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RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE

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**WOULD YOU LIKE AN OCEAN VIEW, A POOL VIEW,
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EMERGENCY PRESIDENTIAL-BRIEFING VIEW?**

FRANCE – EUROPE	3
CBS : French far-right presidential candidate praises Trump	3
French far-right presidential hopeful gives Trump gold star.....	3

Le Pen Refuses to Be Questioned by French Police on EU Expenses	4
Le Pen Says French Foreign Policy Must Be Decided in Paris.....	4
Breitbart : Le Pen Extends Lead in French Presidential Polls.....	4
France’s National Front scandal has exposed the dirty little secret of Europe’s far right (online).....	5

France's Macron Raises Curtain on Election Alliance to Beat Le Pen.....	5	Kim Jong Nam Killed With U.N.-Banned VX Nerve Agent, Malaysia Says.....	27
French Centrist Presidential Candidate Unveils Economic Proposals (online).....	6	North Korea Mocks China for ‘Dancing to U.S. Tune’	27
Newsweek : France's Macron announces economic plans of mixing tax cuts and spending cuts.....	7	Editorial : North Korean Terror Notice.....	28
Macron Gets a Boost From French Pact Opening Gap Ahead of Fillon.....	7	Lee : North Korea’s Palace Intrigue.....	28
Zakaria : Don’t despair: The center can still win in Europe.....	7	Amb. Prosor : How Congress Can Boost Haley at the U.N.....	29
The Verge : Petition calls on Obama to run for president in France.....	8	Editorial : When nature is a terrorist.....	29
NPR : A Citizens' Petition Calls For A New French President: Barack Obama.....	8	Editorial : Twinkle, Twinkle Little Trappist.....	30
Saadia : France should apologize for colonialism in Algeria (online).....	9	ETATS-UNIS..... 30	
Where Are the Toilets? Order Glut Stretches Giant Jet Makers to Limit (UNE).....	9	Schools Assess Bathroom Policies After Trump Rescinds Obama Order.....	30
Seized Bank Funds Will Go to Terror Victims.....	10	Editorial : President Trump Breaks a Promise on Transgender Rights.....	31
It’s Time for Europe’s Militaries to Grow Up.....	11	Editorial : The White House just told transgender students they’re on their own.....	31
Amid Growing Threats, Germany Plans to Expand Troop Numbers to Nearly 200,000.....	12	Duncan and Lhamon : The White House’s thoughtless, cruel and sad rollback of transgender rights.....	32
Editorial : How Europe Can Defend Itself.....	12	Bannon vows a daily fight for ‘deconstruction of the administrative state’ (UNE).....	32
Gilbert : Maastricht's Flaws Still Plague Europe, 25 Years Later.....	13	Trump Strategist Steve Bannon: ‘Every Day Is Going to Be a Fight’.....	34
Fox : What’s So Great About Europe?.....	13	Stephen Bannon Reassures Conservatives Uneasy About Trump.....	34
Migrants Face Deportations and Walls in Europe, Too	14	Trump Vowed to Protect the Safety Net. What if His Appointees Disagree?.....	35
Danish Man Who Burned Quran Is Prosecuted for Blasphemy.....	15	Donald Trump Is Much More Resilient Than He Looks	36
INTERNATIONAL..... 16		Weakened Democrats Bow to Voters, Opting for Total War on Trump.....	37
Krauthammer : Trump and the ‘madman theory’.....	16	The left rallies to save Obamacare with passion but little cash.....	38
O’Hanlon and Gordon : Surprise! Trump's foreign policy is turning out OK.....	16	2020 race lures sprawling Democratic field.....	39
Trump to Add Some Muscle to U.S. Strategy to Fight Islamic State.....	17	Psaki : Democrats, why not give Mayor Pete a chance?.....	40
‘Al-Qaeda is eating us’: Syrian rebels are losing out to extremists (UNE).....	18	Editorial : The ObamaCare Holdouts.....	41
Rebels Claim Capture of Syrian City From ISIS.....	19	Editorial : Waiting for Justice Gorsuch.....	41
For Syrian Refugees, There Is No Going Home.....	20	Editorial : Trump is setting the stage for mass deportations. If Congress has sense it will fix our immigration system instead.....	42
Iraqi Forces Close to Controlling Mosul Airport.....	20	Strassel : Mattis’s Pyrrhic Personnel War.....	42
Lebanese Fear Being Caught in Trump’s Push on Iran	21	Williamson : Big Tent or Circus Tent? A Conservative Identity Crisis in the Trump Era.....	43
Israel calls Human Rights Watch a propaganda tool, says it is not welcome.....	22	Desai and Kleinbard : A win-win path to getting the Trump tax information that really matters.....	44
Ignatius : Russia’s assault on America’s elections is just one example of a global threat.....	22	Brooks : The National Death Wish.....	44
U.S. Talks With Mexico Clouded by Mixed Message (UNE).....	23	Trump Team Broadens Search for Fed Regulatory Post	45
As Kelly and Tillerson Visit Mexico, Their Reassurances Differ From Trump’s Stance.....	24	CEOs and Donald Trump Trade Policy Proposals.....	45
China Shakes Up Top Economic Team Ahead of Major Power Shuffle (UNE).....	25	Lane : Confessions of a Free-Trade Lobbyist.....	46
Gewirtz : Stop writing China off as an enemy. Millennials don’t.....	26	America’s Rowdy Town Halls: More Organic Than Organized (UNE).....	47
		Republicans distance themselves from Trump’s agenda at rowdy town halls.....	48
		Van Dyk : Fellow Democrats, Your Effort to Destroy the President Is Abnormal.....	49

FRANCE – EUROPE

CBS : French far-right presidential candidate praises Trump

French far-right presidential candidate Marine Le Pen has nothing but praise for U.S. President Donald Trump, saying on Thursday that she thinks his actions so far are good for France.

Le Pen, who is leading in the latest opinion polls ahead of the spring election, told The Associated Press that "my only framework is what is in the interest of France."

She credited Trump with a series of accomplishments, including "the promotion of a form of intelligent protectionism, of economic patriotism," as well as his plan to change or scrap the North American Free Trade Agreement with Canada and Mexico, and his "rupture with total free trade imposed on the world."

So far, "There is no (untoward) international fallout" and "I only have reason to rejoice" in Trump's actions, she said.

Le Pen made the remarks after laying out her foreign policy approach were she to win the April 23 and May 7 election to replace unpopular Socialist President Francois Hollande, not seeking a second mandate.

She described a stark vision based on a multipolar world but with France going it alone, first laid out in a conference this month when her platform was made public.

Dozens of foreign diplomats were in attendance. The Saudi Arabian ambassador was among them as well as a U.S. embassy official, according to Bertrand Duthiel de la Rochere of Le Pen's National Front party.

The start of her speech was briefly interrupted by a bare-chested protester from the FEMEN group that has crashed at least two previous Le Pen events in recent years. The single protester screaming "Marine fictive feminist" -- the words written on her chest -- was carried off screaming by bodyguards.

Le Pen, unperturbable, continued, decrying past actions by the United States as "strategic adventurism (that) has harmed what we consider to be our interests." She attributed actions in Iraq, Syria and Libya to the United States, as well as the fallout, from the surge in migrants to destabilization in the Mediterranean and "dangerous games with Islamic militias."

"We are hoping that with the election of President Donald Trump there will be a major shift, nearly a complete makeover, which would be positive not only for the world but also for the United States," Le Pen said.

Le Pen, leader of the anti-immigration National Front, wants to pull France out of the European Union, do away with the euro currency and crack down on what she calls "massive immigration." She also insists that France must be its own defender, leaving NATO and defending itself.

"To assure France's independence and the freedom of the French people, there is no price too high, there is no combat too frightening to be taken on," she said, adding that "no ally, no treaty, no alliance will decide French policies."

Polls have consistently put Le Pen among the top two ranked candidates for the first round of voting, and recent polls put her first. However, the soundings never see her in the final round.

