents pushed to prosecute him in New York. Some officials said they hoped to transfer him before the end of the Obama administration, but the complexity of the case and the review process made it impossible.

Along with Mr. Trump, the case will be a test for Mr. Sessions, who has inherited a Justice Department that has become accustomed to winning important cases against foreign terrorists in federal court.

The F.B.I. has been working alongside commandos from the military's Joint Special Operations Command to collect evidence, a partnership that prosecutors say gives the United States options.

And prosecutors have won cooperation from admitted terrorists, such as Ahmed Abdulkadir Warsame, and that information has then been used to prosecute others and launch drone strikes.

"Given the varied nature of the threats we face today, our military needs every reliable tool we can provide them," said Brendan R. McGuire, the former chief of the terrorism unit at the United States attorney's office in Manhattan and now a partner at WilmerHale.

Under the Obama administration, the Justice Department successfully prosecuted Osama bin Laden's son-in-law and a Pakistani-born Qaeda member who planned to carry out a bombing in Manchester, England. In 2014, a Russian jihadist fighting for the Taliban was sentenced to life in prison in the first example of a foreign combatant captured on the battlefield in Afghanistan being prosecuted in federal court.

As a senator, Mr. Sessions criticized that strategy because it gave terrorism suspects the right to lawyers, the right to remain silent and the right to a speedy trial. All of those make it harder for interrogators to extract intelligence, he said.

But Mr. Sessions has some wiggle room in the Khaybar case. He has said that foreign terrorists should be treated as prisoners of war "at least initially," and then a decision could be made later "as to whether to move them in federal court." Mr. Khaybar has been held for months in Yemen, where he is most likely subject to questioning by the local authorities. The extent of such questioning is unclear.

A third option, besides Guantánamo or criminal court, would be to not seek his transfer and allow another government to handle his case. That would be an unusual move for a case involving charges in American courts.

ISIS Fighter's Australian Citizenship Is Revoked Under Antiterror Laws

Jacqueline
Williams

citizenship under antiterrorism laws, according to local news reports.

A spokeswoman for the Australian Immigration Department said in an interview that someone had been stripped of citizenship under antiterrorism laws but declined to

divulge the person's name. But a leading newspaper, *The Australian*, identified the person as Khaled Sharrouf, 35, reporting that a secret panel of intelligence officials, police officers and lawyers had revoked his Australian citizenship this year.

"If there was a poster boy for stripping citizenship, it's Khaled Sharrouf," said Rodger Shanahan, a research fellow at the Lowy Institute for International Policy in Sydney.

Australia, a longtime ally of the United States in its fight against

Islamic militants in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, is on alert for potential attacks by Islamic extremists, including fighters returning from conflict zones. About 100 Australians are believed to be fighting or engaged with terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq, according to the Attorney-General's Department. Mr. Sharrouf is believed to still be in Islamic State territory.

Under a law passed in 2015, the government can strip the Australian citizenship from people who hold a second nationality if they are found to have been members of a terrorist group or engaged in terrorism-related activity. The action against Mr. Sharrouf represents the first use of the powers in that measure, the Australian Citizenship Amendment Bill.

Mark Dreyfus, the shadow attorney general from the opposition Labor Party, said the law was written to make sure the right balance was struck between security and citizens' rights.

Mark Dreyfus, Australia's shadow attorney general from the opposition Labor Party, said the antiterrorism citizenship law sought to strike the right balance between security and citizens' rights. Joel Carrett/European Pressphoto Agency

"We trust this power will continue to be used in sparing and prudent fashion," Mr. Dreyfus said in a statement.

Mr. Sharrouf, who was born to Lebanese parents in Australia and holds Lebanese citizenship, served time in prison in Australia for his involvement in a foiled terrorist plot and has publicly declared himself a

member of the Islamic State. He gained notoriety in 2014 after he posted a photograph on social media of his son, then 7, holding up the severed head of a Syrian soldier.

The photograph shocked Australians and appalled the former United States secretary of state, John Kerry, who was visiting Australia at the time and called the image "one of the most disturbing, stomach turning, grotesque photographs ever displayed."

Mr. Sharrouf was said to have had a troubled childhood growing up in southwest Sydney. He had been treated for schizophrenia and was suspected of dealing drugs before being radicalized. He traveled to Syria in 2013 and was followed by his wife, an Australian who is believed to have since died, and

their five children, all of whom are Australian citizens.

The fate of the children, none of whom are believed to be older than 15, could be a thorny issue, experts said.

"I don't think anybody has problems with having Khaled Sharrouf's citizenship stripped, but there's a bit of a problem given there's five children in Syria who are Australian citizens whose mother is dead, and Sharrouf's now a Lebanese citizen," said Dr. Shanahan of the Lowy Institute. He added that the children's maternal grandmother had attempted to bring them back to Australia.

Mr. Sharrouf must now rely on his Lebanese citizenship should he wish to leave the conflict zone.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Ledeen : To Break the Moscow-Tehran Alliance, Target Iran's Regime

Michael Ledeen

Feb. 13, 2017 7:09 p.m. ET

Want a deal with Vladimir Putin in the Middle East? Then start with the real questions: Are the Russians prepared to abandon Iran and Bashar Assad's Syria? If so, what would it take to pull it off?

Start by reminding yourself that Russia entered the Syrian battlefield upon Iranian request. The Iranians were losing the fight on behalf of Mr. Assad's regime, and a significant number of Iranian fighters were killed in Syria (the Islamic Republic usually recruits Arab and Afghan proxies to fight for it).

Ergo, an American deal with Russia that pulls the plug on Mr. Putin's alliance with Mr. Assad and Ayatollah Ali Khamenei threatens the Iranians. Without Russian bombers and special forces, Iran would face defeat, as would Mr. Assad. Without Syria, Hezbollah—an integral part of the Tehran regime—would at least be seriously threatened, and could function no longer, along with the military pipeline from Tehran to the Mediterranean.

Does President Trump want to help the Iranians? It is unlikely. Mr.

Trump's top national-security appointees—Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, National Security Adviser Michael Flynn, CIA Director Mike Pompeo and Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly—are all very tough on Iran, and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson concurs. The odds are that the president wants a deal with the Russians that will focus on Islamic State.

If Mr. Assad falls, and Iran is severely weakened, that is good for the U.S. but not very good for Russia. The Russian-Iranian embrace is very tight. Virtually the entire Iranian nuclear program—whatever isn't North Korean—is Russian, from the reactors to the air-defense systems that protect them. The Iranians have committed to purchasing billions of dollars worth of weaponry, including advanced Russian torpedoes to attack the U.S. Navy in the Persian Gulf.

Moreover, there is a powerful Russian and Iranian interest in increasing oil prices, and defeat of Iran in Syria and Iraq might drive petroleum prices down. Again, good for the U.S., but bad for Mr. Putin.

On the other hand, an Islamist republic next door to Russia with a strong military and nuclear capabilities can't make Mr. Putin

very happy. He knows that Iran produces a significant number of radical Islamic terrorists, both Sunni and Shiite. He also knows that the Iranians smuggled Qurans into the Soviet Union and supported separatist Muslim movements in the 'stans and Chechnya. Mr. Putin would be happier with a nonjihadist Iran that didn't aspire to become a nuclear power.

But Mr. Putin isn't likely to join the U.S. in changing the nature of the Tehran regime, because a non-Islamist Iran with warm U.S. relations wouldn't be in Moscow's interest either. At the moment, Mr. Putin is arguably the most influential external force in the Middle East, and it is doubtful he wants to compete with Mr. Trump for that role. Thus, he'll try to cope with his Iran problems on his own.

Given these conflicting geopolitical interests, is there a way for the Russians and the Americans to collaborate in the Middle East? What if the U.S. offered Mr. Putin a regional condominium? This would allow the two countries to collaborate in Iran and Syria, strengthening the American position and solidifying Russia's by debilitating the Islamist threat and gaining some degree of control over the vast oil and gas supplies. The

problem is that the U.S. isn't in a position to make that offer because it lacks the credibility to propose redrawing the Middle Eastern geopolitical map.

What, then, is the best American strategy? Iran continues its campaign against the U.S., and it won't end so long as the regime endures. Therefore American policy must rely on dismantling the Khamenei regime as peacefully as possible, perhaps from the inside out.

Antiregime demonstrations erupt in Iran all the time, and most experts believe the vast majority of Iranians detest Mr. Khamenei and his henchmen. With U.S. support, these millions of Iranians could topple the Islamic Republic and establish a secular government resembling those in the West.

With the Islamic Republic gone, the Trump administration would be in a much stronger position to strike a deal with Mr. Putin. The road to Moscow runs through Tehran.

Mr. Ledeen is the coauthor, with Michael Flynn, of "Field of Flight" (St. Martin's Press, 2016) and a scholar at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies.

The New York Times

Editorial : A New Beginning for Israel and the United States

The Editorial Board

Justin Renteria

It's a fair bet that the first meeting on Wednesday between President Trump and Prime Minister Benjamin

Netanyahu of Israel will feature big smiles and reassuring words. Both men are eager to demonstrate that the hostility that poisoned Mr. Netanyahu's relations with President Barack Obama is a thing of the past.

But personal chemistry can go only so far. The issues facing the United States and Israel, which include addressing the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians and restraining Iran's assertiveness in the region, are as tough to resolve as they are consequential. If Mr.

Trump chooses to stand up for America's national interest and not just cater to the hard-line views of Mr. Netanyahu's Likud government, there are likely to be rough patches ahead.

On the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Mr. Trump has set himself a high bar. Despite the failures of his predecessors, he has announced he intends to pursue a peace agreement "for humanity's sake," calling it the "ultimate deal." Mr. Trump reportedly will appoint his son-in-law, Jared Kushner, as his special envoy. Naming a family member to this sensitive role would be a powerful signal, since there could be no doubt that Mr. Kushner speaks for the president. But it would also mean the Mr. Trump could not distance himself if the initiative collapsed. And Mr. Trump, who is learning (we hope!) diplomacy on the job, would be taking a big risk relying on someone who also has no experience in the arcane and treacherous world of Middle East peacemaking.

What kind of peace the president envisions is unclear. Since the 1993 Oslo peace accords, the United States has been committed to a

two-state solution. But the Palestinian leadership is weak and divided, and, for years, Mr. Netanyahu has aggressively built homes for Israeli settlers on land in the West Bank and East Jerusalem where Palestinians hope to have their state. Now, Mr. Netanyahu is under increasing pressure from far-right members of his fractious governing coalition to officially abandon the goal of two states, the only just solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As Mr. Netanyahu left Israel for Washington on Monday, he refused to tell reporters if he still backed a two-state solution.

Also on Monday, The Jerusalem Post reported that Trump administration officials had said Mr. Trump supported the goal of two states; if that's true, he needs to say so himself. His administration also has to show substantially more respect for the Palestinians, something it did not do when it blocked the appointment of Salam

Fayyad, an esteemed former Palestinian prime minister, as United Nations envoy to Libya.

Mr. Trump is aiming to get Sunni Arab countries, like Saudi Arabia and Egypt, to prod the Israelis and Palestinians to forge an agreement, rather than having Israelis and Palestinians first directly negotiate a deal that would then lead to peace with the broader Arab world, according to The Times. Other presidents also tried this "outside in" approach. But this moment seems riper for it. The Arabs have found common interest with Israel because of a shared antipathy toward Iran. One danger of this Arab-focused approach, which Mr. Netanyahu has long favored, is that Palestinians could find themselves confronted with a precooked deal they consider unjust.

Although Mr. Trump signaled during the campaign that he would be Israel's unquestioning defender, his recent statements have moved from

harsh rhetoric to more nuanced positions, at the urging of Arab leaders. For instance, after insisting that on becoming president he would immediately relocate the United States Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, Mr. Trump has hesitated, at least temporarily. Similarly, while initially voicing unquestioned support for Israeli settlement building, the administration recently said that expanding settlements "beyond their current borders may not be helpful" in achieving peace.

Mr. Trump is showing signs, in other words, of glimpsing the complexity of the task before him. This is not remotely like any other real estate deal he has ever attempted. We hope he can confound the skeptics, including ourselves, and pull it off.

Los Angeles Times

Goldberg : Don't call the Israeli-Palestinian dispute the 'Middle East conflict'

Jonah Goldberg

I heard a TV news anchor say over the weekend that when Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu comes to Washington this week he will discuss a path to resolving the "Middle East Conflict" with the new American president.

That reminded me: I recently received a review copy of "The Israel-Arab Reader: A Documentary History of the Middle East Conflict." It looked like a fine book, but that subtitle vexed me. I literally pulled it out of the envelope as the news on TV described some horrible slaughter in Syria. But the Syrian Civil War isn't called the "Middle East conflict."

The term has always been a misnomer, making it sound like were it not for the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, the Middle East would be all peace and harmony. The Economist once ran "A Chronology of the Middle East Conflict" that was all about Israel and Palestine. It began in 1917 with the Balfour Declaration and ended with the election — apparently for life — of Mahmoud Abbas to the presidency of the Palestinian Authority in 2005. During that

time there were dozens of conflicts in the region — cross-border wars, civil wars, rebellions, revolutions, massacres, etc. — that had nothing to do with Israel.

Islamic State is still in Syria, Libya and Iraq. The president of Syria, Bashar Assad, is finishing off the rebellion against his regime with the help of the Russians and Iranians. Amnesty International released a report over the weekend accusing the Assad regime of executing some 13,000 people in a single prison. Approximately 4.8 million civilians have fled Syria and an estimated 400,000 have been killed. The Syrian refugee crisis in Jordan and Lebanon is straining those relatively moderate states beyond their capacities.

The latest news in the Iran-Saudi proxy war in Yemen: The Saudis say Iran supplied the missiles Houthi rebels have been firing deep into Saudi territory.

Turkey is rapidly transforming itself into an authoritarian state, and Egypt isn't that far behind. The Kurds in Turkey, Syria, Iraq and elsewhere always seem moments away from asserting their independence. And then of course

there's Al Qaeda and all the other terrorist groups — that hate Israel to be sure — but don't really focus on it.

The Middle East has always had much bigger problems and, often, much bigger conflicts than those having to do with "the Zionist entity." Indeed, it is precisely because of those problems and conflicts that rulers in the region chose to magnify the Israel-Palestinian conflict into the Middle East conflict in the first place. Demonizing the Jews is always a useful distraction from domestic dysfunction and oppression.

During the campaign, Donald Trump vowed to be the "most pro-Israel president ever." He followed the great American tradition of presidential candidates vowing to move our embassy to Jerusalem and then, upon taking office, discovering that more study was required.

President Trump has said he'd love to make the greatest of all real-estate deals and settle the conflict once and for all. This, too, is an American presidential tradition.

Republican State Department veteran Elliot Abrams (recently

denied a job as the number two guy at the State Department because he had criticized Trump during the campaign), writes in the current Weekly Standard that the Trump administration may be going for an "outside-in" strategy rather than an "inside-out" one: "Instead of using an Israeli-Palestinian deal to improve Israel's relations with the Arab states, use Israel's relations with the Arab states to advance an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal," he writes.

One reason to follow this approach, Abrams notes, is that the Palestinians don't have much to offer Israel. But good relations (which have been improving) with her Arab neighbors and a more united front against terrorism and Iran is perhaps the core of Israel's national interest.

If President Trump is determined to cut a deal, this sounds like the smartest way to go. If he's determined to be Israel's best friend, he might aim his sights a little lower and deflate the idea that the Israel-Palestine issue is the key to resolving the Middle East's many conflicts.

The New York Times

Simon and Miller : Can This 'Special Relationship' Be Saved?

Steven Simon and Aaron David Miller

During the months after President Trump's election, Israel and many of its supporters in the United

States cheered as he promised a new, warmer relationship, such as a more lenient approach to settlements in the West Bank and

moving the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

But as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel travels to Washington for the leaders' first

official meeting on Wednesday, things have grown cloudier: Sounding like his predecessors, Mr. Trump has said that settlements "don't help" the peace process, and

he has cast doubt on his campaign commitment to move the embassy.

The meaning of Mr. Trump's semi-pivot is unclear. But even if the American-Israeli relationship dramatically improves, there are deeper trends at work that threaten its unique qualities.

Together we have over 50 years of experience working on and watching the American-Israeli relationship, and what concerns us most is the fraying of shared values that set it apart from other bilateral bonds. Without them, interests alone won't be enough to maintain its special character. If the administration isn't careful, it will hasten the unraveling.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel, who will meet with President Trump in Washington on Wednesday. Pool photo by Ronen Zvulun

America's relationship with Israel has always rested on two pillars: an affinity of values and a shared strategic interest. Those values have strong roots, secured by a well-organized American Jewish community: Israel, despite its occupation of the West Bank, remains the sole robust democracy in the region; Americans feel a bond with the holy land of the Bible; and the United States supported the

creation of a Jewish state after the Nazi genocide.

The strategic pillar is much more modest. It was rooted in the Cold War, when Israel was a counterweight to Soviet and Arab nationalist designs in the region and provided the United States with a safe haven for its Mediterranean fleet in return for access to American weapons.

And, truth be told, the two countries are an awkward strategic fit. America is Israel's ultimate security guarantor, but Israel can't come close to reciprocating. Israelis have their hands full at home, and the Israeli military would not be welcome in places America might be at war.

In the past, the weakening of the strategic pillar has been made up for by the strength of the values pillar. But Mr. Trump inherits a relationship with Israel at a critical juncture, in which both pillars are weakening at the same time.

Even if Mr. Trump dismantles the Iran nuclear deal, as he vowed to do during the campaign, Israel and the United States will most likely continue to argue about the best way to deal with Tehran. Whatever rhetoric comes out of the White House, Washington and Jerusalem are sitting in very different places

with very different perceptions of the threat that Iran will build a nuclear weapon. And Israel has been an afterthought in America's engagement in Iraq and, now, Syria, where Israel worries more about Iran and Russia than Mr. Trump does.

But the real concern is over values. The Israeli government and the powerful settler movement are poised to exploit the administration's perceived pro-Netanyahu stance by expanding settlements and neighborhoods in the West Bank and Jerusalem. The Palestinian national movement will no doubt respond with terror and incitement to violence, undermining its own legitimate case. Given the asymmetry of power, Israel's response will probably be harsher and increasingly seen as anti-democratic, or worse.

Perhaps Mr. Trump will deliver on his promise to broker a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But more likely — either through inattention or acquiescence, or the sheer difficulty of diplomacy — the administration will adopt a laissez-faire approach to Israeli actions.

What will things look like in four to eight years? American support for an increasingly right-wing Israeli policy will mean that Israel will have built more settlements; diplomacy

aimed at a two-state solution will be stillborn or abandoned; and violence in the West Bank will require Israel to use force to restore order. Politics in Israel will continue to drift right amid a deepening conviction that it has no Palestinian partner and against the backdrop of an increasingly dangerous region.

If these things come to pass, the erosion of shared values will quicken. The process is already underway because of a number of trends: the drop in religious affiliation in the United States, particularly among Jews; indifference to Israel among many voters, including key Democratic constituencies; the likely leftward turn of the Bernie Sanders generation; and perceptions of an increasingly unpopular alliance between Israel and the Trump administration. Taken together, they point to the very real possibility of growing distance between Washington and Jerusalem.

The American-Israeli partnership will not collapse. Congressional politics, a volatile Arab world and sheer inertia will preserve it in some form. But the relationship would become a pale version of what it once was and what it could be. And that would be a real tragedy for both nations indeed.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Stephens : Mideast Rules For Jared Kushner

Bret Stephens

Feb. 13, 2017

7:14 p.m. ET

Jared Kushner will get his first real taste of Mideast diplomacy this week, when his father-in-law receives Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the White House. Since the 36-year-old former newspaper publisher has been widely touted as the administration's point man on Israeli-Arab issues, this week's column humbly offers four rules Mr. Kushner ought to observe in the months and years ahead.

(1) *The Clifford Rule.* After stepping down as Lyndon Johnson's defense secretary in 1969, the late Clark Clifford settled into the life of a Washington superlawyer—the sort of man who, for a price, could open all the right doors for his clients and fix some of their worst problems.

Approached by a man with one such problem, Clifford considered the matter, then advised: “Do nothing.”

Two days later, the man got a bill from Clifford for \$10,000. Infuriated that such seemingly simple advice

would cost so whopping a sum, he marched into Clifford's office to remonstrate.

Clifford replied: “Do nothing.” He then sent the man a bill for an additional \$10,000.

The moral of this (perhaps apocryphal) story is that “do nothing” is often the best advice—and that failing to heed it can cost you dearly.

Had John Kerry adopted the Clifford Rule, he might have been spared his fruitless yearlong foray into Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, which led to the 2014 Gaza War. Had Condoleezza Rice adopted it, she might not have advocated Palestinian elections that led to victory for Hamas in 2006. Had Bill Clinton taken it, he might have been spared the diplomatic humiliation of being spurned by Yasser Arafat at Camp David in 2000.

(2) *The Kissinger Rule.* If “do nothing” is generally good advice, what's Mr. Kushner supposed to do?

Henry Kissinger once observed that “when enough bureaucratic prestige has been invested in a policy, it is

easier to see it fail than to abandon it.” So it is with the formulas that govern official U.S. thinking toward the Arab-Israeli conflict: “land for peace” and the “two-state solution.” The State Department has been rolling those boulders up the hill for 50 years, and still it thinks one last push will do the trick.

The Kissinger Rule disposes with the futility. It says that if you can't solve a small problem, fix the larger one that encompasses it. So it was with Taiwan and the “One China” policy, or with Egypt and its post-1973 realignment with the U.S.

For Mr. Kushner, that means the goal of diplomacy isn't to “solve” the Palestinian problem. It's to anesthetize it through a studied combination of economic help and diplomatic neglect. The real prize lies in further cultivating Jerusalem's ties to Cairo, Riyadh, Amman and Abu Dhabi, as part of an Alliance of Moderates and Modernizers that can defeat Sunni and Shiite radicals from Raqqa to Tehran. The goal should be to make Palestinian leaders realize over time that they are the region's atavism, not its future.

(3) *The Bush Rule.* In 2004, George W. Bush and then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon exchanged letters in which the president acknowledged that the world had changed since 1967.

“In light of new realities on the ground, including already existing major Israeli populations centers,” Mr. Bush wrote, “it is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final status negotiations will be a full and complete return to the armistice lines of 1949.”

The point of the Bush Rule is to dispose with the flimflam that the Mideast's contrived borders are sacred. And the best place Mr. Kushner could put the Bush Rule to use is to offer U.S. recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights, captured in 1967 from Syria.

The benefits: Nobody there, including 20,000 Druze, wants to be ruled by Damascus. U.S. recognition would put the Assad regime and its Iranian and Russian backers on notice that there's a price for barbaric behavior. And it gives the administration an opportunity to demonstrate its pro-Israel bona fides while exerting a

restraining influence on settlement building in the West Bank.

(4) *The Shultz Rule.* Ronald Reagan's secretary of state held to a clear principle when it came to negotiating with tough adversaries: Establish a reasonable position, announce your bottom line, stick to it. No haggling. It proved effective in

dealing with Soviet arms negotiators.

The overworked metaphor for Mideast diplomacy is the bazaar. The secret to not losing one's shirt is not to enter the bazaar in the first place.

The U.S. cannot solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; only Palestinians can. The U.S. does have an interest in strengthening ties between its allies, both for their own sake and to counter their common enemies. If the Palestinians want to be a part of the solution, so much the better. If they

want to continue to be a part of the problem, they can live with the consequences.

The principles are straightforward. The courage to stick to them will be the test of Mr. Kushner's diplomatic mettle.

Write bstephens@wsj.com.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

7:13 p.m. ET

Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro remains beleaguered, his popularity demolished by rampant inflation, food shortages and lawlessness. The country can't seem to shake the legacy of the late President Hugo Chávez, who transformed over his 14 years of rule from a reckless populist into a brutal authoritarian.

Many Americans first heard from the eccentric *caudillo* in 2006, when he insulted President George W. Bush at the United Nations General Assembly. "Yesterday the devil came here," Chávez said, making the sign of the cross. "Right here. And it smells of sulfur still today." His countrymen could hardly have been surprised. This dramatic and ridiculous behavior was a constant presence on Venezuela's airwaves. Chávez was in some sense the first reality-TV world leader.

O'Neal : The Reality-TV President

Adam O'Neal

Feb. 13, 2017

Not long after taking power in 1999, Chávez premiered "Aló Presidente" ("Hello President"). The program—part talk show, part propaganda broadcast—aired Sundays at 11 a.m. and could run for eight hours. He used it to promote his agenda, humiliate Western journalists and whip up anticapitalist sentiment. No one knew what Chávez might do next.

During a 2008 crisis with Colombia, the president, a former lieutenant colonel, didn't hesitate to command his armed forces on air. "Mr. Defense Minister, move 10 battalions to the border with Colombia for me immediately," Chávez said during the broadcast. "Tank battalions. Deploy the air force." Tempers cooled, but for a moment the first reality-TV war appeared imminent.

During the 351st episode of "Aló Presidente"—as described in "Comandante," Rory Carroll's biography of Chávez—the leader took a stroll. Eyeing a building full of

jewelry stores, Chávez shouted, "Expropriate it! Expropriate it!" He picked another spot and made the same demand. "Yes, expropriate. We have to make this into a great historic center."

Chávez arrested political opponents on trumped-up charges, chased off investors, and allowed billions in oil revenue to be siphoned away by corrupt politicians. But the TV was always great.

American politicians have moved toward communicating directly with the public, too. Barack Obama, with his massive online following and disdain for critical coverage, often gave interviews to sympathetic celebrities. Now, with a former reality-TV star in the White House, will an American "Aló Presidente" come next?

Don't count on it. Donald Trump has discovered that sending a tweet can be as effective as a marathon of television interviews. Why host a lengthy, tiring show to get a point

across, when a few taps on a cellphone can have the same effect?

Mr. Trump can, however, learn an important lesson from the Venezuelan strongman. A year after Chávez's expropriation stunt, Mr. Carroll writes, "everything was boarded up, dusty, dilapidated, the architectural and historic projects yet to begin, possibly forgotten." The perpetually distracted leader had moved on.

If Mr. Trump wants a successful presidency—enhanced border security, an effective ObamaCare replacement, a better environment for job creators—he'll have to scrutinize the implementation of his ideas much more carefully than he crafts his tweets.

Mr. O'Neal is an assistant editorial features editor at the Journal.

The Washington Post

By Garry Kasparov and Thor Halvorssen

Garry Kasparov is chairman of the New York-based Human Rights Foundation. Thor Halvorssen is the foundation's president and chief executive.

Last month the world's elite listened politely as Chinese President Xi Jinping offered the keynote address at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. Of course, the leader of the Chinese dictatorship didn't mention how he and his cronies jail and disappear human rights activists, persecute ethnic minorities and religious groups, and operate a vast censorship and surveillance system, among other evils. It is striking that a forum dedicated to "improving the state of the world" would offer such an important stage to the leader of a repressive regime. Xi began his remarks in part by asking "What has gone wrong with the world?" The fact is, he's part of the problem.

Kasparov and Halvorssen : Why the rise of authoritarianism is a global catastrophe

At present, the authoritarianism business is booming. According to the Human Rights Foundation's research, the citizens of 94 countries suffer under non-democratic regimes, meaning that 3.97 billion people are currently controlled by tyrants, absolute monarchs, military juntas or competitive authoritarians. That's 53 percent of the world's population. Statistically, then, authoritarianism is one of the largest — if not the largest — challenges facing humanity.

Consider the scale of some of the world's other crises. About 836 million live under extreme poverty, and 783 million lack clean drinking water. War and conflict have displaced 65 million from their homes. Between 1994 and 2013 an annual average of 218 million people were affected by natural disasters. These are terrible, seemingly intractable problems — but at least there are United Nations bodies, aid organizations and State

Department teams dedicated to each one of them.

Dictators and elected authoritarians, by contrast, get a free pass. The World Bank bails out repressive regimes on a regular basis. There is no anti-tyrant U.N. task force, no Sustainable Development Goals against tyranny, no army of activists.

We, the authors, have experienced the ills of authoritarianism personally. One of us has been beaten, blacklisted and forced into exile by operatives of the Kremlin. Russian President Vladimir Putin has relentlessly pushed to crush freedom of speech, brazenly annex Crimea and increase his global military activities in ways that hark back to the Cold War. The other author has seen his mother shot by Venezuelan security forces and his first cousin languish for nearly three years in a military jail as a prisoner of conscience. Today Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro runs a regime that regularly imprisons dissidents, abuses protesters and

engages in such widespread graft and corruption that the country is now undergoing a catastrophic economic collapse.

Putin and Maduro have co-conspirators in all parts of the world, fellow would-be tyrants who are dismantling the free press, jailing opponents, manipulating elections and committing a host of human rights violations. In Turkey, a once-promising democracy is gasping for air. Its president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has shut down 149 media outlets, shuttered more than 2,000 schools and universities, fired more than 120,000 civil servants and jailed more than 45,000 suspected dissenters. In North Korea, Kim Jong Un rules the most totalitarian government on Earth, brainwashing 25 million people and terrorizing them with public executions, forced famines and a vast network of concentration camps that reminded U.N. investigators of Pol Pot's Cambodia and Nazi Germany.

And there are so many lesser-known dictators in countries such as

Bahrain, Kazakhstan and Equatorial Guinea, where tyrants pilfer their countries' natural resources and pocket the profits in private off-shore accounts. To cover their atrocities, they hire lobbyists, public relations firms and even policy groups in the free world to whitewash their actions.

If injustice and oppression aren't bad enough, authoritarian governments bear an enormous social cost. Dictator-led countries have higher rates of mental illness, lower levels of health and life expectancy, and, as Amartya Sen famously argued, higher susceptibility to famine. Their citizens are less educated and file fewer patents. In 2016, more patents were filed in France than in the entire Arab world — not because Arabs are less entrepreneurial than the French, but because nearly all of them live under stifling authoritarianism. Clearly, the suppression of free expression and creativity has harmful effects on innovation and economic growth. Citizens of free and open societies such as Germany, South Korea and Chile witness advances in business, science and technology that Belarusians, Burmese and Cubans can only dream of.

And consider that free nations do not go to war with each other. History has shown this to be the only ironclad law of political theory. Meanwhile, dictators are always at war, often with a foreign power and

always with their own people. If you are worried about public health, poverty or peace, your mandate is clear: Oppose tyranny.

Tragically, world institutions and organizations have failed to properly address authoritarianism. Western governments sometimes protest human rights violations in countries such as Russia, Iran, and North Korea — but routinely ignore them in places such as China and Saudi Arabia, in favor of upholding trade deals and security agreements. The United Nations, established to bring peace and justice to the world, includes Cuba, Egypt and Rwanda on its Human Rights Council. Here, a representative from a democracy carries the same legitimacy as a representative from a dictatorship. One acts on behalf of its citizens, while the other acts to silence them. Between June 2006 and August 2015 the Human Rights Council issued zero condemnations of repressive regimes in China, Cuba, Egypt, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

Despite the fact that dictatorship is at the root of many global ills — poor health, failing education systems and global poverty among them — authoritarianism is hardly ever addressed at major conferences worldwide. And no wonder: Many, including the World Economic Forum and the now-defunct Clinton Global Initiative, receive ample funding from authoritarians. Few human rights groups focus exclusively on

authoritarianism, and most establishment ones spend significant chunks of their budgets on criticizing democratic governments and their policies. Dictators are rarely in the spotlight.

The noble struggle against tyranny has fallen upon individual activists and dissidents living under authoritarian rule or working from exile. Citizen journalists Abdalaziz Alhamza and Meron Estefanos found that few people in peaceful, free countries were interested in reporting on Syria and Eritrea, so they took it upon themselves to do so, despite the enormous danger this put them in. Hyeonseo Lee defected from North Korea to find that victims of sex trafficking in China are often abandoned and ignored, so she started pressuring the Chinese government herself. When Rosa María Payá's father, Cuban democracy leader Oswaldo Payá, died in mysterious circumstances in 2012, it fell to her to demand a formal investigation and fair treatment for dissidents in Cuba. Such individuals are in constant need of support, because in their home countries there is no legal way to protest, no ACLU, no Washington Post and no opposition party to stand up for their rights.

If authoritarianism and dictatorship are to be properly challenged — and if so many resulting crises, including military conflict, poverty and extremism, are to be addressed at their root cause — such dissidents need funding, strategic

advice, technical training, attention and solidarity. To turn the tide against repression, people across all industries need to join the movement. Artists, entrepreneurs, technologists, investors, diplomats, students — no matter who you are, you can reach out to a civil society organization at risk and ask how you can help by using your knowledge, resources or skills.

Today, authoritarians rule an increasingly large part of the globe, but the leaders of the free world lack the motivation and gumption to create a new U.N.-style League of Democracies. In the meantime, as individuals living in a free society, we believe it is our moral obligation to take action to expose human rights violations and to use our freedom to help others achieve theirs.

During an interview with the Washington Post's James Hohmann, Sen. Chris Murphy (D-Conn.), implied that President Trump undercuts his national security cabinet when it comes to Russia. Sen. Murphy: Putin listening to 'Trump, not Nikki Haley' on Russia policy (Priya Mathew/The Washington Post)

During an interview with the Washington Post's James Hohmann, Sen. Chris Murphy (D-Conn.), implied that President Trump undercuts his national security cabinet when it comes to Russia. (Priya Mathew/The Washington Post)



Bill and Melinda Gates: How Warren taught us optimism

Bill and Melinda Gates

Story highlights

- Bill and Melinda Gates: 10 years ago, Warren Buffett gave us billions of dollars to try to make the world better
- His model of optimism -- not just hoping for the best but making it happen -- has been an inspiration, they write

The authors are co-chairs of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Their 2017 Annual Letter, from which some points in this article are adapted, is available at www.gatesletter.com. The opinions expressed in this commentary are theirs.

(CNN)Warren Buffett is one of the best loved people in the world -- and it's easy to see why. He's jovial and friendly. He's funny and wise. He makes people feel good about themselves. But he has one quality

that fuels all the others: Warren is the most upbeat, optimistic person we know.

He's optimistic about the country, about the future and about you. No matter where things are right now, he knows in the long run they're getting better. You doubt it? Don't bet against it; he's made billions investing in that belief. The great thing about Warren's optimism is you can't hear him share a story, tell a joke or say hello without picking up some of his optimism yourself.

That's why it feels so good to be around him.

Some people might say, "I'd be optimistic, too, if I'd had his success." But we think that has it backward. Warren's success didn't create his optimism; his optimism led to his success. Because optimism isn't a belief that things will automatically get better; it's a conviction that we can make things better.

Ten years ago, that optimism prompted Warrento give the bulk of

his fortune to our foundation to help fight inequity in the world. It was (and remains) the single biggest gift anybody ever gave anyone for anything, but Warren was very modest about it. He didn't give us any instructions. He just said, "I'm good at making money, not giving it away. That part's up to you."

We knew, though, that just because he's not making the decisions doesn't mean he's not watching.

Last year, marking the 10th anniversary of his gift, he suggested we write a report on the foundation's work that answers the question: What have we accomplished so far, and what do we hope to do in the future? We thought it was a good idea, and so for this year's annual letter, we decided to share with everyone our answer to Warren. Our letter contains a lot of good news, like the fact that the world is on the verge of eradicating polio forever. There's also some disappointing news, including how long it's taking to develop new vaccines for some of the deadliest diseases. But mostly

the letter is an argument for optimism. In it, we offer a lot of evidence that it's possible to make things better -- a lot better -- and that we're gaining even in areas where people may have lost hope.

We're excited to share two of the letter's highlights with you -- and in Warren's spirit of fun competition, we're putting them in a quiz.

Which of the following is true: Over the past 25 years worldwide, extreme poverty (a) increased by 25% (b) stayed the same (c) decreased by 25%?

The answer is "none of the above." Over the last 25 years, extreme poverty has been cut in half. If you didn't get that right, don't worry. Only 1% of people surveyed got it right; everyone else underestimated the progress.

Which of the following is true: Over the last 25 years worldwide, the number of deaths annually of children under 5 (a) increased by 25%; (b) stayed the same; (c) decreased by 25%?

You're probably too shrewd to fall for the same trick twice, so you're likely guessing "none of the above." You're right. Over the last 25 years, the number of childhood deaths annually has been cut in half as well.

Because of the spread of vaccines, better nutrition, more breastfeeding and access to contraceptives, in every year since 1990, fewer children died than in the previous year. If we could show you only one number that proves how life has changed for the poorest, it would be 122 million, the number of children's

lives saved since 1990 when you add up the gains. These are children who would have died if mortality rates had stayed where they were in 1990.

The best news is that these trends of saving lives and reducing poverty are connected and yield benefits for children, their parents and whole nations. Reducing childhood mortality is the heart of the work for us. When you chart them all, virtually all advances in society — nutrition, education, access to contraceptives, gender equity, economic growth — show up as

gains in the childhood mortality chart, and every gain in this chart shows up in gains for society.

When parents are confident their children will survive — and they have access to contraceptives so they can time and space their pregnancies to improve outcomes for mothers and babies — parents can choose how many children to have. The children are healthier, they're better nourished, their mental capacities are higher, and parents have more time and money to spend on each child's health and

schooling. That's how families and entire countries get out of poverty.

These are just two highlights from our letter to Warren; we hope you go to www.gatesletter.com

and find more. Maybe a little bit of Warren will rub off on you, and you'll see that optimism is not just positive thinking -- but the right outlook on how you, too, can transform the world. Together, over time, we *can* make things better.

ETATS-UNIS

THE WALL
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JOURNAL

Donald Trump's National Security Adviser Mike Flynn Resigns Over Russia Contacts

Carol E. Lee, Michael C. Bender and Devlin Barrett

Updated Feb. 14, 2017 12:59 a.m. ET

WASHINGTON—Mike Flynn, President Donald Trump's national security adviser, resigned Monday as he was under increasing fire over his conflicting statements about his contacts with Russian officials before the inauguration, the White House said.

Mr. Flynn's resignation was accepted by Mr. Trump after information about his Russia contacts continued to emerge while the president was "evaluating" whether to keep him in his post.

The move caps an unusually short tenure in the White House—less than a month—for one of Mr. Trump's earliest loyal campaign supporters.

Mr. Flynn insisted until late last week that in a conversation on Dec. 29 with the Russian ambassador, Sergey Kislyak, he did not discuss sanctions imposed that day by the Obama administration, which were levied in retaliation for alleged Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election. Mr. Flynn conceded 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.

The White House said in a statement late Monday that Keith Kellogg, the chief of staff at the National Security Council who advised Mr. Trump during the campaign, would serve as interim national security adviser.

Mr. Trump is considering Mr. Kellogg as a possible permanent replacement, as well as former Central Intelligence Agency Director David Petraeus and retired Vice Adm. Robert Harward.

Mr. Flynn said in a resignation letter released by the White House that during the transition before Mr. Trump's inauguration he had apologized to Mr. Trump and Vice President Mike Pence.

"Unfortunately, because of the fast pace of events, I inadvertently briefed the Vice President Elect and others with incomplete information regarding my phone calls with the Russian Ambassador," Mr. Flynn said in the letter. "I have sincerely apologized to the President and the Vice President, and they have accepted my apology."

For a White House that has been in nearly constant damage control, Mr. Flynn was a consistent flashpoint.

He clashed with several members of Mr. Trump's cabinet, including Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson. The disagreements, particularly over some of Mr. Flynn's hires, grew so heated at one point that two of Mr. Trump's top advisers—Jared Kushner and Steve Bannon—flew from New York to Washington before the inauguration to meet with the incoming president's nominees, said two people familiar with the meeting.

The resignation is a blow to Mr. Trump just weeks into his time in office. It came just hours after White House press secretary Sean Spicer said Mr. Trump was evaluating whether to retain Mr. Flynn, given he discussed the issue of U.S. sanctions against Moscow in phone

calls with Russia's ambassador to the U.S., contrary to Mr. Flynn's earlier denials.

Mr. Flynn's contacts with the Russian envoy are part of a U.S. counterintelligence investigation into Russian government contacts with people close to Mr. Trump. Lawmakers in Congress also have begun investigations into U.S. intelligence agencies' conclusion that the Kremlin engaged in hacking Democratic Party organizations and individuals in an attempt to influence November's election in favor of Mr. Trump.

Senior Trump counselor Kellyanne Conway on Monday said Mr. Trump had "full confidence" in Mr. Flynn, but that changed amid new reports the White House was warned by the Justice Department that Mr. Flynn had made misled officials, including Mr. Pence, about his contacts with Russian officials.

The Justice Department warned the Trump administration last month that U.S. intercepts contradicted Mr. Flynn's denials that he had discussed sanctions with a Russian ambassador, according to a person familiar with the matter. The message was meant both to advise the administration of the apparent contradiction and to let them know that the discrepancy could, in theory, be used as blackmail by Russia against Mr. Flynn someday, according to this person.

The warning from the Justice Department came from Acting Attorney General Sally Yates, an Obama administration holdover who was later fired by Mr. Trump for her refusal to defend in court his executive order temporarily blocking visitors from some countries, this person said.