Her current top opponent, centrist Emmanuel Macron, joined forces on Wednesday with a long-time centrist politician Francois Bayrou, who ensured Macron his backing, a

move the candidate called "a real turning point."

Conservative candidate Francois Fillon, a former prime minister, has lost momentum over a corruption scandal concerning potential fake parliamentary aide jobs for his wife and two of his children. Le Pen, too, is caught up in corruption scandals involving parliamentary aids at the European parliament. One aide was charged on Wednesday with breach of trust. Her bodyguard, also questioned, was back on the job Thursday.

Speaking to AP, Le Pen forcefully rejected compliments from white supremacist David Duke, who referred to her in a tweet as a "strong and intelligent woman" after praising her father, National Front party founder Jean-Marie Le Pen as a "great patriot."

Marine Le Pen called Duke a "provocateur," saying she has no ties to him and adding, "I don't want his support. He can keep it for himself."

abcnews.go.com



French far-right presidential hopeful gives Trump gold star

ABC News

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Le Pen Refuses to Be Questioned by French Police on EU Expenses

@HeleneFouquet
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Helene Fouquet

24 février 2017 à 05:36 UTC-5

- Nationalist says she won't be interviewed before election
- French police issued non-binding summons to Le Pen Wednesday

Presidential candidate Marine Le Pen refused to be interviewed by police investigating her use of a European parliamentary allowance to pay for party work in France.

Le Pen rejected a non-binding summons from French investigators on Wednesday, the prosecutors' office said, confirming an earlier report in Le Monde newspaper.

Marine Le Pen

Photographer: Marlene Awaad/Bloomberg

The National Front leader informed the police by letter that she won't be questioned before the end of the June legislative elections, her lawyer Rodolphe Bosselut said. Le Pen has not been ordered to answer questions, the prosecutor's office said. Bosselut urged the prosecutors to back off until after the election to avoid interfering with the democratic process.

"We are seeing a sudden rush in the procedure which relates to an old complaint," Bosselut said in a telephone interview. "You have to ask why everything is accelerating and Madame has been summoned two months before a major election date."

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Le Pen is favorite to win the first round of France's presidential election on April 23, but polls suggest she will lose heavily in the run-off on May 7 whomever she faces. While Republican rival Francois Fillon has been hurt by a separate investigation into the alleged use of French parliamentary funds, supporters of Le Pen's campaign to overturn the elites in Paris and Brussels may be encouraged by a show of defiance against the authorities.

The anti-euro candidate has refused an order from the European Parliament to repay about 336,000 euros (\$356,000) in funds which the chamber says were used

inappropriately. Le Pen has appealed the decision.

Two aides to Le Pen were arrested Wednesday after investigators raided her National Front party's headquarters earlier in the week as part of the probe into whether she improperly used European money to pay their salaries.

Le Pen's chief of staff was charged late on Wednesday as the candidate brushed off allegations that she misused European Parliament funds, saying the allegations were politically motivated. Her aide was charged for received misappropriated funds, according to the Paris prosecutor's office. A second aide, Le Pen's body guard, was also and then released without being charged.

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Le Pen Says French Foreign Policy Must Be Decided in Paris

23 février 2017 à 13:50 UTC-5

- Foreign policy speech in Paris calls for 'Europe of Nations'
- Le Pen salutes Brexit vote, Trump's early days in office

French foreign policy should be decided solely in Paris, French presidential candidate Marine Le Pen said, calling for a reversal of her country's quest over past decades for tighter ties with European Union allies.

Laying out her foreign-policy vision in a speech in Paris, Le Pen spoke of a world based on nation states that pursue their own interest and

preserve their own cultures without interference.

"To assure the freedom of the French, there is no price too high to pay," Le Pen said. "The foreign policy of France will be decided in Paris, and no alliance, no ally, can speak in her place."

Her first move as president would be to renegotiate EU treaties as an initial step toward creating a "Europe of Nations," she said. She saluted Britain's vote to leave the EU, and said she'd withdraw from NATO's military command.

"I rejoice in Europeans claiming back their freedom against the attempts to create an artificial super-state," she said. "The European Union is not the solution, it's the problem."

Polls show that Le Pen would win the most votes in the April 23 first round of the elections, but would lose the May 7 run-off against whoever she faces.

Policy Mistakes

On the U.S., she said she was hopeful President Donald Trump would reverse what she described as interventionist policies of President Barack Obama. She listed support for rebels in Libya and Syria as "mistakes" that have undermined world peace.

"The U.S. is an ally but sometimes an adversary," she said, adding that she was encouraged by Trump's early days in office.

She said Russia has an "essential balancing role to keep world peace" and "has been badly treated by the

European Union." In Africa, French policy would be one of "non-intervention, but not indifference."

Le Pen said communism and liberal capitalism have both been delusions, and that "people are trying to escape, and find in the nation the best way to protect themselves. Each country should be free to follow its interests, choose its allies, preserve its culture, and France supports that right for all nations."

The start of her speech was interrupted by a topless Femen protester who was quickly removed by security officials.

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

Breitbart : Le Pen Extends Lead in French Presidential Polls

Front National leader Marine Le Pen has extended her lead in polling for the French Presidential elections, and is now comfortably placed to win the first round of voting.

The BVA-Salesforce poll published Thursday gave Le Pen on 27 per cent of the vote in the first round of the election, due to take place on 23

April, up 2.5 percentage points from the last time the poll was conducted in early February.

A second poll by Harris International showed similar results placing Le Pen on 25 percent, four points clear of Francois Fillon (Les Republicains) and five ahead of Emmanuel

Macron, an independent who split from the Socialist party last August.

Both polls were conducted at the start of the week, before Wednesday evening's announcement by veteran centrist Francois Bayrou that he would be dropping out of the race to lend support to Macron, a move which

analysts say could give the independent candidate the edge over his rival Fillon.

Rolling poll results for the French Presidential election, first round. Ifop-Fiducial.

However, Le Pen's lead is not expected to hold into the second

round of voting on 7 May, in which the top two candidates go head to head. The BVA poll showed Macron beating Le Pen comfortably by 61 per cent to her 39 per cent. She is expected to fair marginally against Fillon, with the

vote splitting out 55 per cent to 45 per cent in his favour.

The Harris Interactive poll showed similar results.

If so, Le Pen would share the fate of her father, Jean-Marie, who made it to the second round of the 2002 Presidential elections only for his second round rival Jacques Chirac to win by a landslide 82.2 per cent. However, Marine has done much to

modernise the image of her party, running on a popular platform of offering a referendum on membership of the European Union and abolishing same-sex marriage, among other pledges.



France's National Front scandal has exposed the dirty little secret of Europe's far right (online)

By Henry Farrell and Abraham Newman

By Henry Farrell and Abraham Newman

Monkey Cage

Analysis

Analysis is interpretation of the news based on evidence, including data, as well as anticipating how events might unfold based on past events

February 23 at 10:00 AM

The chief political aide of Marine Le Pen, the leader of France's far-right National Front party and candidate for the French presidential election, has just been put under investigation by French magistrates. If the charges are correct, the National Front leader has been cheating on European Parliament expenses to pay her bodyguard and her chief political aide for jobs they didn't do.

This may sound strange. The National Front, like other European far-right parties, is virulently hostile to the European Union — so why is it able to use European Union resources to build itself up? Yet as we discuss in a new research article for the Review of International Political Economy, the National Front is far from unique.

Far-right parties hate the European Union — yet without it, many of them would have died

Right-wing populists like the National Front typically hate the European Union. They advocate radical changes to the European Union — or outright withdrawal from it. Yet without the support of the European Union, they almost certainly would have a far weaker voice in national politics. Many far-right parties rely on Europe both for elected positions and for money.

The first key resource that Europe offers to far-right parties is the chance to get elected. Far-right parties often have a tough time getting launched into politics. They are not part of the political mainstream, which means that they may face a self-fulfilling prophecy of failure. People are unlikely to vote for these parties, even if they agree with some of the parties' positions, because they don't know much about them, and likely think the parties don't have any real chance of success.