The warning was first reported by the Washington Post.

The turmoil comes as the new administration is trying to formulate its foreign policy and is just beginning to confront multiple global challenges.

The White House is in the midst of a review of its North Korea policy as Pyongyang launched a ballistic missile test over the weekend while Mr. Trump was hosting the prime minister of Japan at his Florida golf club.

Mr. Trump also is stepping up the pace of his meetings with foreign leaders, hosting Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Monday and planning to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Wednesday. Mr. Flynn was on hand for Mr. Trudeau's visit.

Mr. Kellogg's name first surfaced as a Trump campaign adviser in March 2016, when the candidate, under pressure to name people he consulted for foreign policy advice, identified the retired general in a meeting with the Washington Post editorial board.

Mr. Kellogg has been serving on the National Security Council as chief of staff and executive secretary, a crucial position responsible for ensuring the timely and coordinated flow of memos, directives and briefing papers. That process has been beset by dysfunction, with key organizational responsibilities and lines of authority left undefined, said a U.S. official who has worked with Gen. Kellogg.

Mr. Kellogg was among the first American personnel sent into Iraq following the U.S.'s 2003 invasion. Then a contractor for Oracle Corp., he served in Baghdad as the chief

operating officer of the Coalition Provisional Authority, set up to govern the country, for five months.

The CPA's tenure was marked by controversial policy decisions, including to disband the Iraqi army.

Mr. Petraeus commanded U.S. forces in Iraq and was credited with quelling an insurgency in 2007. He later served as director of the CIA but resigned his position in 2012 following revelations that he disclosed classified information to Paula Broadwell, who was writing an authorized biography of the general and with whom he was having an extramarital affair. Mr. Petraeus later pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor charge of mishandling government information after lying to federal investigators about the disclosures to Ms. Broadwell.

Retired Navy Vice Adm. Harward

served as deputy commander of U.S. Central Command, which oversees all U.S. forces in the Middle East. He served on the NSC during the George W. Bush administration and has served in the National Counterterrorism Center.

Since his retirement, Adm. Harward has taken up work in the private sector with Lockheed Martin Corp. He is currently the defense contractor's chief executive in the United Arab Emirates.

Mr. Harward is a leading candidate, according to a person familiar with the White House deliberations. Both Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis and Secretary of Homeland Security John Kelly recommended him for the job and he earlier had been eyed for a position on the National Security Council, this person said.

The Wall Street Journal reported last month that Mr. Flynn's contacts

with the Russian ambassador were under investigation by U.S. officials.

Mr. Spicer said Mr. Trump had "absolutely not" been aware Mr. Flynn was discussing sanctions with the Russian ambassador.

Other senior members of Mr. Trump's team, in addition to Mr. Pence, said publicly during the period between Mr. Trump's election in November and his inauguration in January that Mr. Flynn told them he didn't discuss the issue of U.S. sanctions against Russia in his call to Mr. Kislyak, the ambassador.

Current and former officials, however, have said transcripts of the calls, which the White House has reviewed, show sanctions were discussed in phone calls between Mr. Flynn and Mr. Kislyak on Dec. 29, the day the Obama administration adopted new

sanctions against Moscow in response to its alleged use of cyberattacks to interfere in the U.S. election. Russia has denied the hacking.

Mr. Flynn had maintained there was only one phone call with Mr. Kislyak that day, and that it was solely focused on arranging a conversation between Mr. Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin. White House officials now concede there was more than one phone call that day.

—Shane Harris contributed to this article.

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The Atlantic The Resignation of Michael Flynn

Russell Berman

Michael Flynn has resigned as national security adviser following reports that he misled senior Trump administration officials, including Vice President Mike Pence, about the nature of talks he held with the Russian ambassador in December before he took office.

Flynn submitted his resignation in a letter Monday evening in which he acknowledged having "inadvertently briefed the vice president-elect and others with incomplete information regarding my phone calls with the Russian ambassador." He said he had apologized both to Pence and President Trump and that they had accepted his apology. But amid a firestorm of criticism from Republicans and Democrats, as well as questions about whether he may have broken the law, Flynn quit anyway.

"I am tendering my resignation," he wrote, "honored to have served our nation and the American people in such a distinguished way."

Related Story

Who Will Be the First Victim of White House Chaos?

Keith Kellogg, who like Flynn is a retired general, will serve as acting national security adviser, Trump announced in a statement shortly after 11 p.m. Eastern. He had led the defense team during the Trump transition. David Petraeus, the retired general and former CIA director who pleaded guilty to sharing classified information with his biographer and lover, is reportedly among the candidates for the permanent position, as is Vice Admiral Robert Harward.

Coming less than a month into Trump's presidency, Flynn's departure is the latest and most glaring sign of upheaval for a White House riven by drama and staff infighting. It followed multiple published reports on Monday night that officials at the Justice Department had warned the White House that Flynn had misled Pence by denying that he had discussed the possible relaxation of sanctions against Russia once Trump took office.

The *Washington Post* reported that Sally Yates, then the acting attorney general, told Don McGahn, the White House counsel that Flynn could be susceptible to blackmail

based on the transcript his intercepted call with Sergei Kislyak, the Russian ambassador. The FBI has been investigating ties between the Trump campaign and the Russian government. Yates, according to the report, thought Flynn might have violated the Logan Act barring private citizens from negotiating with foreign governments that have an ongoing dispute with the United States. Trump fired Yates 10 days into his presidency after she refused to defend the executive order he signed on immigration, which is now being held up by the courts. The *New York Times* reported Monday that the Army had separately been investigating whether Flynn took money from the Russian government as part of a trip he took to Moscow in 2015; the payments could have violated the Emoluments Clause of the Constitution.

A retired lieutenant general in the Army, Flynn had served for two years as director of the Defense Intelligence Agency before he was forced out after repeatedly clashing with other members of the Obama administration. He became an enthusiastic and frequently bombastic surrogate for Trump's campaign, giving a lengthy speech

at the Republican National Convention that prompted delegates to begin chanting, "Lock Her Up!" in reference to Hillary Clinton.

Congressional Democrats who had demanded Flynn's ouster in recent days reacted to his resignation by calling for immediate briefings from the Trump administration. "Now, we in Congress need to know who authorized his actions, permitted them, and continued to let him have access to our most sensitive national security information despite knowing these risks," said Representatives Elijah Cummings of Maryland and John Conyers of Michigan. "We need to know who else within the White House is a current and ongoing risk to our national security."

Earlier on Monday, Trump officials had sent mixed signals about Flynn's standing. Kellyanne Conway, who serves as counselor to the president, said on MSNBC that Flynn retained Trump's full confidence. An hour later, press secretary Sean Spicer told reporters that the White House was reviewing Flynn's situation.

A few hours after that, he was gone.



Michael Flynn Resigns As Russia Scandal Dogs White House

Trump's national security adviser steps down, after misleading the vice president about his conversations with Russian ambassador.

Michael Flynn resigned late on Monday as President Donald

Trump's national security adviser after he offered a misleading account of his conversations with Russia's ambassador to the United States that alarmed law enforcement and intelligence officials.

Flynn's departure comes less than a month after he took up the job, an early exit without precedent that underscored the administration's chaotic and disorganized initial weeks in office. But his resignation offers little prospect of defusing a growing cloud over the administration about the nature of

the Trump team's communications with Moscow before the president was sworn in on Jan. 20. The administration has yet to clarify if other senior aides encouraged Flynn's overtures to Russia or sought to undermine the outgoing Obama administration's policies.

Flynn's resignation came after dramatic revelations in the *Washington Post* last week that he had discussed U.S. sanctions in December with Russia's ambassador, Sergey Kislyak, at a moment when the outgoing Obama administration was preparing to impose a new round of sanctions on Moscow for its meddling in the U.S. presidential election.

Flynn had initially denied that the subject came up in his conversations, but later changed his account, saying that it was possible the topic was discussed.

The Justice Department reportedly warned the White House that Flynn had not come clean about the nature of his conversations with the Russian diplomat, and expressed fears that the retired Army general could be vulnerable to blackmail from Moscow.

The accounts of Flynn's phone calls to the Russian

ambassador have fueled concerns among lawmakers in Congress and allies in Europe about Trump's persistent affinity for Russian President Vladimir Putin, and his willingness to consider lifting sanctions on Moscow without concrete concessions in return.

The *Post's* bombshell report last week, and the White House's refusal to come to Flynn's defense over the weekend, triggered intense speculation that the national security adviser could be forced to resign.

In his resignation letter, Flynn said that "because of the fast pace of events, I inadvertently briefed the Vice President Elect and others with incomplete information regarding my phone calls with the Russian Ambassador.

"I have sincerely apologized to the President and the Vice President, and they have accepted my apology."

Flynn, a retired three-star general who served in military intelligence and as director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, said he had "always performed my duties with the utmost of integrity and honesty to those I have served."

Flynn said he was honored to have served under President Trump, "who in just three weeks, has reoriented American foreign policy in fundamental ways to restore America's leadership position in the world."

During the campaign, Flynn had railed against Trump's Democratic opponent, Hillary Clinton, for using a private email server when she was secretary of state, saying she had jeopardized national security. At the Republican Party's convention in August, he led chants of "Lock Her Up!"

Now Flynn faces potential legal jeopardy for his actions. Experts say it's possible he could be charged for

violating the Logan Act, which prohibits private citizens from conducting foreign policy, violating other criminal statutes or for possibly lying to federal investigators.

The White House said in a statement that retired Lt. Gen. Keith Kellogg, a decorated Vietnam War veteran and former commander of the U.S. Army's 82nd Airborne Division, would replace Flynn as acting national security adviser.

But it's not clear if Kellogg will serve in an interim role or be named as the permanent replacement. Flynn's resignation set off speculation about possible successors, including David Petraeus, the former commander of U.S. forces in Iraq. Petraeus pleaded guilty in 2015 to mishandling classified information and handing it over to his mistress and biographer. The scandal surrounding the case forced him to resign as CIA director.

POLITICO Kellogg replaces Flynn as Trump seeks national security successor

By Bryan Bender and Eli Stokols

Keith Kellogg, who was serving as executive secretary and chief of staff for Flynn, now takes the reins of the National Security Council. | AP Photo

Keith Kellogg will guide Trump through his first White House crisis, but Robert Harward could calm things down.

Keith Kellogg, who was named late Monday to be President Donald Trump's interim National Security Adviser, was the first of the retired generals to flock to Trump's long-shot campaign for the presidency, advising him behind the scenes on foreign policy issues from early on.

Now the 72-year-old decorated Vietnam veteran who served as a top civilian official in post-war in Iraq, is guiding President Trump through his first White House crisis — the resignation of National Security Adviser Mike Flynn.

Story Continued Below

But Kellogg is seen by many, including one his fellow retired generals, as only a placeholder for the NSC job.

Retired Army Gen. Barry McCaffrey, who has known Kellogg for decades, said early Tuesday that he is a "good man" but doubted he will be a permanent replacement for Flynn.

"He won't be the selection," McCaffrey predicted.

He said he believes Flynn's permanent replacement will have to "someone with the chops needed to deal with Bannon and Miller," references to two of the president's top political advisers, Steve Bannon and Stephen Miller.

Several administration sources indicated that Vice Admiral Robert Harward, a protege of Defense Secretary James Mattis, is the current favorite to replace Kellogg as the permanent National Security Adviser.

Harward served as the former Deputy Commander of the U.S. Central Command directly under Mattis and does not bring the personal baggage to the administration, already growing fatigued after three weeks of seemingly never-ending controversies, that former CIA director David Petraeus, who has been mentioned by administration officials as a candidate for the role, would.

"It would make sense they would try to calm things down with someone who appears to fit in with everybody," said former Ambassador Chris Hill on Monday night. Harward is "more of a behind the scenes guy and a coordinator, which is what I think Mattis and [Secretary of State Rex] Tillerson would like with this job -- someone who's a good briefer, who can get multiple agencies on the same page and who can work well with others, not someone who thinks he's more important than everyone else."

Harward is familiar with the National Security Council, having served as its director of Strategy and Defense issues during George W. Bush's administration before being assigned to the National Counterterrorism Center in 2005.

"There are a handful of good options, but it's clear he's at the top of the list," said an administration source, who pointed to Mattis's familiarity with Harward and the administration's desire for a lower profile, less controversial figure to replace the erratic Flynn.

Petraeus is also scheduled to meet with Trump this week, and administration officials confirm he is on the list of possible replacements. But despite Trump's admiration for him, Petraeus's higher profile and weighty personal baggage — he pleaded guilty to illegally sharing classified information and then lying about it — make him a less likely choice, two White House officials said Monday night.

Flynn stepped down Monday after little more than three weeks after he misrepresented a phone call he had with the Russia ambassador during the transition. He is also reportedly the focus of an Army investigation into whether he took funds from the Russian government in 2015 and didn't report it.

Kellogg, who retired from the Army in 2003, had little history of partisan politics before backing Trump and had a reputation of avoiding the limelight. For example, unlike Trump, Kellogg has eschewed social media. As of early Tuesday,

he had tweeted only three times and had less than 100 followers.

When he took command of the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg in 1996, Kellogg famously delivered a two-minute speech.

But after officially backing Trump's campaign as an adviser in March 2003, he steadily rose in Trump's orbit as both confidant and surrogate.

"I happen to think my guy has the temperament to be commander-in-chief," he told CNN last summer, calling the real estate mogul a "black swan candidate, a change candidate" who offered "a change opportunity."

Kellogg, a native of Dayton, Ohio, led a reconnaissance platoon in Vietnam and after retiring served as the chief operations officer of the U.S. Coalition Provisional Authority in postwar Iraq. Earlier in his career he also worked for the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

After he left his post in Iraq he held several positions in the defense industry, including for Oracle, the computer technology company.

Following Trump's victory, Kellogg held a senior position on the incoming administration's Pentagon transition team.

Now, with the Trump White House stumbling in its first few weeks on several fronts and facing mounting probes on Capitol Hill, Trump is looking to Kellogg to help steady things.

It is the kind of challenge he seems to relish.

"I've been a paratrooper all my life," Kellogg told an ABC television

affiliate in Nevada weeks before the election, when it looked like Trump would lose. "And paratroopers are used to being surrounded and fighting in every direction out there

and always look and say, 'This is a tough fight.' And we just look at it as a tough fight....We understand that we're against the establishment, as

you would call it, that's out there. So we're fighting uphill the whole way."

The New York Times

Maggie Haberman, Matthew Rosenberg, Matt Apuzzo and Glenn Thrush

Michael Flynn Resigns as National Security Adviser

Michael T. Flynn, the national security adviser, resigned on Monday night after it was revealed that he had misled Vice President Mike Pence and other top White House officials about his conversations with the Russian ambassador to the United States.

Mr. Flynn, who served in the job for less than a month, said he had given "incomplete information" regarding a telephone call he had with the ambassador in late December about American sanctions against Russia, weeks before President Trump's inauguration. Mr. Flynn previously had denied that he had any substantive conversations with Ambassador Sergey I. Kislyak, and Mr. Pence repeated that claim in television interviews as recently as this month.

But on Monday, a former administration official said the Justice Department warned the White House last month that Mr. Flynn had not been fully forthcoming about his conversations with the ambassador. As a result, the Justice Department feared that Mr. Flynn could be vulnerable to blackmail by Moscow.

In his resignation letter, which the White House emailed to reporters, Mr. Flynn said he had held numerous calls with foreign officials during the transition. "Unfortunately, because of the fast pace of events, I inadvertently briefed the vice president-elect and others with incomplete information regarding my phone calls with the Russian ambassador," he wrote. "I have sincerely apologized to the president and the vice president, and they have accepted my apology."

"I am tendering my resignation, honored to have served our nation and the American people in such a distinguished way," Mr. Flynn wrote.

The White House said in the statement that it was replacing Mr. Flynn with retired Lt. Gen. Joseph K. Kellogg Jr. of the Army, a Vietnam War veteran, as acting national security adviser.

Mr. Flynn was an early and ardent supporter of Mr. Trump's candidacy, and in his resignation he sought to

praise the president. "In just three weeks," Mr. Flynn said, the new president "has reoriented American foreign policy in fundamental ways to restore America's leadership position in the world."

But in doing so, he inadvertently illustrated the brevity of his tumultuous run at the National Security Council, and the chaos that has gripped the White House in the first weeks of the Trump administration — and created a sense of uncertainty around the world.

Earlier Monday, Sean Spicer, the White House press secretary, told reporters that "the president is evaluating the situation" about Mr. Flynn's future. By Monday evening, Mr. Flynn's fortunes were rapidly shifting — his resignation came roughly seven hours after Kellyanne Conway, a counselor to the president, said on MSNBC that Mr. Trump had "full confidence" in the retired general.

And when he did step down, it happened so quickly that his resignation does not appear to have been communicated to National Security Council staff members, two of whom said they learned about it from news reports.

Officials said Mr. Pence had told others in the White House that he believed Mr. Flynn lied to him by saying he had not discussed the topic of sanctions on a call with the Russian ambassador in late December. Even the mere discussion of policy — and the apparent attempt to assuage the concerns of an American adversary before Mr. Trump took office — represented a remarkable breach of protocol.

The F.B.I. had been examining Mr. Flynn's phone calls as he came under growing questions about his interactions with Russian officials and his management of the National Security Council. The blackmail risk envisioned by the Justice Department would have stemmed directly from Mr. Flynn's attempt to cover his tracks with his bosses. The Russians knew what had been said on the call; thus, if they wanted Mr. Flynn to do something, they could have threatened to expose the lie if he refused.

The Justice Department's warning to the White House was first reported on Monday night by The Washington Post.

In addition, the Army has been investigating whether Mr. Flynn received money from the Russian government during a trip he took to Moscow in 2015, according to two defense officials. Such a payment might violate the Emoluments Clause of the Constitution, which prohibits former military officers from receiving money from a foreign government without consent from Congress. The defense officials said there was no record that Mr. Flynn, a retired three-star Army general, filed the required paperwork for the trip.

Representative Adam B. Schiff of California, the top Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, said in a statement late Monday that Mr. Flynn's resignation would not close the question of his contact with Russian officials.

"General Flynn's decision to step down as national security adviser was all but ordained the day he misled the country about his secret talks with the Russian ambassador," said Mr. Schiff, noting that the matter is still under investigation by the House committee.

Two other Democratic lawmakers — Representative John Conyers Jr. of Michigan and Representative Elijah E. Cummings of Maryland — called for an immediate briefing by the Justice Department and the F.B.I. over the "alarming new disclosures" that Mr. Flynn was a blackmail risk. "We need to know who else within the White House is a current and ongoing risk to our national security," they said in a statement.

Flynn's Controversies: Islam, Russia and More

Michael T. Flynn served in the military for 33 years before becoming a singular and divisive figure in the intelligence community during the Obama administration. Matthew Rosenberg looks at President Trump's former national security adviser.

By DAVE HORN and SHANE O'NEILL on January 18, 2017. Photo by Kevin Hagen for The New York Times. Watch in Times Video »

Representative Devin Nunes, Republican of California and the chairman of the House intelligence committee, was supportive of Mr. Flynn until the end. "Washington, D.C., can be a rough town for

honorable people, and Flynn — who has always been a soldier, not a politician — deserves America's gratitude and respect," Mr. Nunes said in a statement.

The White House had examined a transcript of a wiretapped conversation that Mr. Flynn had with Mr. Kislyak in December, according to administration officials. Mr. Flynn originally told Mr. Pence and others that the call was limited to small talk and holiday pleasantries.

But the conversation, according to officials who saw the transcript of the wiretap, also included a discussion about sanctions imposed on Russia after intelligence agencies determined that President Vladimir V. Putin's government tried to interfere with the 2016 election on Mr. Trump's behalf. Still, current and former administration officials familiar with the call said the transcript was ambiguous enough that Mr. Trump could have justified either firing or retaining Mr. Flynn.

Mr. Trump, however, had become increasingly concerned about the continued fallout over Mr. Flynn's behavior, according to people familiar with his thinking, and told aides that the media storm around Mr. Flynn would damage the president's image on national security issues.

Stephen K. Bannon, the president's chief strategist, asked for Mr. Flynn's resignation — a move that he has been pushing for since Friday, when it became clear that the national security adviser had misled Mr. Pence.

Around 8:20 p.m. Monday, a sullen Mr. Flynn was seen in the Oval Office, just as preparations were being made for the swearing-in of newly confirmed Treasury Secretary Steven T. Mnuchin. Soon after, Mr. Flynn's resignation letter started making the rounds.