European Parliament elections have boosted far-right parties like the National Front and the UK Independence Party. European voters don't take European Parliament elections very seriously, treating them as what political scientists call "second-order elections." This means that voters are more willing to use their European Parliament votes to protest the government and the political mainstream, making it more likely that they will vote for fringe parties, giving these parties greater credibility. When the National Front won a third of France's seats in the European Parliament elections in 2014, it sent shock waves through France and Europe.

The second key resource that Europe offers to fringe parties is money. Parties elected to the European Parliament or categorized as "Europarties" can receive European funding. This again can be very valuable — especially to parties that do not have parliamentary funds or wealthy backers in their home countries. In theory, this money is supposed to go to Europe-level activities — such as hiring assistants who help members of the European Parliament research legislation and do their jobs. In practice, there is not as much supervision over spending as there ought to be.

This is what has gotten the National Front into trouble. Le Pen is accused of having paid her chief political counselor and her bodyguard on the pretense that they were parliamentary assistants, when they were nothing of the sort. Other members of the National Front are accused of similar abuses.

Brexit would never have happened without European Parliament resources

The most notorious example of the European Union helping a virulently anti-Europe party is the UK Independence Party (UKIP), which was the key mover behind Britain's exit from the European Union. It's safe to say that the UK Independence Party would have died long before Brexit became a possibility if it hadn't been for the European Parliament.

Monkey Cage newsletter

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European Parliament elections were crucial to UKIP's success. British national elections are held under a "first past the post" rule, which gives electoral seats to the party with the most votes in a given constituency. These rules make people much more likely to vote for big parties, and much less likely to risk wasting their votes on small ones. In the description of UKIP former leader, Nigel Farage, "the first-past-the-post system is brutal to a party like us." Britain's elections to the European Parliament, in contrast, are conducted under a proportional representation system that is much more forgiving to fringe parties. This combined with the protest vote to give UKIP 24 seats after the 2014 European Parliament elections, as

opposed to 20 for Labour and 19 for the Conservative Party.

UKIP was poorly funded in Britain, and hence had strong reasons to suck up as much money as it could from the European Parliament. Nathalie Brack describes how euroskeptic parties like UKIP practiced "strategic absenteeism," in which their members turned up in Parliament solely to collect the money that they received for attendance. As Brack quotes one UKIP member of the European Parliament: "If I don't come and put my card in the slot to vote, I don't get my money to give to the party." Without this funding source, UKIP would have been far more poorly resourced.

As both the UKIP and National Front stories demonstrate, there are two things that far-right parties like about the European Union — its election resources and its money. It seems paradoxical that the European Union is paying the parties that want to dig its grave. Indeed, the trouble that the National Front is in may reflect the fact that some European authorities are unwilling to continue this arrangement. The National Front is certainly not the only party guilty of sketchy behavior with European Parliament money — the fact that the Parliament has gone after it, triggering the French investigation, may have as much to do with politics as the desire to uproot corrupt practices.

Henry Farrell is an associate professor of political science and international affairs at George Washington University.

Abraham Newman is an associate professor at the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University.



France's Macron Raises Curtain on Election Alliance to Beat Le Pen

PARIS —

France's presidential race took a new turn on Thursday as independent Emmanuel Macron raised the curtain on a partnership with veteran centrist Francois

Bayrou to help him beat the far-right's Marine Le Pen.

"Political times have changed. We cannot continue as before. The National Front is at the gates of power. It plays on fear," Macron

said, referring to Le Pen's once-shunned party.

Opinion polls appeared to show the 39-year-old Macron, a political novice who has never held elected office but who has soared to become a favorite to enter the

Elysee, was already benefiting from the new-born alliance announced on Wednesday.

After meeting Bayrou, the fresh-faced former investment banker said he saw the new partnership as a turning point "not only in the

campaign but also in French political life" - meaning it would be a break with the left-right rotation of power that has dominated French politics for decades.

Standing with Bayrou, a 65-year-old centrist who has run for president unsuccessfully three times, Macron told reporters they stood between France and a Le Pen regime of "fear."

FILE - Far-right leader and candidate for next spring presidential elections Marine Le Pen from France delivers a speech in Koblenz, Germany, Jan. 21, 2017.

All polls say Le Pen, leader of the anti-immigrant and anti-European Union National Front, will come first in the initial round of voting on April 23 but lose to either Macron or conservative candidate Francois Fillon in the May 7 runoff.

Two new opinion polls released as they met showed Macron still neck-and-neck with Fillon.

A third poll, collected by Ifop Fiducial over the past three days and thus including some reaction to Wednesday night's tie-up with Bayrou, showed

Macron's first round score boosted by 3.5 points to 22.5 percent, ahead of Fillon on 20.5.

Polls have suggested that Bayrou has the support of about five percent of French voters, and his backing for Macron could prove crucial to his election success.

In an interview with Les Echos newspaper on Thursday, Macron, who says he wants to transcend the classic left-right divide, outlined his economic plans mixing tax cuts and a reduction in government jobs.

Socialists Boost

The Socialists are given little chance of making the runoff after five years of unpopular rule by Socialist President Francois Hollande.

But Socialist candidate Benoit Hamon, who routinely trails in fourth place in opinion polls, received a boost when Greens candidate Yannick Jadot withdrew from the race after striking an agreement with Hamon's camp.

Benoit Hamon greets supporters after winning the Socialist party presidential nomination in Paris, France, Jan. 29, 2017.

Opinion polls show Jadot would win only a tiny percentage of votes in the election - between 1 and 2 percent - but the move is a step forward in Hamon's hopes of unifying left-wing forces. Hamon has sought to persuade hard-left veteran Jean-Luc Melenchon, who has a strong core support of over 10 percent, to pull out as candidate and join forces with him to give the Left a chance of retaining power.

Melenchon has so far refused to do so, referring to the Socialist campaign train disparagingly as a "hearse."

After Jadot's announcement on Thursday, Melenchon said he remained open to dialogue with Hamon and had not "closed any door."

Le Pen, in a speech on Thursday dedicated to foreign policy, suggested France should pull out of NATO's military wing and praised Russia as a "decisive force" in the world.

"The historic ties that have linked us with the United States since the War of Independence does not prevent us from leaving NATO's integrated

command structure," she told supporters.

The campaigns of both Le Pen and of Fillon, a former prime minister, have been shaken by investigations into allegations that they misused public money. Both have denied wrongdoing.

French conservative Francois Fillon holds a press conference at his campaign headquarters in Paris, Feb. 6, 2017.

Fillon, 62, was once the frontrunner but is now engulfed in a scandal over salaries paid to his wife and children out of public funds for work they are alleged to have not carried out.

He says they did the work for which they were paid.

Le Pen is facing accusations she paid her chief of staff and bodyguard illicitly from European Parliament funds that she is now being pressed by the assembly to repay.

Florian Philippot, one of Le Pen's main aides, said on BFMTV that the National Front would not turn up if she was summoned to appear in court over the EU fake jobs affair.



French Centrist Presidential Candidate Unveils Economic Proposals (online)

William Horobin

Updated Feb. 24, 2017 8:40 a.m. ET

PARIS—French presidential candidate Emmanuel Macron moved Friday to counter rivals and critics who say his campaign lacks substance, presenting a detailed economic program centered on cuts to welfare spending and a €50 billion (\$53 billion) investment plan.

Mr. Macron, leader of fledgling political party En Marche, said he would target €60 billion of savings a year by the end of his five-year term as president. The cuts initially would focus on limiting health-care spending and paring France's generous unemployment benefits. As president, he said he would also would eliminate 120,000 public-sector jobs.

Taking advantage of the low cost of government borrowing, Mr. Macron said his investment plan would focus on renewable energy and training programs for young people and the unemployed.

"I want to make our public spending more efficient while also financing a transformation of our growth model," Mr. Macron in an interview

published in Friday's print edition of the French daily Les Echos.

In detailing his economic proposals, Mr. Macron's is testing his ability to preserve the broad support that has made him one of the front-runners in the race to become France's next president in May.