Administration officials said it was unlikely that Mr. Kellogg would be asked to stay on as Mr. Flynn's permanent replacement. Mr. Flynn brought Mr. Kellogg into the Trump campaign, according to a former campaign adviser, and the two have remained close. K. T. McFarland, the deputy national security adviser who also was brought on by Mr. Flynn, is expected to leave that role, a senior official said.

One person close to the administration, who was not

authorized to discuss the personnel moves and spoke on the condition of anonymity, said that retired Vice Admiral Robert S. Harward is the leading candidate to replace Mr. Flynn, although Mr. Kellogg and David H. Petraeus are being discussed. It was not clear whether Mr. Petraeus is still expected to appear at the White House this week, as initially discussed by advisers to the president.

Mr. Flynn's concealment of the call's content, combined with questions about his management of his agency and reports of a demoralized staff, put him in a precarious position less than a month into Mr. Trump's presidency.

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Few members of Mr. Trump's team were more skeptical of Mr. Flynn than the vice president, numerous administration officials said. Mr. Pence, who used the false

information provided by Mr. Flynn to defend him in a series of television appearances, was incensed at Mr. Flynn's lack of contrition for repeatedly embarrassing him by withholding the information, according to three administration officials familiar with the situation.

Mr. Flynn and Mr. Pence spoke twice in the past few days about the matter, but administration officials said that rather than fully apologize and accept responsibility, the national security adviser blamed his faulty memory — which irked the typically slow-to-anger Mr. Pence.

The slight was compounded by an episode late last year when Mr. Pence went on television to deny that Mr. Flynn's son, who had posted conspiracy theories about Hillary Clinton on social media, had been given a security clearance by the transition team. The younger Mr. Flynn had, indeed, been given such a clearance, even though his father had told Mr. Pence's team that he had not.

Officials said classified information did not appear to have been

discussed during the conversation between Mr. Flynn and the ambassador, which would have been a crime. The call was captured on a routine wiretap of diplomats' calls, the officials said.

But current Trump administration officials and former Obama administration officials said that Mr. Flynn did appear to be reassuring the ambassador that Mr. Trump would adopt a more accommodating tone on Russia once in office.

Former and current administration officials said that Mr. Flynn urged Russia not to retaliate against any sanctions because an overreaction would make any future cooperation more complicated. He never explicitly promised sanctions relief, one former official said, but he appeared to leave the impression that it would be possible.

During his 2015 trip to Moscow, Mr. Flynn was paid to attend the anniversary celebration of Russia Today, a television network controlled by the Kremlin. At the banquet, he sat next to Mr. Putin.

Mr. Flynn had notified the Defense Intelligence Agency, which he once led, that he was taking the trip. He received a security briefing from agency officials before he left, which is customary for former top agency officials when they travel overseas.

Still, some senior agency officials were surprised when footage of the banquet appeared on RT, and believed that Mr. Flynn should have been more forthcoming with the agency about the nature of his trip to Russia.

Correction: February 13, 2017

An earlier version of this article misstated the day on which the White House sent out a series of conflicting signals about Michael T. Flynn, the national security adviser. It was Monday, not Tuesday. Also, because of an editing error, an earlier version quoted three posts from an unverified Twitter account purporting to be Mr. Flynn's, responding to the resignation.



Michael Flynn resigns as national security adviser

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

President Trump's national security adviser Michael Flynn resigned Feb. 13 after revelations that he had discussed sanctions on Russia with the Russian ambassador to the U.S. prior to Trump taking office. Here's what you need to know. President Trump's national security adviser Michael Flynn resigned Feb. 13. Here's what you need to know. (Deirdra O'Regan/The Washington Post)

Michael Flynn, the national security adviser to President Trump, resigned late Monday over revelations about his potentially illegal contacts with the Russian ambassador to the United States, and his misleading statements about the matter to senior Trump administration officials.

Flynn stepped down amid mounting pressure on the Trump administration to account for its false statements about Flynn's conduct after The Washington Post reported Monday that the Justice Department had warned the White House last month that Flynn had so mischaracterized his communications with the Russian diplomat that he might be vulnerable to blackmail by Moscow.

In a letter to Trump, Flynn said he had "inadvertently briefed the Vice President Elect and others with incomplete information regarding

my phone calls with the Russian ambassador. I have sincerely apologized to the president and the vice president."

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Flynn was referring to his disproven claims to Vice President Pence and others a month ago that he had never discussed U.S. sanctions against Moscow with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak. Pence, White House spokesman Sean Spicer and others, relying on Flynn's accounts, publicly defended him and repeatedly declared in categorical terms that sanctions were never discussed.

[National security adviser Flynn discussed sanctions with Russian ambassador, despite denials, officials say]

President Trump accepted Flynn's resignation letter and appointed Keith Kellogg, a decorated retired Army lieutenant general, as acting national security adviser.

Flynn's resignation — after just 24 days on the job — caps a decorated career in public service for the retired lieutenant general and intelligence official.

Kellogg is one of three candidates Trump is considering as a

permanent replacement for Flynn, according to a senior White House official. The other two are David H. Petraeus, a former CIA director and retired general, and Vice Adm. Robert Harward, a former deputy commander of the U.S. Central Command.

One senior White House official said that Trump did not fire Flynn; rather, Flynn made the decision to resign on his own late Monday evening because of what this official said was "the cumulative effect" of damaging news coverage about his conversations with the Russian envoy.

This official, who requested anonymity to speak candidly about the situation, said Trump does not relish firing people — despite his television persona on "The Apprentice" — and had intended to wait several more days before deciding whether to seek Flynn's resignation.

"There obviously were a lot of issues, but the president was hanging in there," this official said. "Buying some time was part of the plan, and I think Flynn just figured, if it's imminent to the boss, then let's make it immediate."

[Read Michael Flynn's resignation letter]

Flynn's departure just weeks into the Trump administration compounds the confusion in the National Security Council that is

supposed to serve as a disciplined coordination center for the administration's handling of international affairs.

Instead, the White House faces an escalating court fight over an immigration ban aimed at Muslim-majority countries, has alienated key allies with Trump's brusque phone calls to foreign leaders, and seemed so caught off-guard by North Korea's recent ballistic missile test that Trump and senior officials were shown learning of the development on cell phones in full view of patrons at Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort.

Flynn was forced out less than a week after it was disclosed that he had discussed U.S. sanctions against Russia with that country's ambassador before Trump was sworn in as president.

But Flynn's undoing was more directly tied to his inaccurate accounts of those contacts to senior Trump officials including Pence, who officials said was incensed to learn that Flynn has not told him the truth.

Flynn again denied that he had discussed the subject in an interview with The Washington Post last week, only to back away from that statement a day later by acknowledging, through a spokesman, that while he couldn't recall speaking about sanctions he could not rule it out.

In fact, U.S. intelligence and law enforcement officials have said that sanctions was a main subject of Flynn's conversation with Kislyak on the day that the Obama administration announced a series of punitive measures aimed at punishing Moscow for its meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

U.S. officials said that Flynn told Kislyak that Moscow should not overreact to the sanctions, indicating that the two sides would soon be in position to revisit the matter, presumably in Moscow's favor.

In conveying that message, Flynn may have broken a law against unauthorized individuals negotiating with foreign governments over conflicts. He is unlikely to face legal sanction, however, because that law dates to 1799 and has never been prosecuted.

But Flynn's departure is unlikely to end the trouble the issue has created for the Trump administration. The Post reported

Monday that then-acting U.S. Attorney General Sally Q. Yates told the White House counsel last month that Flynn's misleading statements to Pence and others made him vulnerable to blackmail by Russia, whose own government would have known that sanctions were discussed.

[Justice Department warned White House that Flynn could be vulnerable to Russian blackmail, officials say]

The White House appears to have let its repeated false statements about Flynn stand for weeks after that notification from Yates, and has yet to account for what it did with the warning she conveyed. The disclosures about Flynn have added to the swirling suspicion about the Trump administration's relationship with Moscow — suspicion based in part on Trump's repeated expressions of admiration for Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Flynn's resignation appears to end the career of a highly decorated U.S. military intelligence officer, who

served repeated tours in Afghanistan and Iraq but became a polarizing figure in last year's presidential campaign.

In a speech at the Republican National Convention, Flynn led vitriolic attacks on Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton, leading chants of "Lock Her Up" and declaring that if he had been even partly as careless as she was in her handling of sensitive material by email he would be in jail.

Flynn spent last weekend at Mar-a-Lago with Trump, staffing the president during his visit with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Back at the White House on Monday, Flynn attended classified briefings, helped orchestrate the visit of Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, and led Trump's morning intelligence briefing, this official said.

Some of Trump's political advisers felt Flynn should not be fired in the midst of intense media scrutiny and calls for his resignation from Democratic opponents.

"Part of me said, nobody should be firing this guy — not on the day that Nancy Pelosi said fire this guy," the official said. "You've got hashtag 'Fire Flynn' blazing across the Internet by a bunch of Trump detractors."

But by Monday evening, Flynn had decided he could not survive.

"It was when you feel like you're looking around the room and asking, 'Where's my friend?'" the White House official said. "The Pence thing was huge. He is not somebody who's quick to anger. That was very telling to everybody."

Flynn presented his resignation letter to Trump roughly around 9 p.m., shortly after Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin's swearing-in ceremony in the Oval Office. Trump accepted the letter.

"It was a sad moment," the White House official said.

Read more:

The New York Times From Trump's Mar-a-Lago to Facebook, a National Security Crisis in the Open

Michael D. Shear and Maggie Haberman

WASHINGTON — President Trump and his top aides coordinated their response to North Korea's missile test on Saturday night in full view of diners at Mr. Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida — a remarkable public display of presidential activity that is almost always conducted in highly secure settings.

The scene — of aides huddled over their computers and the president on his cellphone at his club's terrace — was captured by a club member dining not far away and published in pictures on his Facebook account. The images also show Mr. Trump conferring with his guest at the resort, Shinzo Abe, the Japanese prime minister.

Shortly before the club member, Richard DeAgazio, who joined Mr. Trump's club recently, took the pictures, North Korea test-fired a ballistic missile into the sea off its eastern coast. Mr. DeAgazio posted his photographs to Facebook as the two leaders and their staff members reviewed documents and worked on their laptops, using cellphones as flashlights.

"HOLY MOLY !!! It was fascinating to watch the flurry of activity at dinner when the news came that North Korea had launched a missile in the direction of Japan," Mr. DeAgazio wrote later on Facebook,

describing how the two leaders "conferred and then went into another room for hastily arranged press conference."

"Wow.....the center of the action!!!" Mr. DeAgazio wrote in the post. The scene at Mar-a-Lago was first reported by CNN. Mr. DeAgazio did not respond to a call seeking comment.

President Trump at Mar-a-Lago in Palm Beach, Fla., on Saturday. He and his aides coordinated a national security response there in full view of diners instead of moving to a private location. Al Drago/The New York Times

The fact that the national security incident played out in public view drew swift condemnation from Democrats, who said it was irresponsible for Mr. Trump not to have moved his discussion to a more private location.

"There's no excuse for letting an international crisis play out in front of a bunch of country club members like dinner theater," Representative Nancy Pelosi of California, the Democratic leader in the House, wrote on Twitter.

Senators Sheldon Whitehouse of Rhode Island and Tom Udall of New Mexico, Democrats who have called for Mr. Trump's club to release a list of its members, denounced the president on Monday for discussing

the North Korean missile launch in the open.

"This is America's foreign policy, not this week's episode of 'Saturday Night Live,'" the senators said in a statement. "We urge our Republican colleagues to start taking this administration's rash and unprofessional conduct seriously before there are consequences we all regret."

Republican senators also seemed puzzled by the president's actions. Senator Marco Rubio, Republican of Florida, said, "Usually that's not a place where you do that kind of thing." Senator John McCain, Republican of Arizona, could barely find words. "Can't make it up," he said.

Michael J. Morell, a former acting C.I.A. director under President Barack Obama, said, "Every president with whom I have worked would have gone to a private room to have what was potentially a classified discussion."

Mr. Trump was at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Palm Beach, Fla. — known casually as the Winter White House — for a get-to-know-you weekend with Mr. Abe, including time with the prime minister on the golf course and dinners with their spouses.

Around 8 p.m. on Saturday, the two leaders appeared for a brief photo together at the main entrance to the resort. Mr. Trump ignored a

shouted question from a reporter about the North Korean missile test, which had occurred about an hour earlier.

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The president and his guests dined at the resort's restaurant during the next two hours, eventually providing the flurry of national security activity that Mr. DeAgazio captured.

Around 10:30 p.m., Mr. Trump and Mr. Abe made short statements to a small group of reporters brought to a separate room in the resort.

Sean Spicer, the president's press secretary, told reporters at the White House that Mr. Trump and Mr. Abe had not reviewed classified material on the resort's patio.

Mr. Spicer said the president was briefed about North Korea in a secure location on the property. It is against the law for officials to be handling classified materials in a nonsecure setting.

Mr. Spicer said Mr. Trump and his aides were reviewing "news conference logistics" about the North Korean missile test.

But national security veterans of past administrations still expressed surprise that Mr. Trump and his staff

would not have excused themselves to be able to have candid conversations about the North Korean situation and to review sensitive or classified documents.

Discussions about how to respond to international incidents involving adversaries like North Korea are almost always conducted in places that have high-tech protections against eavesdropping, like the White House Situation Room.

When presidents are away from the White House, they often conduct important business in a Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility, or SCIF, a location that can be made temporarily impervious to eavesdropping.

Such facilities can be installed permanently in places that the president visits

frequently, like Mar-a-Lago. And a communications team travels with the president wherever he goes to ensure that he can communicate securely regardless of where he is.

There are examples from the previous administration. In 2011, the White House released a photograph of Mr. Obama and members of his national security team sitting in a secure tent while on a trip to Brazil. Mr. Obama had begun attacks on Libya and was conferring about the military operation.

Two years later, Mr. Obama held a dinner with President Xi Jinping of China at the Sunnyslands resort in Rancho Mirage, Calif. But the dinner between the leaders was out of sight of members of the public, in a private dining room.

Mr. Trump and White House aides who joined him and Mr. Abe for dinner on Saturday, including Stephen K. Bannon, the president's chief strategist, did not relocate the discussion to a secure location.

Mr. Trump appears to enjoy presenting the spectacle of his presidency to those at his privately held club, where members pay \$200,000 to join.

While the club is not open to the public, Mr. Trump's dinner with Mr. Abe was in the club's dining room, where members and their guests were likely to be.

Individual club members can invite guests, submitting a list of names of table guests to security officials ahead of time. But none of that would give them clearance to see sensitive or classified material

handled by the president or his aides.

In addition to posting the pictures of the North Korea conversation, Mr. DeAgazio also published pictures of himself standing with a person he described as Mr. Trump's military aide responsible for carrying the nuclear "football" — the briefcase that contains codes for launching nuclear weapons.

After news reports were published about Mr. DeAgazio's Facebook account, the account was deleted, along with the photographs.

Representatives of the Mar-a-Lago resort did not respond to requests for comment about Mr. DeAgazio's use of social media to post photographs of the president.

POLITICO Why Donald Trump let Michael Flynn go

By Josh Dawsey, Alex Isenstadt and Tara Palmeri

Things went downhill fast for Michael Flynn, who is seen here boarding Air Force One on Sunday. | AP Photo

Inside Donald Trump's national security adviser's final days in the White House.

Michael Flynn, President Donald Trump's national security adviser, carried on this past weekend as planned, despite reports that he had inappropriate conversations with Russia's ambassador before Trump took office. Flynn trekked to Mar-a-Lago, hopped on phone calls with foreign leaders, huddled with senior Trump officials and was in on the presidential daily briefing.

At the same time, Flynn's political future was crashing down around him: Trump's aides and top allies urged the president to get rid of Flynn, after it became clear he discussed sanctions with Russian officials and lied about it to Vice President Mike Pence and other administration officials.

Story Continued Below

By Monday night, the president had made his first big staff shake-up, causing chaos in a nascent presidency and raising further questions about the president's ability to handle national security matters in the first month of his tenure.

Though questions about Flynn's conversations -- and whether he fully communicated the details of those discussions with administration officials -- overshadowed Trump's weekend meeting with Japanese Prime

Minister Shinzō Abe, perhaps most damaging to the Trump administration was a report from The Washington Post that Trump officials were informed by the Justice Department of the issues at least several weeks before and had chosen not to act.

Trump's decision on what to do with Flynn was not easy, according to several people who spoke with him about it. The president values loyalty perhaps more than anything, and Flynn had been one of his most staunch surrogates on the campaign trail. The president saw Flynn as a fellow outsider who had a good sense of the national security challenges. "Trump liked the way he talked to him," one adviser said. "He thought Flynn knew what he was doing."

But Trump became increasingly convinced that the question of Flynn's contact with Russia wasn't going away. His top aides and advisers distrusted Flynn, according to senior White House officials and others who spoke with Trump, and Trump was concerned that the intelligence and national security community would always oppose Flynn, sources said.

"I inadvertently briefed the Vice President Elect and others with incomplete information regarding my phone calls with the Russian Ambassador," Flynn said in a resignation letter. "I have sincerely apologized to the President and the Vice President, and they have accepted my apology."

Pence was unhappy with Flynn for not telling him the truth and told the president about his displeasure, a White House official said, but said he would accept whatever decision the president made.

Kellyanne Conway, counselor to the president, who is close with Steve Bannon, his strategist, was aware of the uncertainty about Flynn's future and the concerns in Trump's orbit but tried to telegraph on TV that the adviser wasn't in trouble hoping the storm could pass, one person familiar with her thinking said.

"General Flynn does enjoy the full confidence of the president," Conway said.

Her appearance created waves in Trump's orbit, and Sean Spicer, Trump's press secretary, who has expressed displeasure about Conway to associates, immediately put out a statement that seemed to contradict her.

"The president is evaluating the situation," Spicer said soon after Conway's remarks.

One person who frequently speaks to Trump said the president was reluctant to ditch Flynn because he doesn't "like to fire people who are loyal." Even Monday evening, Trump was still pondering the decision, the person said.

"He has this reputation of being a 'you're fired' kind of guy, but he really didn't want to have that conversation," the person said.

Heading the agency in Flynn's absence will be Keith Kellogg, Flynn's chief of staff, but he is not guaranteed the job permanently, senior officials said.

Officials are searching for a permanent head and meeting with officials, including Gen. David Petraeus. Also, in the hunt to replace Flynn, according to a senior administration official, is Vice Admiral Robert Harward, who is the

frontrunner, a senior White House official said.

A number of White House and national security officials are involved in the search, including CIA Director Mike Pompeo, Defense Secretary James Mattis, Department of Homeland Security John Kelly, chief of staff Reince Priebus, chief strategist Stephen Bannon and son-in-law Jared Kushner, a senior official said.

Retired Army Gen. Barry McCaffrey, who has known Kellogg for decades, said early Tuesday that he is a "good man" who was among the earliest Trump loyalists.

But he doubted he will be a permanent replacement for Flynn.

"He won't be the selection," McCaffrey predicted, saying Flynn's permanent replacement has to be "someone with the chops needed to deal with Bannon and Miller, references to two of the president's top political advisers, Steve Bannon and Stephen Miller.

Flynn's decision to resign came after it became clear to him that he had lost the president's trust, officials said. Flynn was increasingly isolated from Trump's inner circle, and became convinced that he had little support by Monday afternoon after making a number of calls to Trump confidants and aides, according to a White House official.

Flynn was also rattled by a number of news media reports that said he was on the outs, according to a high ranking official. He "knew things weren't heading in the right direction for him and that Trump might be changing his position."

Flynn, long a controversial figure in the national security establishment,

was widely disliked by many of Trump's aides who were more aligned with the establishment wing of the party, according to several aides.

Though he was particularly close to Bannon, the president's top strategist and a philosophical and strategic adviser with a vast sway on the presidency, Bannon by the weekend had

told Flynn to "do the right thing" and resign, according to a senior White House official.

Trump spent the weekend in difficult conversations about Flynn and talked with a number of top aides on Monday, many of whom told the president to get rid of Flynn, according to several people who spoke with him.

Yet Flynn spent the weekend at Mar-a-Lago and was on the front row Monday when Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau came to the White House.

Two people close to Trump said that many in Trump's world had turned on Flynn and used the latest story to try and drive him out. Others in Trump's immediate circle

wondered "why Trump kept defending him."

Flynn seemed to take the departure in stride. The last four words of his resignation letter posted Monday night were Trump's presidential slogan: "Make America Great Again."

The Washington Post

Trump turns Mar-a-Lago Club terrace into open-air situation room

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

enthold/

It was Saturday night, and Palm Beach's tony Mar-a-Lago Club was packed. There was a wedding reception in the ballroom. There was a full house for dinner on the terrace.