By putting figures on his pledges, the 39-year-old Mr. Macron, who has never held elected office, risks opening himself to criticism from leftists and the National Front leader Marine Le Pen, who say France is already constrained by European Union-inspired austerity.

The center-right Les Républicains party, however, says France needs steep tax cuts and sharp reductions in public spending. Their candidate, Francois Fillon, has promised to make €100 billion in spending cuts annually by the end of his five-year term as president and slash 500,000 public-sector jobs.

Recent polls for the first round of France's two-round presidential election show Mr. Macron trailing Ms. Le Pen but ahead of Mr. Fillon. The same surveys show that Mr. Macron would rally enough support

from across the political spectrum to win the second-round runoff against National Front leader Marine Le Pen.

However, Mr. Macron's voter base is fragile. According to Ifop's tracking poll of 1,395 people between Sunday and Thursday, only 49% of Mr. Macron's voters are sure of their choice compared with 63% of Mr. Fillon's and 79% of Ms. Le Pen's. The poll shows Ms. Le Pen winning the first round with 26.5%, ahead of Mr. Macron 22.5% and Mr. Fillon on 20.5%.

A former economy minister in the Socialist government of Francois Hollande, Mr. Macron is positioning himself as a centrist by mixing policies associated with both the French right and left.

As an olive branch to leftist voters he has pledged to extend France's generous unemployment benefits to the self-employed and sanction employers who make regular layoffs. But he says he would also trim €10 billion from unemployment benefit spending and loosen strict labor laws to give companies more flexibility to hire and fire.

"France is one of the only large European Union countries that has not resolved its problem of mass unemployment: that should be our priority," Mr. Macron said.

The presidential candidate's tax proposals also had a pro-business slant with cuts to corporate tax and employers' social security contributions. But Mr. Macron says he wouldn't go as far as Mr. Fillon in shifting the tax burden to households from businesses and the wealthy. Unlike the center-right candidate, Mr. Macron said he would not raise sales taxes and would adjust, rather than abolish, France's wealth tax.

"I want a new social and economic model. Unlike Francois Fillon, I don't believe in purging or repairing the country against its will," Mr. Macron told Les Echos.

Write to William Horobin at William.Horobin@wsj.com

Corrections & Amplifications
An earlier version of this article misspelled Emmanuel Macron's last name as Marcon. (Feb. 24, 2017)

Newsweek : France's Macron announces economic plans of mixing tax cuts and spending cuts

By Reuters On 2/24/17 at 4:46 AM

French presidential candidate Emmanuel Macron on Thursday outlined his economic plans mixing tax cuts and a reduction in government jobs that would stick to France's commitments to eurozone partners to cut its budget deficit.

The former economy minister, one of the frontrunners in the April-May presidential race, had come under pressure to present a more detailed manifesto in recent weeks and sought to stay true to his vow to transcend the left-right divide.

"Unlike François Fillon, I don't believe in a purge and in fixing the country against

the people's will," Macron told Les Echos newspaper in an interview, referring to his main conservative rival in the election.

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"And unlike Benoit Hamon, I don't accept defeat on the jobs front," he added, in reference to the Socialist candidate.

The 39-year old ex-banker said he would cut corporate tax to 25 percent from the current 33.3 percent over the next term and aimed to cut public sector headcount by 120,000.

Some 60 billion euros in public spending would be cut over the next

five years should he be elected—less than the 100 billion euro shock-and-awe plan advocated by Fillon but a more ambitious target than the ruling Socialists' current plan.

In a country blighted by an unemployment rate of 10 percent, Macron said he would make cutting it his priority and said bringing it down to 7 percent by 2022 appeared "reasonable."

In a gesture of goodwill towards Germany, the European Union's paymaster and its strongest economy, Macron said he would seek to show he is carrying out reforms to gain Berlin's trust rather than confront it over deficit cuts.

"France must carry out structural reforms: It's good for us and will reassure our partners, and chiefly Germany," he said. "If we don't have a brave plan of structural reforms, the Germans won't follow us."

Having done that, he would seek to get the eurozone to increase its joint investment capacity and set up a common budget.

Macron, who has never held elected office, was given a boost this week after an influential centrist decided to back him to defeat far-right rival Marine Le Pen.



Macron Gets a Boost From French Pact Opening Gap Ahead of Fillon

23 février 2017 à 13:20 UTC-5 23 février 2017 à 14:41 UTC-5

- Independent Macron bolstered campaign through pact with ally
- Fillon camp says Macron and Bayrou are secret socialists

Emmanuel Macron, the maverick presidential candidate who created his own political movement less than a year ago, got a pickup in the polls from his new centrist alliance to move 2 percentage points ahead of his main rival.

Macron jumped 3.5 points in Ifo's daily tracking poll on Thursday to reach 22.5 percent, the first to incorporate reactions to his pact with one-time rival for the political center ground, François Bayrou. Republican François Fillon also gained from Bayrou's decision to stay out of the race, rising 1.5 points to 20.5 percent, his highest score with Ifo in nearly three weeks.

Emmanuel Macron

Photographer: Marlene Awaad/Bloomberg

With exactly two months to go until the first round of voting in a topsy-turvy race, the 39-year-old Macron

is vying with Fillon, a former prime minister, for the second slot in the May 7 run-off. The nationalist Marine Le Pen is favorite to win the first round -- Ifo projected she'll get 26 percent -- but she's also tipped to lose heavily in the final ballot.

Macron quit the Hollande government last year to mount an independent bid for president and overturned expectations to become the marginal front-runner for the French election. He suffered his first major hiccup last week when he managed to ruffle both the conservatives proud of France's colonial past and the gay community, fueling concerns that Le Pen might emerge from the melee with a mandate to take the country out of the euro.

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The spread between French 10-year bonds and similar-maturity German bunds rose 1 basis point to 75 at 6:38 p.m. in Paris.

As well as snagging Bayrou, Macron also won the backing of former green party member François de Rugy, who was defeated in the Socialist Party's primary. Bayrou has the support of about 5 percent of voters, a prize for Macron in a tight race.

Fillon, Hamon

François Baroin, a former finance minister who's helping Fillon, tried to downplay the significance of the alliance, comparing it to Bayrou's support for President François Hollande in 2012 instead of Nicolas Sarkozy, traditionally a closer ally. Macron worked for Hollande, first as economic adviser and then as minister between 2014 and 2016.

"Bayrou has been a clandestine socialist for 20 years now," Baroin said on Europe 1 radio. "This is effectively the second time he'll be voting for François Hollande. This time he's paying for his place officially."

The Socialist candidate Benoit Hamon issued a statement complaining that he had already taken the lead on the public ethics initiatives that Bayrou has agreed with Macron and questioning Macron's commitment to the measures. He said Macron should publish names of his donors and name lobbyists that he's met.

Divided Left

With Bayrou's backing, "Macron can embody the return of morality to political life, which is an important issue for many voters," Bruno Cautres, a political scientist at Sciences Po institute, said on LCI television.

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Macron's ability to pick up endorsements contrasts to the left, where Hamon and far-left candidate Jean-Luc Melenchon have failed to mount a joint bid. Ifo put Hamon at 13.5 percent and Melenchon at 11 percent, meaning that combined they'd have enough to reach the presidential run-off. Hamon did pick up the backing of green candidate Yannick Jadot Thursday. Polls show Jadot had the support of about 2 percent of voters.

"We can never say never for the left, but there is a huge amount of bad blood on both sides," said Sudhir Hazareesingh, a history lecturer at Balliol College, Oxford. "If Hamon gets too close to Melenchon he will lose support to Macron."

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Zakaria : Don't despair: The center can still win in Europe

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

varieties, who share a disdain for globalization, are energized, certain that the future is going their way. But the center is rising again, even in the heart of the old world.