And at one table on the terrace, there was the president and the leader of a major U.S. ally, hashing out a national security problem in the open air.

"Someone opened up a laptop, and at the table . . . a group of Japanese people stood around the prime minister and Donald, and they were all looking at the laptop," said Jay Weitzman, a member of President Trump's Mar-a-Lago Club and founder of the Pennsylvania-based parking management company Park America. He was sitting three tables away from Trump and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Saturday evening.

"Whoa," Weitzman remembered thinking. "What's going on?"

"Turns out, it was a missile launch," he said Monday.

As Weitzman and other patrons watched Saturday evening, Trump and Abe remained at the table and discussed their response to a ballistic missile test by North Korea. While waiters came and went — and while one club member snapped photos — the two leaders reviewed documents by the light of an aide's cellphone.

That strange scene — in which Trump turned his table into an al fresco situation room — astounded White House veterans, who were used to presidents retiring to private, secured settings to hash out such an event.

Trump became president, in part, because of Democrat Hillary Clinton's neglect of information security. During the 2016 campaign, Trump repeatedly called for Clinton to be jailed — and his crowds at rallies often chanted "Lock her up!" — for her use of a private email server to handle government

business while she was secretary of state.

Now, Trump is drawing fire from Democrats for his own seemingly loose attitude toward information security. He has continued to use an insecure cellphone, according to the New York Times. He may have left a key to classified information on his desk while visitors were in the Oval Office, according to a tweet from a Democratic senator.

And now, Trump has used his bustling club in Palm Beach, Fla., as a "winter White House," except that, unlike the actual White House, the club is full of other people.

Sean Spicer, the White House press secretary, told reporters Monday that "no classified material" was shared at the table at Mar-a-Lago and that Trump had been briefed in a secure location both before and after dinner.

The scene was first described by CNN. On Monday, Democrats blasted Trump for his handling of the moment.

North Korea test launched a ballistic missile early Sunday, Feb. 12. After news of the missile test, President Trump and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who was visiting the U.S. at the time, held a brief joint news conference and presented a united front against the ballistic missile. North Korea test launched a ballistic missile early Sunday, Feb. 12. After news of the missile test, President Trump and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who was visiting the U.S. at the time, held a brief joint news conference and presented a united front against the ballistic missile. (Reuters)

(Reuters)

"There's no excuse for letting an international crisis play out in front of a bunch of country club members like dinner theater," Rep. Nancy Pelosi (Calif.), the leader of House Democrats, wrote in a tweet.

Separately, two Senate Democrats from the Homeland Security Committee, Claire McCaskill (Mo.) and Thomas R. Carper (Del.), wrote to Defense Secretary Jim Mattis,

who oversees the agency that protects the president's communications. McCaskill and Carper said they were concerned about media reports that Trump is still using his old Android phone to send Twitter messages.

McCaskill and Carper said that if a foreign power was able to hack that phone, it could be turned into an always-on listening post in the president's pocket.

"The national security risks of compromising a smartphone used by [the president] are considerable," the senators wrote.

Last week, Sen. Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.) tweeted an Associated Press photo showing Trump with the chief executive of Intel standing by a stack of papers on Trump's desk along with a black bag and a key in sight. "Never leave a key in a classified lockbag in the presence of non-cleared people," Heinrich wrote.

It is hard to recall any other instance in recent U.S. history when the president seemed to handle an urgent national security matter in a public place.

On Sept. 11, 2001, of course, President George W. Bush learned of that day's terrorist attacks while he was reading a book to children at a Florida elementary school. Bush continued reading for nearly a half-hour before being whisked away on Air Force One to a secure location.

In Barack Obama's White House, two former aides said, a situation like the North Korean missile test might have been handled similarly: the president would be given a note with the news, then taken to a secure room to discuss a response.

Pete Souza, who was Obama's White House photographer, posted a photo Monday that showed Obama huddling with national security advisers in a private space during a 2011 trip to El Salvador.

"When we were on the road, national security discussions and head of state phone calls were conducted in a private, secure location set up on-site. Everyone

had to leave their Blackberry outside the area," Souza wrote.

The Mar-a-Lago Club, which Trump has run since 1995, includes tennis and beach facilities for its members and rents its ballroom out for weddings and galas open to nonmembers.

Trump has an apartment at the club. Club members said that the president seems at ease there, among people who have known him for years — and away from the protests and stresses of his new job. "He's in a safe space," said Mar-a-Lago member Robin Bernstein, an insurance executive.

Saturday night, as guests streamed into Mar-a-Lago for dinner and the wedding reception, a parking lot near the club had been converted into a security-check area for vehicles entering the estate. A string of BMWs, Mercedes and other high-end vehicles were backed up waiting to get through the checkpoint, which was staffed by Secret Service agents and officers from the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office.

Inside the club, Trump and Abe entered the dining terrace to a standing ovation, club members told The Washington Post. The two leaders and their wives sat down on the noisy terrace, among other diners.

Richard DeAgazio, a retired investor and club member from the Boston area, was about six tables away. Already that day, his status as a Mar-a-Lago member had given him unprecedented access to the president: He had snapped pictures of Trump and Abe golfing and taken a photo with White House strategist Stephen K. Bannon.

During dinner, DeAgazio got a text: a friend asking him if he was aware of the North Korean missile test.

He looked over at the president's table.

"That's when I saw things changing, you know," DeAgazio recalled in a telephone interview. DeAgazio said a group of staffers surrounded the two world leaders: "The prime

minister's staff sort of surrounded him, and they had a little powwow."

As Trump and Abe turned their dinner table into an impromptu situation room, DeAgazio continued taking pictures, and he posted them on Facebook that night.

[Should President Trump be spending weekends at Mar-a-Lago?]

"The President receiving the news about the Missile incident from North Korea on Japan with the Prime Minister sitting next to him," DeAgazio wrote as the caption for a photo he posted on Facebook at 9:07 p.m. Eastern time Saturday.

"HOLY MOLY !!!" De Agazio wrote later, posting more photos of the scene. "Wow ... the center of the action!!!"

DeAgazio told The Post that after Trump and Abe had spoken for a few minutes, they left the open

terrace and spent about 10 minutes in private before conducting a joint news conference at about 10:30 p.m. Later, he said, Trump and first lady Melania Trump returned to listen to music on the terrace, which faces the Intracoastal Waterway, and shake hands and schmooze with members and guests at the club — all of whom had paid Trump's business to be there (or been paid-for by their hosts).

DeAgazio said he was impressed with how the president handled the situation.

"There wasn't any panicked look. Most of the people [on the terrace] didn't even realize what was happening," DeAgazio said. "I thought he handled it very calmly, and very presidentially."

[Trump ran a campaign based on intelligence security. That's not how he's governing.]

Weitzman, the parking garage entrepreneur, said he didn't notice any weariness or concern in the president's face, even after the news from North Korea. He said Trump was jovial: The president, for instance, complimented Weitzman's son-in-law on his recent weight loss.

"It's amazing," Weitzman said. "You know, the president of the United States comes over and says, 'You lost a little weight. How ya doing?'"

DeAgazio, the Boston retiree, said he was impressed that Trump had not gotten up from the table immediately when the North Korean news broke.

Politics newsletter

The big stories and commentary shaping the day.

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"He chooses to be out on the terrace, with the members. It just shows that he's a man of the people," DeAgazio said.

Membership at the Mar-a-Lago Club now requires a \$200,000 initiation fee — a fee that increased by \$100,000 after Trump was elected.

DeAgazio said he wasn't worried about the national security implications of Trump's al fresco discussion with Abe. He said he was sure they had not been overheard.

"You don't hear anything. You can't hear" because of the background music and other diners' chatter, DeAgazio said. "I mean, I can barely hear what's going on at my table."

John Wagner, Philip Bump and Abby Phillip contributed to this report.

**The
Washington
Post**

Justice Department warned White House that Flynn could be vulnerable to Russian blackmail, officials say

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

The acting attorney general informed the Trump White House late last month that she believed Michael Flynn had misled senior administration officials about the nature of his communications with the Russian ambassador to the United States, and warned that the national security adviser was potentially vulnerable to Russian blackmail, current and former U.S. officials said.

The message, delivered by Sally Q. Yates and a senior career national security official to the White House counsel, was prompted by concerns that Flynn, when asked about his calls and texts with the Russian diplomat, had told Vice - President-elect Mike Pence and others that he had not discussed the Obama administration sanctions on Russia for its interference in the 2016 election, the officials said. It is unclear what the White House counsel, Donald McGahn, did with the information.

Flynn resigned Monday night in the wake of revelations about his contacts with the Russian ambassador.

Checkpoint newsletter

Military, defense and security at home and abroad.

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In the waning days of the Obama administration, James R. Clapper

Jr., who was the director of national intelligence, and John Brennan, the CIA director at the time, shared Yates's concerns and concurred with her recommendation to inform the Trump White House. They feared that "Flynn had put himself in a compromising position" and thought that Pence had a right to know that he had been misled, according to one of the officials, who, like others, spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence matters.

A senior Trump administration official said before Flynn's resignation that the White House was aware of the matter, adding that "we've been working on this for weeks."

The current and former officials said that although they believed that Pence was misled about the contents of Flynn's communications with the Russian ambassador, they couldn't rule out that Flynn was acting with the knowledge of others in the transition.

The FBI, Yates, Clapper and Brennan declined to comment on the matter.

In a Feb. 8 interview with The Washington Post, Flynn categorically denied discussing sanctions with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak, repeating public assertions made in January by top Trump officials. One day after the interview, Flynn revised his account, telling The Post through a spokesman that he "couldn't be

certain that the topic never came up."

Two officials said a main topic of the relevant call was the sanctions. Officials also said there was no evidence that Russia had attempted to exploit the discrepancy between public statements by Trump officials and what Flynn had discussed.

[National security adviser Flynn discussed sanctions with Russian ambassador]

Flynn told The Post earlier this month that he first met Kislyak in 2013, when Flynn was director of the Defense Intelligence Agency and made a trip to Moscow.

U.S. intelligence reports during the 2016 presidential campaign showed that Kislyak was in touch with Flynn, officials said. Communications between the two continued after Trump's victory on Nov. 8, according to officials with access to intelligence reports on the matter.

Kislyak, in a brief interview with The Post, confirmed having contacts with Flynn before and after the election, but he declined to say what was discussed.

For Yates and other officials, concerns about the communications peaked in the days after the Obama administration on Dec. 29 announced measures to punish Russia for what it said was the Kremlin's interference in the election in an attempt to help Trump.

After the sanctions were rolled out, the Obama administration braced itself for the Russian retaliation. To the surprise of many U.S. officials, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced on Dec. 30 that there would be no response. Trump praised the decision on Twitter.

Intelligence analysts began to search for clues that could help explain Putin's move. The search turned up Kislyak's communications, which the FBI routinely monitors, and the phone call in question with Flynn, a retired Army lieutenant general with years of intelligence experience.

From that call and subsequent intercepts, FBI agents wrote a secret report summarizing Flynn's discussions with Kislyak.

Yates, then the deputy attorney general, considered Flynn's comments in the intercepted call to be "highly significant" and "potentially illegal," according to an official familiar with her thinking.

Yates and other intelligence officials suspected that Flynn could be in violation of an obscure U.S. statute known as the Logan Act, which bars U.S. citizens from interfering in diplomatic disputes with another country.

At the same time, Yates and other law enforcement officials knew there was little chance of bringing against Flynn a case related to the Logan Act, a statute that has never been used in a prosecution. In addition to the legal and political hurdles, Yates and other officials

were aware of an FBI investigation looking at possible contacts between Trump associates and Russia, which now included the Flynn-Kislyak communications.

Word of the calls leaked out on Jan. 12 in an op-ed by Post columnist David Ignatius. "What did Flynn say, and did it undercut U.S. sanctions?" Ignatius wrote, citing the Logan Act.

The next day, a Trump transition official told The Post, "I can tell you that during his call, sanctions were not discussed whatsoever."

White House press secretary Sean Spicer, in a conference call with reporters on Jan. 13, said that the conversation between Flynn and Kislyak had "centered on the logistics" of a post-inauguration call between Trump and Putin. "That was it, plain and simple," Spicer added.

On Jan. 15, Pence was asked about the phone call during an appearance on CBS's "Face the Nation." Citing a conversation he had with Flynn, Pence said the incoming national security adviser and Kislyak "did not discuss anything having to do with the

United States' decision to expel diplomats or impose censure against Russia."

Before the Pence statement on Jan. 15, top Justice Department and intelligence officials had discussed whether the incoming Trump White House should be notified about the contents of the Flynn-Kislyak communications.

Pence's statement on CBS made the issue more urgent, current and former officials said, because U.S. intelligence agencies had reason to believe that Russia was aware that Flynn and Kislyak had discussed sanctions in their December call, contrary to public statements.

The internal debate over how to handle the intelligence on Flynn and Kislyak came to a head on Jan. 19, Obama's last full day in office.

Yates, Clapper and Brennan argued for briefing the incoming administration so the new president could decide how to deal with the matter. The officials discussed options, including telling Pence, the incoming White House counsel, the incoming chief of staff or Trump himself.

FBI Director James B. Comey initially opposed notification, citing concerns that it could complicate the agency's investigation.

Clapper and Brennan left their positions when Trump was sworn in, but Yates stayed on as acting attorney general until Jan. 30, when Trump fired her for refusing to defend his executive order temporarily barring refugees and people from seven majority-Muslim countries — an action that had been challenged in court.

A turning point came after Jan. 23, when Spicer, in his first official media briefing, again was asked about Flynn's communications with Kislyak. Spicer said that he had talked to Flynn about the issue "again last night." There was just "one call," Spicer said. And it covered four subjects: a plane crash that claimed the lives of a Russian military choir; Christmas greetings; Russian-led talks over the Syrian civil war; and the logistics of setting up a call between Putin and Trump. Spicer said that was the extent of the conversation.

Yates again raised the issue with Comey, who now backed away from his opposition to informing the

White House. Yates and the senior career national security official spoke to McGahn, the White House counsel, who didn't respond Monday to a request for comment.

Trump has declined to publicly back his national security adviser after the news broke.

On Monday afternoon, Kellyanne Conway, counselor to the president, said Trump had "full confidence" in Flynn. Minutes later, however, Spicer delivered a contradictory statement to reporters.

"The president is evaluating the situation," Spicer's statement read. "He's speaking to Vice President Pence relative to the conversation the vice president had with Gen. Flynn and also speaking to various other people about what he considers the single most important subject there is: Our national security."

And then late Monday, Flynn resigned.

Karen DeYoung and Greg Miller contributed to this report.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

COMMENTS

Editorial : Eavesdropping on Michael Flynn

Feb. 13, 2017
7:19 p.m. ET 297

A White House spokesman said Monday that President Trump is "evaluating the situation" regarding national security adviser Michael Flynn over his pre-inaugural contacts with Russian officials. (See the editorial nearby.) While the President is at it, how about asking if the spooks listening to Mr. Flynn obeyed the law?

Mr. Flynn is a retired general who ran the Defense Intelligence Agency, so surely he knew that his Dec. 29 call to Russian ambassador Sergey Kislyak would be subject to electronic surveillance. U.S. intelligence services routinely get orders from the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court to monitor foreign officials. But under U.S. law, when they get those orders they are supposed to use "minimization" procedures that don't let them listen to the communications of

Americans who may be caught in such eavesdropping. That is, they are supposed to protect the identity and speech of innocent Americans. Yet the Washington Post, which broke the story, says it spoke to multiple U.S. officials claiming to know what Mr. Flynn said on that call.

The questions someone in the White House should ask the National Security Agency is why it didn't use minimization procedures

to protect Mr. Flynn? Or did it also have a court order to listen to Mr. Flynn, and how did it justify that judicial request?

If Mr. Flynn was under U.S. intelligence surveillance, then Mr. Trump should know why, and at this point so should the American public. Maybe there's an innocent explanation, but the Trump White House needs to know what's going on with Mr. Flynn and U.S. spies.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

COMMENTS

Editorial : White House Disruption

Feb. 13, 2017
7:23 p.m. ET 71

President Trump came to Washington promising to disrupt a failing government, but to succeed he will have to stop the disruption inside his own White House. He could start by giving his chief of staff the authority to act like a real chief of staff.

That runs counter to Mr. Trump's preferred theory of management, which by all accounts is to encourage multiple competing views and a walk-in-anytime Oval Office policy. The White House has at least six different power centers, by our conservative count, and they compete for influence, which often

means being the last person to speak to the President on an issue.

Vice President Mike Pence ran the transition and has a say in personnel, among other things. Strategist Stephen Bannon and his policy mate Stephen Miller share Mr. Trump's fondness for shocking the Beltway bourgeoisie and wrote the botched executive order on immigration.

Son-in-law Jared Kushner appears to play on any issue he wants. Kellyanne Conway is a presidential favorite who takes the media spears on the cable shows. Gary Cohn runs the National Economic Council and is already muscling out competing voices on taxes and finance and blocked supply-siders

Steve Moore and Larry Kudlow from senior White House jobs.

Then there's Reince Priebus, the nominal chief of staff who is supposed to impose order on the joint but hasn't been given the power to do so. And now he's taking the blame, unfairly in our view, for White House mistakes.

The reality is that Presidents get the White House they want, which reflects their governing style. Mr. Trump favors shock-and-awe politics that is constantly on offense. This fits the Bannon method, but the lack of even basic vetting for the executive order led to public confusion and defeat in court.

Mr. Trump is said to have since asked Mr. Priebus to impose order

on the White House policy process, and the pace of mayhem has slowed down. Neil Gorsuch's Supreme Court nomination was the best moment of his Presidency, and the meetings this weekend and Monday with the Prime Ministers of Japan and Canada seem to have gone well.

But now come reports that national security adviser Michael Flynn talked about sanctions with Russia's ambassador to the U.S. before the inauguration. Mr. Flynn denied it, and Mr. Pence made that case in public on his behalf. But media reports claim that intelligence sources who monitored the conversation say they did discuss sanctions. (See editorial nearby.)

If Mr. Flynn lied to his colleagues, then Mr. Trump will have to decide if that's the kind of White House he wants to run. Mr. Pence will have been made to look foolish, and Mr. Flynn's word

won't be good for much on Capital Hill, the Pentagon or the rest of the White House staff.

The larger point for Mr. Trump is that these needless dramas sap

White House and public attention from the agenda he must implement to succeed as President. Mr. Trump will have to give Mr. Priebus the authority to impose some discipline on the White House cacophony,

including Messrs. Bannon and Flynn, or he needs to find someone else who can. Credibility squandered in the early weeks of a Presidency is hard to get back.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

In Donald Trump's Fourth Week, a Chance for a Reboot

Gerald F. Seib

Updated Feb. 13,

2017 10:53 a.m. ET

This is the fourth week of the Trump presidency. And a good time for a reboot.

The first three weeks have been filled with enough drama and controversy to last three months—perhaps three years—in a normal presidency. The idea that nothing ever happens in Washington has been shattered, but at an unusually high price.

Conversations with those who wish the new administration well and those who wish it ill offer the president strikingly similar advice at this point: Slow down. Stop acting as if everything that came before is flawed, by definition. Stop looking for chances to make enemies and make a few more friends.

And perhaps find some more people with deeper governing experience. When Ronald Reagan hit a crisis point in his presidency, he brought in one of Washington's most experienced hands, former Sen. Howard Baker. He stabilized Mr. Reagan's presidency, and his legacy.

It's possible that a turning point already was reached Saturday night, when campaign bluster met cold reality. That moment arrived when North Korea tested a medium-range ballistic missile precisely as Mr. Trump was hosting the leader of a nation directly

threatened by Korea's nuclear antics, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

Mr. Trump's reaction was strikingly different from two weeks earlier, when a statement by Mexico's president that he didn't intend to pay for a border wall brought an instant, campaign-like Twitter rebuke and the cancellation of a carefully planned meeting. This time, the reaction was a careful and subdued joint statement of "100%" solidarity with an important ally, Japan, which Mr. Trump had said during the campaign would have to do more to fend for itself.

And then—nothing more. No offhand Twitter comment, no warnings, no provocative aside. There was a simple message, and it was delivered without static.

During the long presidential campaign, by contrast, Mr. Trump found that unpredictable behavior, even the cultivation of chaos, was his friend. That approach kept his opponents guessing and prevented them, or the media, from boring in on any one controversy for too long, because another one inevitably was just around the corner.

For most of the first three weeks, the presidential pattern was similar. Mr. Trump moved almost frenetically from oil pipelines to health care to trade deals to border walls to financial deregulation to Iranian sanctions to an exploding immigration executive order, along the way picking fights with Mexico,

car companies, the pharmaceutical industry, Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer, the news media and Nordstrom Inc.

All that undoubtedly pleased his core supporters, many of whom share his list of enemies and wanted, more than anything, a simple sense that Mr. Trump would end stasis and gridlock in Washington. But that approach hasn't done much to expand his base of support, within Washington or around the country. That's been illustrated in polls finding his level of approval historically low for a new president, and resembling his level of support in the campaign.

More than that, the approach has left his Republican allies in Congress struggling to figure out the focus of the new administration. What are its top priorities? What has happened to the goals that most of Mr. Trump's fellow Republicans put at the top of their priority list: tax reform and a tax cut?

On other fronts, the exact contours of Trump policy have been hard to discern among a series of reversals. The president questioned America's longstanding one-China policy, and then reaffirmed it in a phone call with Chinese President Xi Jinping. He suggested in the campaign he would ditch the Obama administration's nuclear deal with Iran, but pledged in a phone call with Saudi Arabian King Salman only to "rigorously" enforce it. He has said the Affordable Care Act—

Obamacare—would be repealed and replaced quickly and simultaneously, and then said replacing it might take more than a year.

Throughout, the corrosive idea that those who disagree with Mr. Trump should be not merely called out but attacked, personally, has persisted.

All this has given Democrats ample excuse to simply oppose the new president on all fronts, after initially seeming to find areas—trade and infrastructure most notably—where they might work with him.

This is a dangerous strategy for Democrats. All-out opposition on all fronts may please angry activists now, but it isn't a sustainable approach for four years. More important, it does nothing to win back those working-class voters Mr. Trump took away from them in the 2016 election. Democrats will face their own moment for a reboot.

As that suggests, the power of the impulses that make up Trumpism, and that drove Mr. Trump to the White House, remains strong. If Washington had been working beautifully, there would have been no rationale for a Trump candidacy.

Yet translating a winning campaign message into effective governance is hard, as Mr. Trump has learned over the last three weeks.

Write to Gerald F. Seib at jerry.seib@wsj.com

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Steven Mnuchin Is Confirmed as Treasury Secretary

Nick Timiraos

Feb. 13, 2017

7:36 p.m. ET

WASHINGTON—The Senate confirmed financier Steven Mnuchin as the next Treasury secretary in a 53-47 vote Monday evening, placing him in a leading position to advance President Donald Trump's plans to revamp financial regulation and the U.S. tax code.

Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia was the only Democrat to join with all of the Senate's Republicans to approve the nomination of Mr. Mnuchin, who was sworn in on Monday night.

Mr. Mnuchin, who served as Mr. Trump's campaign-finance

chairman last year, spent 17 years at Goldman Sachs Group Inc. before leaving in 2002 to work in the hedge-fund industry. He co-founded Dune Capital Management LP and expanded into the entertainment business, financing Hollywood movies.

Mr. Mnuchin's role buying and rehabilitating the failed IndyMac Bank, later rebranded OneWest Bank, became a key focus of his confirmation battle. He and Republican backers said the financial-crisis era acquisition from the U.S. government demonstrated his business savvy.

Democrats opposed Mr. Mnuchin, 54 years old, citing the bank's involvement moving thousands of

defaulted mortgages through foreclosure. They also questioned whether the bank had done enough new lending to under-served markets after the financial crisis.

"A president's cabinet provides insight into how they'll govern and what their priorities will be. The president has shown his hand by selecting the most anti-working-class cabinet that we have ever seen," said Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D., N.Y.) on the Senate floor Monday.

The delay between presidential administrations in filling the Treasury post was the longest in the nation's history, said Senate Finance Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch (R., Utah). "None of the

allegations my colleagues have raised can stand even a modest amount of scrutiny," he said.

The lack of bipartisan support for a Treasury secretary is unusual. Previously, the closest vote for the job came in 2009 for President Barack Obama's first Treasury secretary, Timothy Geithner, who won confirmation on a 60-34 vote with 10 votes from Republicans. His nomination became controversial after disclosures that Mr. Geithner failed to pay some employment taxes in a timely manner.

One question now centers on how Mr. Mnuchin will be able to work with both parties to advance an overhaul of the tax code, an infrastructure-spending package

and a rewrite of financial regulations passed by Congress in 2010.

Democrats have already pressed Mr. Mnuchin to explain how he will uphold a pledge delivered after his nomination was announced last fall to revamp the tax code in a way that provides "no absolute tax cut" for the upper class, a position that would appear very difficult to reconcile with the tax plan Mr. Trump unveiled last year.

Mr. Mnuchin faces several immediate tasks. The government's borrowing limit is suspended through March 15, after which it must be raised or suspended again. Independent analysts believe the department can

use emergency measures for a few months to prevent the country from being unable to pay certain bills.

On the international front, the Treasury Department will be at the locus of decision-making on any changes to sanctions, including against North Korea following a ballistic-missile test last weekend. And officials will prepare this spring the semiannual report to Congress that would identify whether U.S. trading partners, such as China, are manipulating their currencies.

Mr. Mnuchin will also need to ramp up hiring at the agencies for dozens of appointed positions, many of which require Senate confirmation

that could keep those slots vacant for weeks or months.

Mr. Mnuchin is expected to tap David Malpass, the former chief economist at Bear Stearns, for the Treasury's top international affairs post. Jim Donovan, a senior executive at Goldman Sachs, is being considered for a senior position overseeing domestic finance. Drew Maloney, a Washington lobbyist who is the top government affairs executive at energy supplier Hess Corp., is being considered for the top legislative affairs post at the department, according to people familiar with the matter.

Mr. Mnuchin will bring on another campaign official, Eli Miller, as his chief of staff. He also has recruited several senior advisers, including former BlackRock executive Craig Phillips and Reed Rubinstein, a Washington lawyer who previously held a top post at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Shannon McGahn, a top aide to the Republican leadership of the House Financial Services Committee, will also join the department.

Write to Nick Timiraos at nick.timiraos@wsj.com

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Trump Travel Ban Likely Unconstitutional, Federal Judge in Virginia Finds

Aruna Viswanatha

Feb. 13, 2017 9:49 p.m. ET

A federal judge in Virginia said late Monday that President Donald Trump's executive order on immigration was likely unconstitutional and issued a preliminary injunction blocking part of the administration's efforts to restrict entry to the United States.

With her ruling, U.S. District Judge Leonie Brinkema added another judicial roadblock to the president that is similar to court orders issued elsewhere, including a nationwide ruling issued Thursday by the Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals based in San Francisco.

Judge Brinkema said the government has provided "no evidence" to justify the order, which temporarily barred visitors and immigrants from seven majority-Muslim countries. The

administration argues it was needed to stop terrorists from entering the country.

Critics say the executive order discriminates against Muslims and is an extension of Mr. Trump's call on the campaign trail for a "total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States."

Judge Brinkema cited similar comments in her order. "The 'Muslim ban' was a centerpiece of the president's campaign for months," and is still available on his website, she wrote.

The government has argued the executive order is a valid exercise of the president's authority to control immigration. But Judge Brinkema said that while Mr. Trump may have broad power over immigration, he still must operate within "the constraints of the

Constitution, including the Bill of Rights.

"Maximum power does not mean absolute power," she wrote.

The case was brought by the Virginia attorney general's office.

Although both the Ninth Circuit ruling and Judge Brinkema's decision take aim at the executive order, they differ in important ways.

The Ninth Circuit ruling was national in scope, and it covered additional parts of the order that suspended the U.S. refugee program for four months and blocked refugees from Syria indefinitely. In contrast, Judge Brinkema's ruling covers only Virginia, and only the section of the order suspending entry from the seven specified countries.

The Ninth Circuit also focused on the question of whether the executive order violated due

process, saying those challenging the order were likely to succeed in arguing that it did. Judge Brinkema, by contrast, tackled the issue of religious discrimination, and says the plaintiffs are likely to win on that.

Neither ruling, however, amounts to a direct decision on the underlying legality of the executive order. Instead, they suspend the measure while its fundamental merits can be considered by the courts, a process that could take months.

The result is a complicated legal landscape, though one that has clearly been unfriendly to Mr. Trump's order so far. The White House has said it is reviewing its options, including issuing a new order, in light of its setbacks in court.

Write to Aruna Viswanatha at Aruna.Viswanatha@wsj.com

The New York Times

What's Next for Trump's Travel Ban? Justice Dept. and States Weigh Options

Adam Liptak

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department said in a brief filed on Monday that it would continue to defend President Trump's targeted travel ban in the federal appeals court in San Francisco, which on Thursday refused to reinstate it.

The department did not say whether it would try to appeal that ruling to the Supreme Court. But its silence on the matter suggested that the Trump administration will not pursue an immediate appeal.

The administration had asked a three-judge appeals court panel for prompt action to avert a national security emergency — and was

rebuffed last week — after a trial judge had blocked the ban, allowing refugees and visitors from seven Muslim-majority nations into the United States. The Justice Department has moved at a more deliberate pace since its loss last Thursday, an indication that it will not file an emergency application in the Supreme Court.

The administration may have decided that the chances of success at the Supreme Court are poor. For the last year, the court has had just eight members, and a 4-to-4 tie would leave the appeals court ruling in place. It would take five votes to overturn the ruling, and it appears unlikely that any of the court's four more liberal justices

would support the administration's position.

Continue reading the main story

The Justice Department asked the trial judge

The Justice Department asked the trial judge, Judge James L. Robart, of the Federal District Court in Seattle, to "postpone any further proceedings" in his court while the appeals court, the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, considers whether to rehear the case.

Lawyers for the states of Washington and Minnesota, which are challenging the ban, urged Judge Robart to order the parties to

start exchanging information in preparation for trial.

"Given the gravity of the states' constitutional allegations, defendants' stated national security concerns, and the public interests at stake, the states respectfully submit that discovery should proceed without delay," Noah G. Purcell, Washington's solicitor general, wrote.

At a hearing on Monday afternoon in Seattle, Michelle Bennett, a Justice Department lawyer, urged Judge Robart to halt proceedings in the trial court.

Judge Robart said he was surprised to hear her make that argument, in

light of a statement from Mr. Trump after the Ninth Circuit's ruling. "See you in court," Judge Robart said, quoting a Twitter post by Mr. Trump, which drew a laugh in the courtroom.

"I'm not prepared to slow this down," Judge Robart said. "There is a very sensitive time issue."

Unless the appeals court or the Supreme Court acts, Judge Robart's Feb. 3 temporary restraining order, which blocked the key provisions of targeted travel ban, will remain in place. The ban, one of the first executive orders Mr. Trump issued after taking office, suspended worldwide refugee entry into the United States. It also suspended travel from seven Muslim-majority nations — Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen — for 90 days.

On Thursday, a three-judge panel of the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, in San Francisco, refused to stay Judge

Robart's order.

On Friday, an unidentified appeals court judge called for a vote on whether the three-judge panel's ruling should be reheard by a larger panel of the Ninth Circuit. Those briefs are due Thursday.

If a majority of the court's active judges voted to rehear the case, it would typically be considered by an 11-member panel made up of the circuit's chief judge and 10 judges chosen at random.

Rehearing motions filed by parties and requests for votes on rehearings requested by judges are not particularly unusual. The Ninth Circuit rehears decisions issued by three-judge panels 15 to 25 times a year, the court said.

The Ninth Circuit has 25 active judges, 18 of whom were appointed by Democratic presidents.

In a separate order, the three-judge panel last Thursday set a schedule for submitting briefs in the underlying appeal. (The question

decided on Thursday was whether to stay the trial court order. The question at issue in the new briefs is whether that ruling was correct.) The last of those briefs is due March 29.

Judge Robart, meanwhile, was considering on Monday what should happen in his court in the meantime.

Last Friday, he asked the states and the Justice Department to file briefs on whether there was a need for further proceedings in his court. Ordinarily, after a temporary restraining order is issued, the parties would file additional briefs and perhaps submit evidence on whether to make the order more permanent by entering a preliminary injunction.

Before the Ninth Circuit ruled, Judge Robart ordered the parties to file those briefs starting on Feb. 9 and ending on Feb. 17.

But the Ninth Circuit's ruling complicated matters by treating the

order as a preliminary injunction, suggesting that there was nothing more for Judge Robart to do for now.

Mr. Purcell said that was the right interpretation of the appeals court's ruling.

"In short, because the Ninth Circuit has construed the Feb. 3 order to grant all the preliminary relief the states would have sought through a motion for a preliminary injunction, no additional briefing or evidence is required in the district court on the propriety of preliminary relief," Mr. Purcell wrote.

The Justice Department, in a brief signed by Ms. Bennett, did not take a firm position on that question, saying only that "further proceedings in the Ninth Circuit will likely inform whether additional proceedings on a preliminary injunction motion are necessary in the district court."

The Washington Post

Cohen : Trump, like Nixon, is incapable of change

<http://www.facebook.com/RichardCohenColumn>

Sooner or later in any administration, Casey Stengel comes to mind. The great Yankee manager, ending his career with the then-hapless New York Mets, looked down the dugout one dismal day in 1962 and asked, "Can't anybody here play this game?" The answer for the Mets was no. It is the same now for the Trump administration.

Michael Flynn presides over a National Security Council that is widely seen as dysfunctional. Flynn, ousted from his previous job for an allegedly chaotic management style, has apparently not lost his touch. Now he has been accused of lying about whether he had discussions with the Russian ambassador about relaxing sanctions — before Donald Trump was inaugurated and while President Barack Obama was imposing new sanctions for messing around in our elections. In this administration, it seems, only the top guy is permitted to lie.

Reince Priebus, too, is under fire. The White House chief of staff is being criticized for the rollout of Executive Order 13769, which caught Cabinet members, Congress, the nation and foreign countries by surprise. It restricted

entry into the United States from seven majority-Muslim countries. Demonstrations quickly erupted, and the courts intervened. In the end, the executive order may well pass constitutional muster, but nothing can surpass it in confusion, chaos and sheer cruelty.

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The best conversations on The Washington Post

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Stephen K. Bannon, just recently of Breitbart News and now, suddenly, the White House's top strategic thinker, apparently appointed himself to the National Security Council. From there, he wages battles furiously against the status quo in just about everything. A recent Time magazine profile of him reveals a fervid ideologue who thinks the next big war is just over the horizon, probably with the Muslim world. Back when he was running Breitbart, he said of Islam: "Our big belief, one of our central organizing principles at the site, is that we're at war."

Trump speaks before he thinks and, like some teenager with a phone hidden under the covers, indulges in name-calling via Twitter. In the presidential campaign, he publicly disparaged U.S. District Court Judge Gonzalo Curiel, who was

overseeing lawsuits against Trump University, for being of Mexican heritage. Now, he knocks a federal appeals court for upholding a timeout on his executive order.

None of this should be surprising. Trump's genius as a manager is apparent only to himself. He is inattentive and dishonest. He insults rather than consults and has spent an inordinate amount of time at his golf courses. Already he has reversed himself on the one-China policy and has sent mixed signals about Russia. He trashes trade agreements as if ending them will reverse globalization, and he responds to complexity with tweets. He would deal with Chicago's murder rate by sending in the feds. To do what exactly?

We wait in vain for the promised pivot. It will not happen. At the age of 70, Donald Trump is not about to grow up. He ran a dishonest and tawdry presidential campaign. He continues to disparage John McCain's heroism and public service, characterizing him as a loser. In spirit, it is no different than his criticism of the Gold Star parents of Humayun Khan, who lost his life while serving in Iraq. Trump felt that while the Khans had sacrificed, so had he — in building a business. If there is a Guinness Book of Narcissism, this is in it.

It is not only Stengel who comes to mind. So does Richard Nixon. He, too, assembled a coterie of zealots who were itching to make (domestic) war on anyone and everyone. For a time, the old Nixon was forgotten. A new one was declared. Supposedly gone was the mudslinger of yore, the pol with the twitchy insecurities and a metastasizing inventory of resentments. But the old Nixon was always lurking.

In the end, Nixon had to quit. I believe Trump will meet a similar fate, but things have changed since Nixon's time. The Senate, which in the end gave Nixon the fatal nudge, is not the institution it once was. (Where have you gone, Barry Goldwater?) As for the so-called mainstream media, it has nowhere near its old influence nor its old audience. Little works as it once did. Even the electoral college, designed to keep a Trump out of the White House, became the vehicle for his victory.

The remedy remains political courage — a determination, particularly by congressional Republicans, to reject the normalization of Trump and his ways. Trump will not change. The question is whether an opportunistic and supine Congress will.

Read more from Richard Cohen's archive.

The Washington Post

Gerson : A White House where no one is in charge

By Michael Gerson

In early January, House Speaker Paul Ryan met on the issue of tax reform with a delegation from the president-elect. Attending were future chief strategist and senior counselor Stephen K. Bannon, future chief of staff Reince Priebus, future senior adviser Jared Kushner, future counselor Kellyanne Conway and future senior policy adviser Stephen Miller. As the meeting began, Ryan pointedly asked, "Who's in charge?"

Silence.

It is still the right question. Former officials with deep knowledge of the presidency describe Donald Trump's White House staff as top-heavy, with five or six power centers and little vertical structure. "The desire to be a big shot is overrunning any sense of team," says one experienced Republican. "This will cause terrible dysfunction, distraction, disloyalty and leaks."

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Trump has run a family business but never a large organization. Nor has he seen such an organization as an employee. "Trump," says another former official, "is ill-suited to appreciate the importance of a coherent chain of command and

decision-making process. On the contrary, his instincts run instead toward multiple mini power centers, which rewards competing aggressively for Trump's favor."

This seems to be the dynamic unfolding on the weekend political talk shows. These have traditionally been venues for an administration to communicate with media and political elites (whose religion dedicates Sunday morning to the gods of policy, scandal and pith). But Trump surrogates are clearly appealing to a different audience: an audience of one, who may well tweet them a nice pat on the back. The goal — as Miller demonstrated over the weekend — is not to persuade or even explain. It is to confidently repeat Trump's most absurd or unsubstantiated claims from the previous week. This time it was electorally decisive voter fraud in New Hampshire (for which there is no evidence). Next weekend it could be the harm done by vaccination, or the possible murder of Antonin Scalia (both of which Trump has raised in the past). It is the main function of Trump surrogates to restate Trump's "alternative facts" in a steady voice.

It is hard for me (and everyone else outside the White House) to know exactly what is going on in the West Wing. Leaks may provide a distorted picture. But, in this case, there have been an awful lot of

them, clearly from the highest levels. And they uniformly reveal a management structure and culture in which the highest goal is not to display competence or to display creativity but to display loyalty, defined as sucking up. The philosophy of competing power centers has, indeed, produced terrible dysfunction, distraction, disloyalty and leaks. Trump's failed and frightening executive order on immigration is exhibit A. But now the National Security Council seems to be in a full-scale crisis of purpose, thoroughly demoralized and trying to discern American policy from presidential tweets. With the real NSC badly weakened by the travails of the national security adviser, it seems that Bannon is developing a shadow NSC to serve his well-developed nationalist agenda.

The president may thrive in chaos, but the presidency does not. A president needs aides who will give him honest information and analysis, not compete for his favor. This may even involve checking a president's mistaken instincts. There will always be competing power centers in the West Wing. But the White House runs best when there is, according to a former White House official, "a strong chief of staff, empowered by the president to exercise absolute control over all logistics, decision-making processes and execution.

He can have as many advisers as he wants, but until one person has full control over the process, chaos will persist."

What does it mean to have a president who seems so hungry for affirmation and so influenced by slights? I recall (from working in George W. Bush's White House) the briefing material that senior staff received before international visits. It always included detailed personality profiles of foreign leaders. Surely other intelligence services prepare the same way. Might Trump's impulsive (and perhaps compulsive) reactions be manipulated by enemies and allies, either to allay or to enrage?

For whatever reason, Trump sees benefits in surrounding himself with a swarm of disorder and disruption. So far, that has helped produce relatively small, self-made crises. But what about the big ones caused by the relentless flow of events? The president will face challenges of amazing complexity that must be addressed in real time, without do-overs. Will the president be able to act swiftly, on the best information and the best advice?

Silence.

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



Editorial : Repair and retain Obamacare

The Editorial Board, USA

TODAY

When will America get a new healthcare plan? President Donald Trump is now saying it could be a year from now. Aaron Dickens reports. Buzz60

Medical students protest in support of Obamacare in New York on Jan. 30, 2017. (Photo: Justin Lane, epa)

When President Obama was in office, Republicans made a mantra of their call to "repeal and replace" his signature health care program. But now that they are actually in position to do something, they're flummoxed.

They have no plan for a replacement anywhere near as robust as Obamacare. They can't even agree on what a significant rollback would look like.

So might we suggest an alternative approach? It starts by treating Obamacare the same way that a doctor would treat a patient: First, do no harm.