Consider Emmanuel Macron, the 39-year-old former Rothschild

banker who is the odds-on favorite to become France's next president. Polls indicate that the far-right candidate, Marine Le Pen, is leading the field in the first round with about 25 percent of the vote. But in the second round, which pits only the two front-runners against one

another, Macron is projected to beat her handily. Keep in mind that Macron is emphatically in favor of free markets, globalization, the European Union and the transatlantic alliance — and yet he is surging in a country often defined by its strong labor unions,

skepticism of capitalism and distrust of the United States.

Why? Because Macron is, above all, an outsider, a reformer and a charismatic politician, and these qualities appear to be far more important than an ideological checklist. Social science studies have shown persuasively that people connect to candidates on a gut level and then rationalize that connection by agreeing with their policy proposals. There was little difference between the ideologies of Bill and Hillary Clinton. But voters in Middle America felt, at an emotional level, that Bill "got them," and never felt that way about Hillary.

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Europeans and Americans sense a stagnation in the economics and politics of the West. They are frustrated with business as usual and see the established order as corrupt, paralyzed and out of touch. Macron's campaign is working because it is brimming with energy.

His new party is called On the Move! ; his campaign book is titled "Revolution."

"Macron is, in some sense, the handsome brother of Marine Le Pen," says Columbia University scholar Mark Lilla. "Both fill a vacuum created by the collapse of the major parties. All over Europe, the main political parties represent old cleavages between the church and secularism, capital and labor. Macron and his movement are new. He represents start-ups, the young, tolerance, flexibility and, above all, hope."

We are living through a sea change in politics and watching an outbreak of populism. But this doesn't mean that there are no other forces and sentiments at work. The world is increasingly connected, diverse and tolerant, and hundreds of millions of people in the West, especially young people, celebrate that reality. Macron champions these ideals, even as he appeals to others who are more nervous about the changing world.

Macron is not an isolated phenomenon. Consider Germany,

where much has been made of Angela Merkel's sagging poll numbers. But Merkel has been in power for more than a decade, at which point almost no Western leader has been able to maintain enthusiastic support. Margaret Thatcher, Tony Blair and Helmut Kohl all watched their approval ratings spiral down around the 10-year mark. And Merkel's greatest competition comes from Martin Schulz, a left-of-center former bookseller who is even more pro-European, cosmopolitan and globalist.

"The political order is messy right now," Lilla says. "It will eventually sort itself out around the new cleavage — people comfortable with globalization and those opposed to it." But for those of us at the center, who do see globalization as a positive force, we will need to understand the cultural dislocation caused by the large-scale immigration of recent decades.

The center can win. Europe is not inexorably heading down a path of right-wing nationalism that abandons the European Union, economic integration, the Atlantic

alliance and Western values. But much depends on the United States, the country that created the strategic and ideological conception of the West. A senior European leader who attended the Munich Security Conference last week noted that, despite some reassuring words from senior American officials, "many of us are convinced that the White House is trying to elect Le Pen in France and defeat Merkel in Germany." And there is heady talk by White House chief strategist Stephen K. Bannon about weakening the European Union and destroying the established order.

If the United States encourages the destruction of core Western institutions and ideals, then the West might well unravel. But this would not be one of those stories of civilizational decline in the face of external threats. It would be a self-inflicted wound — one that might be fatal.

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The Verge : Petition calls on Obama to run for president in France

Amar Toor

Amid a presidential campaign that has been marred by scandal, conspiracy theories, and the spectre of a new far-right leader, disillusioned French voters have called for an outsider to join the race: Barack Obama.

A petition launched on Monday calls on the former US president to run in this year's French elections, which will be held in April and May. Called Obama17, the petition aims to garner 1 million signatures by March 2015, and as of Friday morning, it had already gained 30,000, according to one of the people behind the effort. But even the people who launched the website acknowledge that the chances of Obama actually ascending to the Elysée Palace are virtually zero. French law requires presidential

candidates to be French, which Obama is not.

But the impossibility of the campaign is also what inspired it. In a phone interview Thursday night, one of the people behind the petition, who asked only to be identified as "Antoine," said he and three other friends decided to create the site out of frustration with France's leading candidates and the campaigns they've run so far.

"We just wanted to say that we've had enough of all of these guys."

"In a campaign where we only talk about the scandals of [center-right candidate François] Fillon or the rise of [far-right candidate Marine] Le Pen, at a certain moment we told ourselves well, why not?" Antoine said. "We just wanted to say that

we've had enough of all of these guys."

Antoine, who is in his 30s, says that he and his friends are not activists, and he doesn't align himself with a particular political party. But he says he has grown tired of voting for the lesser of two evils in every presidential race, rather than a candidate who inspires genuine enthusiasm. "The only guy who's ever made me feel that way is Obama," he says. This week, he and his friends plastered some 500 Obama posters across Paris, each carrying the slogan: "Oui on peut" ("Yes we can").

Antoine isn't the first French voter to call for an Obama presidency; similar petitions were launched last year, as NPR notes. And although Antoine realizes that it may be a long time before France changes its

citizenship requirement for presidents, he thinks it's important to at least put forth the idea of a more globalized government — particularly given the nationalist, inward-looking rhetoric that has characterized Le Pen's campaign.

"At a time when Amazon and Facebook and Apple are richer than our country, it's stupid to think that it's our nationalism that will make us better governed," he says. "We would do better to pay people who are competent to fill important positions, rather than getting stuck with the same people we've had for 20 years."

"The reality, of course, is that it will never happen," he adds. "But in another world, in 100 years or 200 years, it may not be a problem."

NPR : A Citizens' Petition Calls For A New French President: Barack Obama

Camila Domonoske Twitter

The "Obama 2017" campaign is attempting to "persuade" the former U.S. president to run for office again — in France.

Courtesy of Obama 2017

The French presidential campaign has been marked by scandal, surprises and upsets as the April election approaches.

Now a petition is calling for an even bigger plot twist: the return of President Barack Obama. As in, French President Barack Obama.

Earlier this week, the Obama 2017 campaign was launched, calling for the former U.S. president to step forward as a candidate in the French election while there's still time.

"Barack Obama has completed his second term as President of the United States," the site says. "Why not hire him as president of France?"

... [He] has the best resume in the world for the job."

Posters for Obama 2017 have been plastered around Paris. The slogan, of course: "Oui on peut," French for "Yes we can." And a campaign-style website is gathering signatures to persuade Obama to run.

It's not the first time French citizens have expressed longing for Obama's leadership — at least two petitions were started last year — but it's by far the most successful. According

to the site's organizers, some 27,000 people have signed the petition so far.

A group of four friends — "basic 30-year-old guys from Paris" who work in creative industries — came up with the idea "after a drink," according to one of the people behind the site. He asked NPR not to use his name, to avoid possible legal consequences that could damage his career.

"We were thinking about French politics and saying that we were fed up with the fact that we all the time had to vote *against* someone," he says, "and how it would be cool to be able to vote for someone we admire. We came up with Obama."

"I think the whole world would love to have him as president," he says.

"Yes we can," the posters read, with a link to the petition. **Courtesy of**

The Washington Post

By Manu Saadia

By Manu Saadia

February 23 at 2:48 PM

Manu Saadia is a French writer based in Los Angeles.

In what may be a turning point in French history, Emmanuel Macron, the former finance minister and center-left candidate in the French presidential election, called French colonization a "crime against humanity" and intimated that France should "offer apologies to all those toward whom we directed these acts."

No public figure in France has ever dared to go that far in reckoning with the country's colonial past, let alone discuss apologies. As a matter of fact, quite the opposite: No later than last August, François Fillon, the leading center-right candidate for the presidency, had stated that "no, France is not guilty to have wanted to share its culture with the people of Africa, Asia and North America." The abyss between Fillon's rather unfortunate "sharing" and Macron's sweeping indictment is hardly limited to Algeria (where Macron made his statement). This is a very public fight between the candidates aspiring to France's highest elective office about the nation's colonial past, and therefore about its future. What should be the place of the descendants of France's colonial subjects — Muslims from North Africa but also Vietnamese, Malagasy, Congolese, etc. — in today's French society?

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

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Doug Cameron

Robert Wall and

Feb. 23, 2017 4:30 p.m. ET

Obama 2017 hide caption

We should note that in order to run for president in France, Obama would have to be naturalized as a French citizen. Also, he doesn't speak French — although Michelle Obama studied the language in college, according to a biography.

Anyway, that's not really the point.

"It's definitely a joke," says the co-creator of the site. "But it could make people think a little bit about

what we could do differently in French politics. ... the idea was to make people wake up."

Obama 2017 isn't meant to rally support for any French candidate or party, he says — it's an expression of frustration about politicians in France in general.

"Always the same people, here for 20 years, coming up from the same schools, giving ministry [positions] to their friends," the co-creator says.

"We don't know politics," he says, referring to the group of friends behind the site. "We aren't coming with real stuff. We're just proposing something to make people think."

NPR has reached out to Obama's personal office for comment; so far, there has been no reply.

Saadia : France should apologize for colonialism in Algeria (online)

In Algeria, Macron's declarations were welcome. Historian Fouad Soufi praised the candidate for being "courageous." Reactions on the right to Macron have been predictably angry: Fillon denounced Macron's "indignity" and "constant repentance." As for populist Marine Le Pen (whose father, Jean-Marie Le Pen, allegedly engaged in torture as a paratrooper during the Algerian War of Independence), she let one of her lieutenants speak for her, accusing Macron of "detesting France."

Comments were more muted on the left. For instance, Emmanuelle Cosse, the housing minister, disagreed on the use of "crimes against humanity" because of its precise legal nature. Yet an IFOP poll taken for the Algerian news website TSA shows the French public is divided, with 51 percent agreeing with Macron.

By using the legal qualification of crime against humanity, Macron has acknowledged the colonial enterprise for what it truly was: an illegitimate dispossession of territory and a violent subjugation of local populations for the sole benefit of the imperial power.

Formal apologies from European colonial powers are few and far between and usually involve discrete events. Germany is in the process of presenting apologies for its role in Namibia's Herero and Nama genocide between 1904 and 1907 (without any compensation). The Netherlands apologized to Indonesia for mass killings during the War of Independence. Belgium, on the other hand, never apologized for King Leopold's bloody rule over Congo, while England has

adamantly refused to make amends for massacres in colonial India.

To this day, the Algerian War of Independence (fought between 1954 and 1962) remains highly contentious in French politics. The French Army's human rights violations (most notably, its widespread use of torture), terrorism on both sides and the ultimate defeat and repatriation of close to 800,000 French citizens from Algeria — all these left durable divisions in French society. The mass immigration of workers from the former colony to power France's industrial miracle during the 1960s only compounded the problem. There are now an estimated 7.3 million French people with at least one immigrant parent (out of 66 million inhabitants), including about 1 million of Algerian descent.

A decade ago, the right-wing majority passed a law demanding that the "positive role" of colonization be acknowledged in history textbooks. It was thankfully rescinded. In similar fashion, in 2001, the socialist mayor of Paris unveiled a plaque commemorating the massacre of Oct. 17, 1961. At the time, the right wing and police unions called it an "argument for Muslim extremists" and a "provocation." That modest plaque aimed to acknowledge the up to 200 pro-independence Algerian demonstrators said to have been killed in cold blood, with some of them thrown into the Seine river, by French police. The plaque remained, but the specter of the colonial past still haunts France's present. Last Friday, anti-Macron demonstrators in Carpentras (South) screamed "Treason" while holding banners that read "OAS" (the infamous Organisation Armée

Secrète, a French terrorist death squad responsible for many anti-Algerian bombings during the War of Independence and even a failed assassination attempt on Gen. Charles de Gaulle).

The French left is not exempt from such hysteria, either. In fact, it was under a left-leaning government that the hijab was first banned in schools. An entire strain of the French left wing, from cartoonists at Charlie Hebdo to leading intellectuals, views Islam as incompatible with the République's ideals of equality and laïcité (that is, the strict confinement of religious expression to the private sphere and the precedence of the majority's laws).

That is why Macron's public denunciation of the criminal nature of colonization is such a watershed. While this is not a particularly controversial view among professional historians, it goes against the most strident voices on both the nativist, populist right and the Republican, anti-religious left. Macron's statement single-handedly opened up a space for the recognition of France's past wrongs. The breakthrough and the hope are that identifying these wrongs, naming them and making them visible might lead to a better diagnosis of France's complex dealing with its ethnic and religious minorities. Offering amends for the horrors of colonization is indeed a powerful and necessary gesture of truth toward the many disenfranchised French citizens of colonial origins. Speaking truth to that past is a first step on the path to reconciliation.

business. It ceased to be funny when a frustrated Qatar Airways canceled orders for four planes that were months overdue.

There were so many almost-finished jetliners, missing their engines, piled up at an Airbus SE factory in Germany last May that executives joked they were in the glider

"It is making a huge impact on my bottom line. We are, quite frankly, screaming," said the airline's chief executive, Akbar Al Baker.

After years of surging orders, including many from fast-growing Asian and Mideast airlines that sought fuel-efficient jets when oil prices were higher, the aviation industry is heaving under the strain. By the end of the decade, Airbus and Boeing Co. must build 30% more planes annually than they do now to meet existing orders, in one of the industry's steepest production increases since World War II. The scale of the ramp-up is putting companies to the test.

Suppliers of seats, toilets and engine parts are stretched to the limit and sometimes falling short. In one of the worst holdups, Pratt & Whitney, an engine supplier for a hot-selling new Airbus model, informed the European plane maker in September it would ship only 75% as many engines in 2016 as planned.

Both Boeing and Airbus are making adjustments to cope, retooling factories and tightening oversight of their globe-spanning supply lines. Boeing said at the beginning of 2016 it would make fewer planes during the year than in 2015. The move sent Boeing's stock to its steepest drop in 14 years. The shares later recovered and on Thursday hit a record high.

Airbus fell so far behind on its 2016 production schedule it had to rush out more than 100 planes in December to meet the year's target. It took the unusual step of increasing staffing at factories in the final weeks of the year, including the holidays, and told suppliers to do the same.

Airbus's newest version of its workhorse A320 offers new engines, but the company had 20 of the planes still waiting for engines at year-end. By cranking out more older models, filling back orders, it managed to meet and even exceed its 2016 target of 670 planes.

Today, the yearslong order bonanza pressuring manufacturers shows signs of tailing off, but that doesn't

relieve the urgency to deliver ordered planes as quickly as possible. Manufacturers collect most of a plane's price only when they ship it. For Airbus, cash flow ran steeply negative for much of last year because so many airlines weren't getting to customers.

Also, for the fiercely competitive Boeing and Airbus, on-time delivery can keep buyers loyal instead of turning to the arch rival or to emerging plane producers in China, Russia and Canada. Qatar Airways, after the Airbus delays, decided to buy some Boeings, a new 737 model called the Max.

Qatar Airways' Mr. Al Baker blames both of the big two for not being ready for the order boom, which was fed by low interest rates in addition to the higher fuel prices of prior years. The inexpensive financing spurred purchasing by airplane-leasing companies, which buy about 40% of new planes.

In 2011, Mr. Al Baker ordered 50 Airbus A320 airliners with new, more fuel-efficient engines, called the A320neo—an order trimmed to 46 after his cancellations last year. "Both Airbus and Boeing, in order to mitigate their risk, will have to start investing in the industry in order to have a more diversified supply chain," Mr. Al Baker said.

Airbus, based in Toulouse, France, has moved around shifts and vacation time for factory workers to align them better across its manufacturing centers. It may dedicate more resources to "supporting and understanding proactively possible hiccups with suppliers in the future," said Tom Enders, the chief executive. He asked his chief operating officer, Fabrice Brégier, to personally supervise suppliers.

"We need to educate" them, Mr. Brégier said. "They are on their way. Some need to continue to make efforts."

At Boeing, meanwhile, Chief Executive Dennis Muilenburg has staff members and consultants scouring for potential problems that might delay the first delivery of the 737 Max, expected as early as May.