Republicans know they would pay a huge political price if they kill Obamacare and leave millions of people without health coverage, including for addiction treatment in the midst of an opioid epidemic. To avoid that, the Republicans should adopt a new mantra. Rather than "repeal and replace," they should preach "retain and repair."

Obamacare is very complicated, but two facts are clear. One is that it has provided insurance coverage to 20 million people while having a benign effect on overall health care prices. The other is that it is in trouble in some states, where too few young people (and too many unhealthy people) are signing up. That's causing insurance companies to hike prices or pull up stakes altogether.

Even without any action by Congress, the Trump administration could take several steps to undermine the Affordable Care Act, and several steps to help shore it up.

Waiving or watering down the mandate that all individuals have insurance would be devastating.

One reason too few young people sign up is that Congress set the penalties for not having coverage too low. If those penalties are reduced or eliminated, healthy people would have little incentive to buy insurance until they get sick.

On the other hand, the Trump administration is said to be considering some ideas that would meet the do-no-harm standard and might actually help.

One is to slightly raise insurance costs for people near retirement while lowering them for young people. The law says premiums for older customers can be no more than three times as much as those for young people. In reality, the average 60-year-old consumes more than three times as much as the average twentysomething, so the limit forces young people to subsidize their elders. Without any legislation, the Trump team believes it could raise the ratio to 3.49-to-1 (on the grounds that 3.49 rounds down to three).

Trump officials are also said to be considering cutting back on some grace periods that insurance

companies say are being gamed by savvy customers. One idea would clamp down on people who are late on their payments. Another would tighten the requirement that people show documentation of a life event (such as marriage, birth or change in employment status) before being allowed to enroll outside of the open enrollment period.

These ideas could result in lower premiums and persuade insurance companies to stay in the exchanges. They also reflect what Republicans say they would like to do legislatively if they can ever muster consensus and votes.

Obamacare — or whatever it is to be called going forward — has many things going for it. If Republicans want to show they can govern, their best course is to fix the things that are working against it.

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Tim Phillips
Published 6:07

Many argue we should keep the Affordable Care Act intact because it has provided health insurance for more people. But to what end?

Deductibles are even worse. Deductibles on mid-level silver plans average \$3,572 for individuals in 2017 and \$7,474 for families. This at a time when 46% of Americans say they cannot afford a

The law's problems all have the same root cause: The ACA tried to

It's time that lawmakers learn from these mistakes and implement targeted reforms providing more choice, lowering cost, and improving quality of care. Repeal is the first step of that plan.

Tim Phillips is the president of Americans for Prosperity, an organization that advocates lower taxes and less regulation.

**The
New York
Times**

Editorial : The Latest Voter-Fraud Lie

The Editorial

Mr. Miller made the comment at the end of a heated back-and-forth with ABC's George Stephanopoulos, who had asked him to defend Mr. Trump's latest claim of voter fraud — that his narrow loss in New Hampshire was due to voters who had been bused in illegally from Massachusetts. When Mr. Stephanopoulos pressed him for even a single example of fraud, Mr. Miller responded: "George, go to New Hampshire. Talk to anybody who has worked in politics there for a long time."

Or how about Tom Rath, the state's former attorney general and a Republican, who tweeted on Sunday that "allegations of voter fraud in NH are baseless, without any merit — it's shameful to spread these fantasies." Even New Hampshire's governor, Chris Sununu, who shortly before the election floated his own evidence-free claim about buses of illegal Democratic voters, has backed off.

But Mr. Miller had plenty more to say about the “serious problem” of voter fraud, which includes, as he put it, “millions of people who are registered in two states or who are dead who are registered to vote.” Being registered in two states is not voter fraud; it’s an innocent record-keeping error that happens when

people move and forget to notify election offices to take their names off the rolls — people like Stephen Bannon, Mr. Trump's top White House adviser (Florida and New York); Sean Spicer, his press secretary (Virginia and Rhode Island); Jared Kushner, his son-in-law and senior adviser (New York and New Jersey); and Steven Mnuchin, his Treasury secretary (New York and California). (States purge their rolls regularly, but they don't catch everyone who moves, and there's no evidence of any multistate-registration conspiracy.)

Mr. Miller also trotted out what he called the “astounding statistic” that 14 percent of noncitizens are registered to vote — but that statistic is drawn from a single study that has since been debunked.

In a reality-based world, people bringing wild claims of widespread lawbreaking should carry the burden of proof. With voter fraud, it's the opposite — fact-averse Republicans have for years been hawking the idea of large-scale

voter fraud and then daring others to do the real work of proving them wrong. Meanwhile, the baseless claims continue to get converted into policy in the form of stricter voting laws, like requiring prospective voters to show a photo ID — which, by the way, New Hampshire does, despite the lack of any evidence that people go to the polls pretending to be someone else. The real effect of the laws is to make voting harder for students, the poor and people of color, all groups that lean Democratic.

Baseless claims about “widespread” voter fraud have become so frequent, and so shameless, that it’s tempting to succumb to the fatigue of fighting them and laugh them off. Under President Trump and Attorney General Jeff Sessions, who became famous by prosecuting bogus voter-fraud cases in Alabama, that would be a big mistake.

A polling place in Manchester, N.H., on Election Day. Darren McCollester/Getty Images

**THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL**

Editorial : Andy Puzder's Grilling

President Trump's early troubles are starting to affect his ability to govern—to wit, Democrats think they have a shot at defeating his nominee for Labor Secretary, Andy Puzder. The White House had better get all hands on deck lest it lose a nominee who knows the damage that the Obama labor agenda did to workers.

Mr. Puzder has served as CEO of CKE Restaurants for the last 16 years, and labor groups are broadcasting complaints from workers at the company's Carl's Jr. and Hardee's chains. Workers at CKE franchises represented by the union "Fight for \$15" operation recently filed four charges of sexual harassment with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 22 wage-and-hour complaints with state labor departments, and seven unfair labor

practice charges with the National Labor Relations Board. The complaints represent fewer than 0.1% of CKE restaurants' workforce, and none were employed by corporate stores.

The Restaurant Opportunities Center United (ROC) last month also released an online survey that claimed to find rampant sexual harassment by customers and “wage theft” (i.e., workers not

receiving required breaks or being paid overtime).

The ROC survey was far from scientific, and even the group's self-appointed spokesperson Keith Ellison—who's running to lead the Democratic National Committee—noted “we’re not presenting ourselves as statisticians.” Almost anyone could have completed the survey, and multiple times. One irony is that the NYC Health Department cited a ROC-owned

restaurant in New York several times for unsanitary conditions. Its workers also sued for back pay.

More credible is a confidential phone survey of 250 CKE workers by the Employment Policies Institute. According to the survey, more than 90% of restaurant employees said they learned valuable job skills and felt safe and respected at work. The vast majority said managers accommodate their schedules outside of work, though about a quarter complained they couldn't work as many hours as they'd like.

Disgruntled workers exist at any company, and plaintiff attorneys earn a living finding them. But CKE restaurants wouldn't have many customers or workers if the ROC survey reflected reality. Fast-food joints compete with other restaurant and grocery stores. Profit margins are tight. Regulations—labor, health and safety—are stringent.

Judging by Labor Department data, CKE restaurants have an outstanding compliance record. Fewer than 2% of the company's 2,900 U.S. restaurants (corporate and franchises) were investigated for wage-and-hour violations by the Obama Labor Department. Less than \$80,000 in back wages was paid for violations, and no violation was identified at a corporate-owned restaurant.

Liberals are also making a fake issue of Mr. Puzder's employment of an undocumented housekeeper. He says he didn't know her immigration status, and upon learning she was undocumented he "immediately ended her employment and offered her assistance in getting legal status."

Then there are the claims that CKE's racy marketing make Mr. Puzder a misogynist. Liberals have even dredged up domestic abuse charges that his ex-wife made

during a messy divorce three decades ago, which she has since retracted. In a letter to Senators, she expressed regrets about pressing charges, which she said were urged by a personal attorney with a "vendetta" against Mr. Puzder.

The real union problem with Mr. Puzder is over policy. Labor groups want a \$15 minimum wage. But as Mr. Puzder has argued, a national \$15 minimum would encourage automation and price low-skilled workers out of jobs. Unemployment last year increased among black teens as well as workers without high-school diplomas after the minimum wage rose in several big cities and states.

Unions also want to organize fast-food workers on a systemwide scale rather than hop from store to store. It's far easier to bully a corporate parent into agreeing to a union election rather than organize

workers at each location. Fast food has among the lowest unionization rates of any industry due to high worker turnover and low entry-level wages.

The groups behind these protests such as Fight for \$15 are funded and directed by unions. But because the groups aren't registered as unions, they don't have to comply with the Labor Department's financial reporting requirements or the National Labor Relations Act. So they can picket businesses and bully workers with impunity.

Mr. Puzder sees through the charade. As Labor Secretary, he could audit these joint-unions and force them to play by the same rules as businesses. That's one reason Republicans should confirm him as soon as possible.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

McGurn : Donald Trump's Abolitionist Cabinet

William McGurn

Updated Feb. 13,

2017 7:27 p.m. ET

Among Democrats, the only question about Donald Trump's cabinet picks appears to be whether these people are merely unqualified for their jobs—or *uniquely* unqualified.

"In my mind she is the least qualified nominee in a historically unqualified cabinet." So spoke Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer about Betsy DeVos, who was nonetheless confirmed last Tuesday as education secretary. Somewhat more modestly Sen. Patty Murray (D., Wash.) contented herself with "uniquely unqualified" to describe Andrew Puzder, the labor secretary nominee whose confirmation hearings the Senate is scheduled to take up later this week.

Not surprisingly, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi went much further on Ben Carson, declaring the neurosurgeon-turned-secretary of housing and urban development "disconcerting and disturbingly unqualified." In the same vein New York's Democratic attorney general, Eric Schneiderman, attacked Scott Pruitt, Mr. Trump's nominee to lead the Environmental Protection Agency, as "a dangerous and unqualified choice." Rick Perry got off relatively lightly when Sen. Martin Heinrich (D., N.M.) limited himself to "utterly unqualified" to

describe Mr. Trump's pick for energy secretary.

So what is it about these Trump nominees that makes them so distinctive and unqualified? National Public Radio comes closer to the truth than Mr. Schumer: It's because many of these cabinet secretaries are thought to "oppose the work of the very agencies they've been tapped to lead."

For some of us, that's the most encouraging thing about them. True, only Mr. Perry has publicly called for the abolition of the cabinet agency he's now been asked to lead, and that was years ago. It's also true that in his confirmation hearing last month Mr. Perry pulled a Henry IV (the French Protestant king who converted to Catholicism to solidify his hold on the throne). If Henry thought Paris well worth a Mass, the former Texas governor has obviously concluded that a cabinet post is worth a public recantation of his previous call to eliminate it.

Here's hoping some of the old Mr. Perry remains in his unconverted heart. No one denies that the Energy Department has important responsibilities—primarily over our nuclear weapons. Even so, the question almost never asked is this: Does America need an entire cabinet agency for the job, and are we getting the proper bang for our taxpayer buck?

It's a timely question, in a day when most federal cabinet agencies

spend and regulate in ways fundamentally at odds with free people acting through their elected representatives. Then again, many of these agencies were designed this way, especially the more recent additions.

It helps to remember that the Environmental Protection Agency began life as Richard Nixon's attempt to buy favor with the left. In a similar way, the Education Department was Jimmy Carter's sop to the National Education Association (even the New York Times editorialized against its establishment as "unwise"). Labor began as part of the U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor in 1903 but 10 years later morphed into a separate department. Which illustrates another lamentable fact of cabinet agencies: Far from dying off, they often subdivide into more agencies that each become bigger than the parent.

Competence is not a requirement. One small example from the Education Department: a just-released federal analysis of a signature Obama initiative to improve failing public schools reports almost zero gain from the \$7 billion spent. Yet we're to believe that Mrs. DeVos is the unqualified one here?

Ditto the EPA. For Democrats today's EPA is less a government bureau than a secular church enforcing the dogmas of climate change. Over the Obama years, this

took the form of trying to kill off the coal industry, as well as to assert federal control at the expense of the states. Enter Mr. Pruitt, who as attorney general for Oklahoma tussled in court with the EPA. The fierce opposition to Mr. Pruitt speaks to the progressive fear that he might help restore not only science to its rightful place but federalism.

In George Washington's day, the president got by with four cabinet members: secretary of state, secretary of the Treasury, secretary of war and attorney general. Their posts reflect the core functions of the federal government. Today there are 15 separate departments in the cabinet, along with agencies like the EPA, which chug along merrily in Republican as well as Democratic administrations because, once established, they almost never have to justify their existence.

Even with the best of reforms the United States will never again see a cabinet as pared down as Washington's. But for believers in limited government, the most refreshing aspect of the Trump cabinet is that he's included men and women whose primary qualification is a willingness to question whether we really need the federal behemoths they have been asked to lead.

Write to McGurn@wsj.com.

Rampell : Republicans to predatory companies: Grab as much as you can

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

The White House may be in chaos. But at least Congress is addressing the issue Americans care about most: making it easier for the finance industry to rip them off.

Last week, Jeb Hensarling (R-Tex.), chairman of the House Financial Services Committee, circulated an outline of his latest plan to repeal Dodd-Frank. Dodd-Frank, you may recall, was put in place after the financial crisis to reduce our chances of having another one.

The law isn't perfect, but it did have at least one critical, mostly popular component: It created an agency dedicated solely to helping consumers fight back when financial institutions cheat or mislead them.

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This agency is called the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB). It oversees large banks, thrifts and credit unions, along with lots of companies in the "nonbank" universe, such as mortgage brokers and servicers, payday lenders, debt collectors, private student lenders and credit bureaus.

While the CFPB may not have the same name recognition as, say, the Federal Reserve, many of its actions have generated big headlines.

Remember when Wells Fargo got

caught creating millions of fake customer accounts? The bureau helped lead that investigation, which resulted in a \$185 million settlement.

The bureau has also, among other things, sued pension-advance companies that fleece veterans, and it ordered the firms that left low-income users of prepaid RushCards unable to access their own money to pay \$13 million in restitution and fines.

In its five years of existence, the bureau says it has recovered \$11.7 billion for more than 27 million consumers.

The financial industry, understandably, is not super keen on this independent federal agency. And neither is Hensarling, who — just coincidentally? — has received generous campaign contributions from the finance industry.

Hensarling's leaked memo lays out updates to legislation he introduced last year (which, among other things, required that CFPB employees be paid less than their counterparts at other federal financial regulatory agencies).

Under the Orwellian section heading "Empowering Americans to Achieve Financial Independence," the memo explains how Hensarling intends to further disempower this agency — and by extension, American consumers.

For instance, the CFPB director would become an at-will political appointee. This means that — unlike the officials who run the Fed, Federal Trade Commission or

Securities and Exchange Commission — the CFPB director could be fired without cause. The bureau would cease to be an independent agency and could be pressured at any time to drop investigations of, say, friends of the president.

According to the memo, Hensarling also plans to repeal the CFPB's supervisory powers. This is a fancy way of saying the bureau would no longer have the right to kick the tires and look under the hood — that is, to regularly examine what's going on inside the institutions it regulates to make sure they're following the law.

Even more disturbing, the bureau would no longer be allowed to punish firms that cheat their customers. At most, it could tell the firms to please stop cheating (or else!).

Yes, you heard that right. No more fines and no more penalties. It's not even clear from Hensarling's memo that the bureau could force firms to return any money they've already pinched from consumers.

In such a world, why not grab as much as you can?

We don't know exactly how the bullet points in this memo will get translated into legislation. (A spokeswoman for the House Financial Services Committee declined to comment on the memo.) But it seems likely that consumer protections would wind up even weaker than they were before the crisis.

That's because Dodd-Frank took the authority to enforce some consumer protection laws away from other regulators and gave them to the newly formed CFPB. Assuming those authorities aren't being re-delegated to these other agencies — and the memo does not indicate that will happen — they'll remain with a bureau that's essentially powerless to enforce them.

Of course, many of these policy changes make sense if your worldview is that government should stay out of private transactions because consumers are smart enough to fend for themselves. Which brings me to the weirdest and least defensible parts of Hensarling's plan: an effort to make consumers dumber.

Hensarling's memo not only strips the CFPB of most supervisory and enforcement powers; it also eliminates the bureau's research functions, its public database of consumer complaints (so much for transparency) and even its consumer education functions. Right now, the bureau publishes educational materials on its website and partners with libraries, veterans groups and other community organizations.

It's hard to imagine what legitimate public interest lies in killing efforts to promote financial literacy. But in the con-man economy, maybe public interest is no longer a consideration.

Leonhardt : The Struggle Inside The Wall Street Journal

David Leonhardt

The most successful modern publisher of ideological journalism is Rupert Murdoch. He buys media properties, or starts new ones, and turns them into conservative megaphones.

In England, he carefully nudged the venerable Times to the right, while his tabloids mocked Labour Party politicians as weaklings or Stalinists. In the United States, he transformed the once-liberal New York Post into a peppery conservative tabloid and then built Fox News from scratch.

Clearly, he enjoys both populist and elite media. And in 2007, he bought a journalistic jewel, The Wall Street Journal.

Now The Journal's newsroom is embroiled in a fight over the paper's direction.

Many staff members believe that the paper's top editor, Gerard Baker, previously a feisty conservative commentator, is trying to Murdoch-ize the paper. "There is a systemic issue," one reporter told me. The dissatisfaction went public last week, with stories in Politico and the Huffington Post. At a staff meeting on Monday, Baker dismissed the criticism as "fake news," Joe Pompeo of Politico reported.

As a longtime reader, admirer and competitor of The Journal, I think the internal critics are right. You can see the news pages becoming more politicized. You can also see The

Journal's staff pushing back, through both great journalism (including exposes on the Trump administration) and quiet insubordination.

Gerard Baker, The Wall Street Journal's top editor, in 2014. Andrew Burton/Getty Images

Consider The Journal's coverage of Trump's false voter-fraud allegations. The stories are mostly solid, noting Trump has no evidence. The headlines often tend toward stenography:

Trump Seeks Election Fraud Probe

Trump Takes Aim at 'Millions' of Votes

Top Adviser Repeats Vote-Fraud Claims

Reporters and editors have become accustomed to the "shaving off the edges" of Trump-related stories, one said, especially in headlines and initial paragraphs. The insubordination shows up in later paragraphs, where reporters include harder-hitting information.

There is no shortage of troubling anecdotes: A revealing story about Trump's white-supremacist support that never ran in print. A dearth of stories about climate change and frightened immigrants. An email from Baker encouraging the staff not to mention the Muslim makeup of the countries when describing Trump's immigration ban (partly rescinded after BuzzFeed disclosed the email). Glowing stories about Trump — "astonishing," one longtime editor said — by a reporter

who once tweeted a photo of herself smiling with Trump on his jet.

More generally, staffers are worried about Trump-Journal chumminess. Ivanka Trump was until recently a trustee of the Murdoch estate. In The Journal's Washington bureau, eyebrows rose when Baker's assistant called to ask how to send Trump a memento: a printing-press plate from an edition reporting his ascendance. (A spokeswoman said no plate was sent.)

The Journal's opinion pages, of course, have long been conservative. And they have their own tensions: An editor critical of Trump was recently fired, The Atlantic reported. But The Journal's news pages, like those of The New York Times, The Washington Post

and elsewhere, have aspired to objectivity.

One way to understand the fight is through the lens of Fox News. Its former leader, Roger Ailes, knew that the country had become more polarized and that many viewers didn't want sober objectivity. He also knew that most reporters leaned left, and their beliefs sometimes seeped into coverage.

So Ailes came up with a brilliantly cynical strategy. He created a conservative news channel that dispensed with objectivity, and sometimes with facts, while claiming it was more objective — "Fair and Balanced" — than the competition.

The Wall Street Journal is no Fox News, and Baker, who's publicly acknowledged Trump's untruths

and celebrated some hard-hitting stories, is no Ailes. Yet it's easy to see how The Journal could continue down the Murdoch path.

Baker believes that most media is hopelessly biased, Journal staffers say. He views his critics as liberal whiners, and his approach as the fair and balanced one.

I happen to agree that liberal bias can be a media problem. On important issues — abortion, education, parenting and religion, to name a few — left-leaning beliefs too often distort coverage. The Journal, and every newspaper, should indeed fight that problem.

But that's very different from saying reporters protect any political party. They don't. Journalists' incentives and instincts all point the other way.

Which is why the media reported so aggressively on Hillary Clinton's emails, damaging her badly.