In the frenzy to deliver on time, minor snafus can cascade into big problems. Trouble has arisen with seats, toilets and in-flight entertainment systems, all in short supply at various times.

Hit by a 2014 strike at a Texas seat maker, France-based aviation-parts supplier Zodiac Aerospace SA was late delivering business-class seats, which cost about \$100,000 each, for new Boeing 787s headed to American Airlines Group Inc. in 2015. Typically, airlines buy seats directly from suppliers but have them shipped to the airplane manufacturer.

The delay pushed back deliveries of the 787s by four months and held up fitting new seats in some 777 jets. American switched seat suppliers. The airline declined comment. Boeing now is backing a startup seat-maker to prevent shortages.

Zodiac also was late delivering seats and lavatory doors to Airbus for its A350 long-range jet, at a time when Airbus was sharply raising production of that plane in 2015. One of the first buyers, Finnair, received the planes late.

Zodiac's chief executive, Olivier Zarrouati, said his company relied too heavily on assurances from subsidiaries that make the parts but has since fixed the problems. Zodiac agreed in January to be acquired by Safran SA, a French maker of airplane parts, which has pledged to help Zodiac overcome its problems. The acquisition still needs shareholder and regulatory approval.

Nothing has been more disruptive than the Pratt & Whitney engine issue. When Airbus set out several years ago to rejuvenate its popular 165-seat A320, by giving buyers a choice of two new engines, orders for the A320neo far outpaced expectations.

For one engine option, Airbus picked CFM International, a joint venture of General Electric Co. and Safran. For the other, it chose the Pratt & Whitney unit of United Technologies Corp.

Pratt & Whitney struggled with making the engine fan blades, which initially took twice as long as managers had expected. The company said this is improving and extra capacity is coming on stream to meet its new target.

United Technologies' chief executive, Gregory Hayes, said in January that it was back on track after struggling with parts issues. Pratt & Whitney delivered 138 engines in 2016, down from the planned 200, but expects to build 350 or 400 this year. The company on Feb. 1 replaced the head of its commercial aircraft engines business.

CFM also shipped fewer engines than planned last year, 77 instead of about 100. Output is scheduled to jump to more than 2,000 by 2019. CFM this month named a boss to oversee the process after the contract for the prior head of the joint venture ended. One CFM plant, outside Lafayette, Ind., is trying to cut in half the 20 days needed to turn out an engine.

Airbus managed to deliver 68 A320neo airliners last year, including 39 with the Pratt & Whitney engine. After Qatar Airways' cancellation of its initial orders, Deutsche Lufthansa AG became the first airline to take delivery.

This year should be smoother, though delays are likely to persist, said Airbus's Mr. Brégier. The company expects to triple its output of the A320neo and build more than 700 airliners in all.

Boeing, which delivered 748 planes last year, expects this to rise to 760 to 765 in 2017 as it boosts production of the 737 from the third quarter, with further increases planned over the next two years.

—Ted Mann contributed to this article.

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Seized Bank Funds Will Go to Terror Victims

Devlin Barrett

Updated Feb. 23,

2017 9:35 a.m. ET

Victims of terror attacks against Americans in the 1970s, '80s and '90s will start receiving checks in coming weeks from a \$1.1 billion compensation fund carved out of a settlement struck between the U.S.

government and a French bank, BNP Paribas SA.

The government last week began sending out letters notifying roughly 2,300 victims or their surviving relatives they were in line for money from the fund, which was established by Congress in 2015. The fund is designed to compensate people who were injured in terror

attacks before 2001 as well as the families of those killed.

Those include victims of the 1998 U.S. embassy bombings in Africa, the 1983 and 1984 attacks on the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, the families of the hostages taken at the U.S. Embassy in Iran in 1979, and the family of Malcolm Kerr, a university president in Beirut when he was killed by terrorists in 1984. One of

Mr. Kerr's sons, Steve Kerr, is now a basketball coach in the NBA.

The fund aims to provide compensation to victims of terror attacks against Americans overseas, many of them U.S. government employees.

Advocates hope the approach will become a new model for compensating terror victims. The

situation is relatively novel, in that the BNP settlement was so large and Congress stepped in to allocate the money. The settlement follows charges that BNP evaded U.S. sanctions against Iran and other countries for years, creating a tie between the wrongdoing and the issue of terrorism.

Edith Bartley was a law school student in 1998 when her father and brother died in an al Qaeda bombing of the U.S. embassy in Nairobi. She has spent more than 18 years fighting for recognition and compensation for the victims' families. She said she was relieved the payments were finally about to go out.

"It's been a very long journey and an exhausting one for me personally," she said. "For someone who's walked the halls of Congress and has the calluses on my feet to show for it, it's still surreal."

The payments to the victims and

their families will be based on court awards determined in previous lawsuits. Individuals and families will receive prorated shares—slightly less than 14% of the individual court judgments entered in their names, capped at \$20 million for individuals and \$35 million for families—according to officials working on the compensation program.

About \$100 million of the fund comes from a settlement the U.S. government struck with Credit Agricole SA, a French bank, for violations of U.S. sanctions, but \$1 billion of it comes from a nearly \$9 billion settlement struck in 2014 with BNP Paribas for similar violations. Both banks admitted wrongdoing as part of those deals.

After those deals were struck, Congress passed legislation allocating some of that money for terror victims. Some of the money from the BNP settlement is going to other recipients, such as the first-

responders to the terror attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

"The money is not from taxpayers, it's from foreign banks who made billions making an end run around U.S. sanctions and pleaded guilty to criminal conspiracy," said Stuart Newberger, a lawyer who represents hundreds of the families eligible for the funds.

Many of Mr. Newberger's clients are CIA families, foreign-service families, or foreign nationals who worked for the U.S. government and have waited decades for compensation. "This is a way to finally say our people who were put in harm's way are finally going to be taken care of," he said.

The payment system created by the legislation will continue for another nine years. Mr. Newberger said he expects new allotments of cash could be sent to the victims and their families if and when future criminal settlements are struck with banks for

violating sanctions against terror-sponsoring countries.

The program is run by special master Ken Feinberg, who also oversaw the compensation fund for victims of the Sept. 11 attacks. That fund was set up in the immediate aftermath of the attacks as a means of protecting the airline industry against catastrophic lawsuits.

Mr. Feinberg praised the Justice Department's handling of the matter, saying the new program is significant because it finally addresses historical terror victims. "At long last," he said, "there is some recognition that victims and their families who are innocent of any responsibility for these arbitrary terrorist attacks will receive some degree of compensation—not enough, but at least a first step."

Write to Devlin Barrett at devlin.barrett@wsj.com



It's Time for Europe's Militaries to Grow Up

David Francis | 2 hours ago

The continent can't blame Trump for its long-running inability to take care of its own security.

The transatlantic partnership between the United States and Europe has been the linchpin of U.S. grand strategy for more than half a century. It is also in deep trouble. During the 2016 presidential campaign, Donald Trump repeatedly suggested that NATO was obsolete, accused U.S. allies in Europe of "not paying their fair share," and said "the U.S. must be prepared to let these countries defend themselves."

Not surprisingly, his election rang alarm bells in Europe, and his erratic behavior since taking office has only intensified European concerns. How can America's European partners be confident in their most important ally when the U.S. president lives in an alternative reality derived from *Breitbart*, Fox News, and whatever dark conspiracies he's being fed by Steve Bannon? Would you trust a president who prefers to rely on shady Ukrainian politicians, convicted fraudsters, and his own personal lawyer to deal with sensitive diplomatic matters, instead of the normal channels of statecraft?

Secretary of Defense James Mattis and Vice President Mike Pence spent last week trying to reassure U.S. allies at the Munich Security Conference, but their efforts were only partly successful. Each made strong pro-NATO statements — and Pence even said the U.S. commitment was "unwavering" — but their message wasn't

unambiguous. In particular, Mattis warned his NATO counterparts that the United States might moderate its commitment to Europe if they didn't ramp up their defense spending to roughly 2 percent of GDP.