Observers of Murdoch's company believe that his sons, rising in power, don't care as much about conservative causes as their father. If that's right, it's possible to imagine many more years of The Wall Street Journal as one of the world's best newspapers, enlightening readers and, yes, making life difficult for competitors.

After all, has there ever been a more important time for sophisticated and fearless financial journalism?

The New York Times

Brooks : How Should One Resist the Trump Administration?

David Brooks

If we are in a Bonhoeffer moment, then aggressive nonviolent action makes sense: marching in the streets, blocking traffic, disrupting town halls, vehement rhetoric to mobilize mass opposition.

Gerald Ford is one possible model for resisting the threat Donald Trump may create. George Tames/The New York Times

On the other hand, it could be that the primary threat is stagnation and corruption. In this scenario, the Trump administration doesn't create an authoritarian regime, but national politics turns into a vicious muck of tweet and countertweet, scandal and pseudoscandal, partisan attack and counterattack.

If that's the threat, St. Benedict is the model for resistance. Benedict was a young Umbrian man who was sent to study in Rome after the fall of the empire. Disgusted by the corruption all around, he fled to the wilderness and founded monastic communities across Europe. If Rome was going to sink into barbarism, then Benedictines could lead healthy lives and construct new forms of

community far from the decaying center.

If we are in a Benedict moment, the smart thing to do is to ignore the degradation in Washington and make your contribution at the state and local levels.

Karlyn Bowman of the American Enterprise Institute notices that some of the interns in her think tank are thinking along Benedictine lines. In years past they were angling for career tracks that would land them in Washington, but now they are angling to go back to the places they came from.

The third possibility is that the primary threat in the Trump era is a combination of incompetence and anarchy. It could be that Trump is a chaotic clown incapable of conducting coherent policy. It could be that his staff members are a bunch of inexperienced second-raters.

Already the White House is back stabbing and dysfunctional. The National Security Council is in turmoil. Mussolini supposedly made the trains run on time, but this group couldn't manage fascism in a phone booth.

It could be that Trumpism contains the seeds of its own destruction. The administration could be swallowed by some corruption scandal that destroys all credibility. Trump could flake out in the midst of some foreign policy crisis and the national security apparatus could have to flat out disobey him.

If the current reign of ineptitude continues, Republicans will eventually peel away. The Civil Service will begin to ignore the sloppy White House edicts. The national security apparatus will decide that to prevent a slide to global disorder, it has to run itself.

In this scenario, the crucial question is how to replace and repair. The model for the resistance is Gerald Ford, a decent, modest, experienced public servant who believed in the institutions of government, who restored faith in government, who had a plan to bind the nation's wounds and restored normalcy and competence.

Personally, I don't think we're at a Bonhoeffer moment or a Benedict moment. I think we're approaching a Ford moment. If the first three weeks are any guide, this administration will not sustain itself

for a full term. We'll need a Ford, or rather a generation of Fords to restore effective governance.

When this country was born, several of the founders wanted to feature Moses on the Great Seal of the United States. They didn't want to do it because he liberated his people from tyranny. That was the easy part. They wanted to do it because he bound his people to law.

Now and after Trump, the great project is rebinding: rebinding the social fabric, rebinding the government to its people, and most of all, rebinding the heaping piles of wreckage that Trump will leave in his wake in Washington. Somebody will have to restore the party structures, rebuild Congress, revive a demoralized Civil Service.

These tasks aren't magic. They are for experienced professionals. The baby boomer establishment polarized politics, lost touch with the voters and paved the way for Trump. We need a new establishment, one that works again.

The Washington Post

'I'm terrified I'm not going to have a home to come home to'

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

aguerra

(Video: Monica Akhtar / The Washington Post; Photo: Stephen Lam for The Washington Post)

Authorities ordered an emergency evacuation in Oroville, Calif., after a damaged spillway threatened the area with flooding. Here's what you need to know about the situation. Authorities ordered an emergency

evacuation in Oroville, Calif., after a damaged spillway threatened the area with flooding. Here's what you need to know about the situation.

(Video: Monica Akhtar / The Washington Post; Photo: Stephen Lam for The Washington Post)

CHICO, Calif. — Authorities urgently lowered the level of Lake Oroville on Monday ahead of impending rain, stopping the flow of water over the Oroville Dam's emergency spillway and apparently

averting the threat of an immediate flooding disaster.

But law enforcement and water officials said they were not ready to lift a mandatory evacuation order that sent nearly 200,000 people from Oroville and points south of the dam fleeing to Chico and other nearby cities, signaling potentially significant concerns about the infrastructure meant to protect residents in the Northern California valley below.

Though the Oroville Dam's integrity remained intact, spillways designed to handle overflow began to crumble and erode over the weekend as water drained from the overfull lake, leading authorities to fear that a larger failure could send a torrent of water rushing through the valley below and into area towns.

Lake Oroville is one of California's largest man-made lakes, with more than 1 trillion gallons of water and

167 miles of shoreline, and the Oroville Dam is the nation's tallest, at 770 feet. Lake Oroville is a central element of the state's government-run water system, bringing water from the Sierra Nevada to the Central Valley, where it is crucial for agriculture, and to residents and businesses in Southern California.

The emergency evacuation order Sunday has residents worried about a major piece of California's infrastructure as the region transitions from a record-setting drought to unusually large amounts of rain and snow. It could portend problems ahead as more rain is in the immediate forecast and as the melting season looms, with more snow piled on the peaks of the Sierra than there has been in years.

Heavy rains forecast for this week could again cause lake levels to rise, put pressure on the damaged spillways and jeopardize area communities. Three storms are lined up to drench Northern California, with up to nine inches of precipitation possible.

[The Lake Oroville dam stress test isn't over — more rain this week, then spring thaw]

It is unclear when residents who were ordered to flee their homes will be able to return. Butte County Sheriff Kory Honea said Monday that he would not lift the mandatory evacuation order until water resources officials have a better grasp of the expected risks.

"This is still a dynamic situation, it's still a situation we're trying to assess," Honea said, noting that he does not want anyone in the community to go back home if there's a chance that they could be in harm's way. "Getting those people home is important to me. I want that to happen absolutely as soon as possible."

Oroville and surrounding communities sat as ghost towns Monday, with residents having left at nearly a moment's notice Sunday, jamming highways as night fell. Many of them gathered here in Chico, at temporary shelters and at the fairgrounds, waiting.

Father and son Pedro and Juan Mota evacuated from Gridley, a small town in the flood zone, along with 12 members of their extended family. Juan, 28, said a friend of his working on the

dam's spillway called him at 4 p.m. Sunday, ahead of the official evacuation order, and said ominously, "You've got to get out."

"It's crazy. It's unreal," Juan Mota, dressed in a black Oakland Raiders sweatshirt, said as he sat on a folding chair in front of a station handing out bottles of water and bags of chips. "You see this stuff in movies, people trying to get gas before it runs out and passing each other on the highway, all of that."

Cindy Vanneman, who lives in the Golden Oaks Mobile Homes in Oroville and does not have a car, heard about the evacuation order at 9:30 p.m. Sunday. She was whisked out of town by shuttle bus but wasn't allowed to bring Leo, her 2-year-old tuxedo cat, so she called animal rescue, hoping they could help.

"I felt every emotion you can feel all at one time," Vanneman said. "You don't know if you can go back home or if you'll go back to see your home floating down the river. I've been there for 17 years. But now I'm definitely looking into moving. I want to live somewhere high and dry."

Much of California has felt high and dry for years, the state's lengthy drought causing Lake Oroville's water levels to plunge well below capacity and making it an oft-cited example of the extent of the dryness. Now, in a dramatic shift, Northern California has experienced an extraordinarily rainy winter that has caused waters to rise to their highest levels in decades.

There was never any danger of the main Oroville Dam collapsing. The problem instead is with the dam system's spillways — safety valves along the lake's shoreline designed to release water in a controlled manner, preventing water from topping over the wall of the colossal dam.

As the lake's water levels rose to the brim after heavy rain and snow this month, unexpected erosion crumbled the main spillway, pulling off chunks of concrete and creating a large hole. Then sheets of water began flowing over the dam's emergency spillway for the first time in its nearly 50-year history, coursing down a wooded hillside and carrying murky debris into the Feather River.

"Once we have damage to a structure like that, it's catastrophic,"

said Bill Croyle, acting director of the state's Department of Water Resources. "We determined we could not fix the hole."

More than a decade ago, three environmental groups warned state and federal officials about what they believed was a problem with the dam's emergency spillway, because it isn't really a spillway; it's actually a 1,700-foot-long weir that empties onto a dirt hillside. The concern centered on erosion of that hillside in the event of an emergency.

[Officials were warned the Oroville Dam emergency spillway wasn't safe. They didn't listen.]

When the Oroville Dam was going through a re-licensing process, the environmental groups filed a motion in October 2005, urging a federal regulatory agency to require state officials to armor the emergency spillway with concrete so that, in case of extreme rain and flooding, water wouldn't freely cascade down the hillside and tear it away. The upgrade would have cost millions of dollars, and no one wanted to foot the bill, said Ronald Stork, senior policy advocate for Friends of the River, one of the groups that filed the motion.

"When the dam is overfull, water goes over that weir and down the hillside, taking much of the hillside with it," Stork said Monday. "That causes huge amounts of havoc. There's roads, there's transmission lines, power lines that are potentially in the way of that water going down that auxiliary spillway."

Federal officials determined that nothing was wrong with the emergency spillway, which they said could handle 350,000 cubic feet of water per second and "would perform as designed" in the event of its use, according to a July 2006 memo from a senior engineer with the regulatory agency.

"The emergency spillway meets FERC's engineering guidelines for an emergency spillway," the engineer wrote. "The guidelines specify that during a rare flood event, it is acceptable for the emergency spillway to sustain significant damage."

Croyle said Monday at a news conference that he hadn't seen the 2005 reports and declined to comment on them.

When officials decided to use the emergency spillway in recent days, flows that were a tiny fraction of the apparent limit caused serious enough erosion on the hillside to warrant the evacuation.

Anticipating a possible catastrophe for the Oroville area, about 75 miles north of Sacramento and about 25 miles southeast of Chico, the Butte County Sheriff's Office ordered evacuations, emphasizing in a news release that it was "NOT a drill."

Honea called the evacuation order a "critical and difficult decision" and said he recognized that it would cause significant dislocations and traffic jams — which it did. Residents of Oroville, a town of 16,000, were ordered to head north toward Chico, while other nearby residents drove south toward Sacramento.

"I recognize how tough this situation is on people," Honea said. "I recognize that we've had to displace a lot of people."

Stork believes none of that would have happened had officials listened to his and others' concerns and built a proper spillway 12 years ago.

"They told us not to worry. All was good. Everything was fine. It's all safe," he said. "First of all, they're not supposed to fail. That's not what we do in a first-world country. We don't do that. We certainly don't do that with the nation's tallest dam. An auxiliary spillway isn't supposed to cause lots of havoc when it's being used."

Adriana Weidman of Marysville, Calif., said she heard about the evacuation around 5 p.m. Sunday. Fearing that nearby rivers would overflow, she rushed to pack as much as she could, then got into the car with her husband and two children, she said. They headed to Colfax, Calif., about 45 miles east.

"It's scary," Weidman said. "I'm terrified I'm not going to have a home to come home to."

Romeo reported from Chico. Schmidt and Guerra reported from Washington. Angela Fritz and Derek Hawkins in Washington contributed to this report.

POLITICO Trump just getting started with immigration raids

By Seung Min Kim and Ted Hesson

The arrests of hundreds of immigrants last week marked the

first large-scale raid under the Trump administration — and the crackdown was, by all indications, just the start of much more to come.

The expansive executive order signed last month by President Donald Trump allows a significantly broader population of immigrants to be picked up for deportation. And

Trump has signaled he has every intention of using that authority to carry out his campaign pledge to deport millions of foreigners from the United States.

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Immigration advocates say the stepped-up enforcement amounts to a new deportation dragnet that's ensnaring otherwise law-abiding immigrants.

"In four weeks, we've seen three incredibly harsh executive orders targeting the immigrant community," said Ali Noorani, executive director of the National Immigration Forum. "This is what he campaigned on, and now the country has to deal with the consequences."

But for Trump, it's working out just as planned.

"We're actually taking people that are criminals — very, very hardened criminals in some cases — with a tremendous track record of abuse and problems, and we are getting them out," Trump said at a news conference Monday with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. "And that's what I said I would do."

One of Trump's top advisers, Stephen Miller, also credited the administration's new executive order with the "more vigorous immigration enforcement activities," telling Fox News that Trump has "taken new and greater steps to remove criminal aliens from our communities."

In a statement Monday, Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly confirmed that more than 680 immigrants were swept up in so-called "targeted enforcement operations" across several cities, including Los Angeles, Chicago, Atlanta, San Antonio and New York City.

About three-fourths of those arrested were immigrants who had been convicted of crimes ranging from homicide, aggravated sexual abuse and drunken driving. The rest were picked up for various immigration violations, such as illegally reentering the country after being removed.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials, as well as Kelly himself, have maintained that the raids were nothing more than routine operations that immigration authorities have carried out for years, including under the Obama administration.

But immigration advocates say the Trump administration has the capacity to go far beyond what President Barack Obama — who deported more than 2 million

undocumented immigrants during his tenure — ever did.

In his Jan. 25 executive order, Trump said any immigrant who had been merely charged with a crime could be targeted for deportation. That's a significant departure from Obama's policy: the previous administration primarily sought out only immigrants who had been convicted of felonies or at least three misdemeanors.

The Trump directive also calls on federal authorities to target immigrants who have "committed acts that constitute a chargeable criminal offense," which immigration advocates say is too broad a description.

Another major change: The Obama administration largely gave a pass to law-abiding immigrants who arrived illegally before January 2014. But the Trump directive contains no similar cutoff date, meaning immigration agents are free to target immigrants who have lived in the United States for decades.

Even the less-prominent provisions in Trump's order could, in the advocates' view, wrongly ensnare immigrants. For instance, the order deems those who have "engaged in fraud or willful misrepresentation" before the government as priorities. That could mean that immigrants accused of lying during a green card interview could be targeted for deportation, according to Cleveland-based immigration attorney David Leopold.

"When you read that executive order, there is no other conclusion that you can draw except that everybody is a target. Everybody," said Leopold, former president of the American Immigration Lawyers Association. "It's carefully couched in terms of prioritizing criminals, but it's designed to encourage and allow ICE agents to pick up anybody they can get their hands on."

Criticism of the Trump administration's far-reaching crackdown has been mounting for days, although it has largely focused on a separate order that called for barring travelers from seven majority-Muslim nations, as well as all refugees. That directive has been blocked by the courts.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) said Monday that ICE officials need to be more

forthcoming about the nature of the agency's most recent raid operations, including where they were held and details of immigrants who were arrested.

"I have always supported smart immigration enforcement that helps to keep our country safe," Schumer said Monday. "But raids targeting law-abiding immigrants and treating those with traffic violations the same as murderers and robbers will only achieve the opposite."

Sen. Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) has already called for hearings to investigate Trump's trio of immigration executive orders, and Congressional Hispanic Caucus leaders are meeting with acting ICE director Thomas Homan on Tuesday to discuss the raids.

But advocates for a tougher approach to illegal immigration said the raids — and Trump's pledge to keep up the enforcement tactics — are nothing more than a return to what was commonplace before Obama loosened some deportation priorities.

Mark Krikorian, executive director of the Center for Immigration Studies, called the roundups "a start" and added that he would like to see "more systematic efforts" to target employers who hire undocumented immigrants.

He called the reaction from immigrant rights groups "hysterical" and "almost comically exaggerated." In his view, organizations grew too accustomed to lax enforcement under Obama.

"This is a return to normalcy, if you will, rather than some kind of radical departure," Krikorian said. "It was Obama that represented the radical change in practice."

Guadalupe Garcia de Rayos is locked in a van that is stopped in the street by protesters outside the Immigration and Customs Enforcement facility in Phoenix on Feb. 8. | AP Photo

Roy Beck of NumbersUSA says he prefers mandatory E-Verify — an internet-based system that allows businesses to check whether employees are in the U.S. legally — instead of wide-scale arrests. But until Congress passes a law requiring businesses to use the

verification system, raids are the best tactic available, he said.

The recent raids are sending waves of fear through immigrant communities across the country, immigrant advocates say. They've been scrambling in recent days to respond to reports of ICE activity and to keep track of where enforcement actions have taken place, with little assistance from federal immigration authorities.

Angelica Salas, executive director of the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles, said her organization had received 2,000 calls from worried residents in recent days.

Others worry that with ICE agents greatly empowered to make arrests, undocumented immigrants who answer the door will be nabbed even if those individuals aren't the intended target of the operation.

One frequently cited case is that of Manuel Mosqueda Lopez, a 50-year-old house painter in Los Angeles who was arrested by ICE after agents came to his home looking for someone else. He was put on a bus to Tijuana and nearly deported before his lawyers intervened.

The lack of information from federal immigration authorities has further disquieted immigrant rights leaders. But Claude Arnold, a retired ICE special agent in charge based in Los Angeles, said it's routine for the agency to withhold details of an operation in order to protect agents.

ICE could also begin to use mobile units to scan fingerprints of suspected undocumented immigrants found during enforcement operations, Arnold said. He said the fingerprint scans are an alternative to physically arresting someone who is in the country illegally but doesn't stand out as a priority. In the past, officers used the scans to place undocumented immigrants in removal proceedings without a formal arrest, Arnold said.

Arnold added that doesn't think ICE will suddenly target noncriminals.

"The priorities are still going to be the same priorities, criminals first," he said. "But what the president's executive order did do, it returned discretion to arrest and not to arrest to the line-level officer. ... If they encounter someone who's here illegally, they have the authority and discretion to arrest them, period."

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Immigration authorities arrested 680 people in raids last week

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Sandhya>

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Immigration authorities last week arrested 680 people who were in the United States illegally,

Homeland Security Secretary John F. Kelly said in a statement Monday.

The raids in at least a dozen states, which marked the Trump administration's first large-scale crackdown on people living in the United States illegally, set off a wave of panic and protest in immigrant communities over the weekend and sparked questions from immigration advocates as to whether the arrestees posed legitimate threats to public safety.

DHS, which oversees U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), said Monday that approximately 75 percent of those arrested were "criminal aliens," including some who had been convicted of crimes such as homicide, sexual assault of a minor and drug trafficking.

Asked to provide further clarification, a DHS official confirmed that the term "criminal aliens" includes anyone who had entered the United States illegally or overstayed or violated the terms of a visa. There are an estimated 11 million people in the United States who fit that profile.

ICE declined to provide the names and locations of those who were detained in the raids, nor would the

agency say how many of the 680 people had committed serious crimes.

Field offices in Los Angeles, San Antonio, Chicago, Atlanta and New York City released a total of 15 examples of people ICE took into custody last week, including one who was a "self-admitted MS-13 gang member" and one who was wanted for murder and attempted murder in Mexico. Seven had prior convictions for sexual assault or for lewd or indecent acts with a child, and three, including the gang member, had convictions for drug trafficking or distribution.

ICE carried out the arrests in New York, California, Illinois, Texas, Missouri, Kansas, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Kentucky, Indiana and Wisconsin. Of those, about a quarter had no prior convictions.

ICE has characterized the raids as routine, but immigrant rights groups said the actions were out of the ordinary and that most of those swept up were not dangerous. They said ICE also handled the detentions — which activists described as playing out in homes,

on the side of the road and outside workplaces — differently from how the agency had in the latter years of the Obama administration, and accused the government of sowing fear among the immigrant - community.

"This is not normal," Sulma Arias, field director for the Center for Community Change, said in a teleconference with reporters Monday, calling it a "horrific overreach that will destroy families and undermine the American Dream for thousands."

The Center for Migration Studies of New York, a think tank that favors immigration, says there are about 3.3 million households in the United States that contain both legal and illegal residents. Most of those homes have U.S. citizens, including 5.7 million U.S.-born children.

Obama, who deported more people than any president, in his second term prioritized deportations to target public safety threats over other people with less-serious criminal violations.

More than 90 percent of those deported from the United States

during the past fiscal year had been convicted of what DHS considers serious crimes, according to a Migration Policy Institute study. Activists say ICE also tended to detain people at night, which was often terrifying but less public.

"The Obama administration shied away from big displays of enforcement because it would alienate their base. For Trump, it is red meat for his supporters and fulfills a campaign pledge," said J. Kevin Appleby, senior director of international migration policy for the Center for Migration Studies of New York.

Thousands of immigrants and activists rallied outside the Milwaukee County courthouse in Wisconsin on Monday for a "Day Without Latinos, Immigrants and Refugees." The event was designed to demonstrate how integral the groups are to the nation's social and economic fabric.

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