This recurring concern with European defense spending is understandable, but it mostly misses the point. Why? Because the fundamental problem isn't inadequate latent capacity or even a lack of mobilized resources. The only "clear and present" military threat Europe faces today is a resurgent Russia (though this threat may not be nearly as great as alarmists maintain), and NATO's European members possess the wherewithal to deal with the challenge on their own. Leaving the United States and Canada out of the equation, NATO's European members have nearly four times Russia's population, and their combined GDP is more than 12 times greater. More importantly, even at today's supposedly "inadequate" spending levels, every year NATO's European members (again: not counting the United States and Canada) spend at least *five times* more on defense than Russia does.

The problem, in other words, is not the amount of money that European countries devote to national security. The problem rather is that they don't spend these funds very effectively and don't coordinate their defense activities as well as they could. Despite numerous attempts, Europe's long-promised "Common Foreign and Security Policy" remains an aspiration, not a reality.

This failure isn't at all surprising, because CFSP is an EU initiative and the EU is still more of a collection of nation-states rather than a fully integrated community. The key point, however, is that throwing more euros (or kroner or zlotys) at the problem won't fix it.

Among other things, this situation tells you that if NATO were to meet U.S. demands and get all of its members up to the canonical target of 2 percent of GDP, it wouldn't do all that much to improve the overall balance of power unless they started spending the money more effectively. In short, the narrow focus on "defense spending as a percentage of GDP" is a red herring.

U.S. efforts to pressure Europe into spending more by threatening to reduce its own commitment to Europe are also inherently contradictory. When he warned that the United States might "moderate" its support, Secretary of Defense Mattis was telling his European counterparts that they might not be able to count on the United States if they didn't start spending more. The flip side of the coin, however, is an implicit pledge that if they do start hitting that 2 percent target, then Washington will stay "all in," too. But that's a recipe for Europe doing *just enough* to keep Uncle Sam happy while Washington remains its protector of first and last resort.

From a broader strategic perspective, getting Europe to bear more of the burden of its own defense is meaningful only if it allows the United States to reduce the resources it devotes to

European security so that it can focus more attention on other theaters, such as Asia. And given the enormous imbalance between Europe's military potential and those of its potential foes, that formula should be relatively easy to negotiate. Instead of the familiar kabuki dance where Americans threaten to do less but don't really intend to, the United States and its European partners ought to be developing a long-term plan to reduce the U.S. commitment more or less permanently (or until such time as there is a serious threat to the European balance of power). As John Mearsheimer and I explained last summer, as long as there is no potential hegemon in Europe — and Russia doesn't qualify — it is not necessary for the United States to take the lead in defending it.

In short, the hype devoted to relative defense spending levels is mostly just symbolic politics. What American politicians are really saying is that it looks bad when Americans spend 3.5 percent of GDP on defense and our relatively wealthy allies in Europe (or Asia, for that matter) spend less than 2 percent. And they're right: It does look bad. But if U.S. officials can somehow convince those same allies to boost their spending a bit, they can go back to American voters and claim success, *even if it doesn't reduce U.S. defense burdens or make Europe any safer.*

Finally, constantly harping about burden sharing distracts attention from the more serious challenges that threaten the transatlantic partnership. The first challenge is

the lack of a compelling strategic rationale for it. Much as I hate to admit it,

Trump was not entirely wrong to suggest NATO was obsolete — at least in its current form — because it was created to deal with a problem (the Soviet Union) that no longer exists.

Trump was not entirely wrong to suggest NATO was obsolete — at least in its current form — because it was created to deal with a problem (the Soviet Union) that no longer exists. It is harder to justify an expensive U.S. commitment to defend Europe when there is no potential hegemon there and the new missions that NATO has taken on after the Cold

War ended (Afghanistan, Libya, etc.) have fared rather poorly. (NATO's other implicit purpose — "to keep the Germans down" — isn't relevant either, despite Germany's central role in the EU. With a declining and rapidly aging population, Germany today could never aspire to European hegemony.)

The second challenge is European disunity itself, especially in the wake of the 2008 financial collapse, eurozone crisis, and Brexit decision. Centrifugal forces in Europe make it even less likely that its member states will create effective all-European defense forces, even if individual countries do manage to boost their own spending levels a bit. And they certainly won't do the

hard work to create a genuine pan-European defense capability if they remain convinced Uncle Sam will always be there to bail them out.

Then throw in various right-wing populist politicians who are either ruling or contending for power in France, the Netherlands, Hungary, Poland, and Turkey. Many of these would-be leaders are openly hostile to the idea of European unity, and Trump has made this problem worse by embracing Brexit and giving rhetorical support to right-wing xenophobes like Marine Le Pen.

This approach is exactly what Washington should *not* be doing today. If you want Europe to take on more responsibility for its own security, the last thing you'd want to

do is undermine Europe's increasingly delicate political order. A Europe led by politicians like Le Pen or Geert Wilders is not a Europe that will stable and secure enough to take care of itself so that the United States could focus its energies and resources elsewhere. If Trump really wanted to get the United States out of the business of protecting Europe, backing European xenophobes and coddling Vladimir Putin is not the way to go. But you weren't expecting clear, coherent, or consistent strategic thinking from this president, were you?



Amid Growing Threats, Germany Plans to Expand Troop Numbers to Nearly 200,000

By Robbie Gramer

Germany is slowly shedding its reluctance to wield military power, announcing Wednesday it would boost the size of its armed forces to nearly 200,000 over the next seven years. While the move comes days after top U.S. officials called on Europe to step up on defense, former officials and experts say the latest announcement was years in the making.

"The Bundeswehr has rarely been as necessary as it is now," German Defense Minister Ursula Von Der Leyen said in a statement on the announcement. "Whether it is the fight against ISIL terrorism, the stabilization of Mali, continuing support of Afghanistan, operations against migrant smugglers in the Mediterranean or with our increased NATO presence in the Baltics."

The new decision is splashy, but not substantive. It will increase the military's roster of professional soldiers from the current level of 178,000 to 198,000 by 2025. Last May, Germany already announced it would increase its troop size to 193,000 by 2023. The latest announcement adds only 5,000 troops to that number over a longer timespan.

At its height during the Cold War, the West German military swelled to a size of over 500,000, and was a central part of NATO's plan to

defend Europe against a Soviet armored incursion. Since the end of the Cold War, its size sharply declined, hitting a low of 166,500 in 2015.

Still, the move drew skepticism from some circles in Germany, including in Angela Merkel's own government.

"One has to ask whether it would really calm Germany's neighbours if we turned into a big military power in Europe," Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel told reporters. "I have my doubts."

Germany, like Japan, had a deeply-ingrained cultural aversion to military strength since the end of World War II. In Tokyo, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is trying to drag a reluctant public towards a more accepting view of using military power. In Germany, that all started to change in recent years after Russia invaded Ukraine and turmoil in the Middle East fueled Europe's migration crisis. A 2015 poll found 56 percent of Germans favored expanding Germany's military.

"Germany's a serious player in Europe. They realized they've got a responsibility in NATO," Jim Townsend, the Pentagon's former top NATO official, told Foreign Policy.

Germany's announcement comes amid growing European concerns of President Donald Trump disengaging from NATO. Trump

called NATO "obsolete" on the campaign trail, and suggested Washington might not come to the defense of NATO allies if they were behind on their payments. During their respective visits to Brussels in recent weeks, both Vice President Mike Pence and Defense Secretary James Mattis sought to reassure allies of U.S. commitment to NATO, though Mattis warned the country would "moderate" its commitment to European security if allies didn't foot their fair share of the defense bill.

It's long been a thorn in the side of U.S.-European relations. Only five of NATO's 28 members currently meet the obligation of spending 2 percent of GDP on defense: the United States, United Kingdom, Estonia, Poland, and Greece. Germany spends 1.2 percent of its GDP on defense and would need to spend an additional \$66 billion to reach the 2 percent threshold. The Pentagon declined to comment on Germany's latest announcement.

Trump's NATO skepticism rattled U.S. allies, who are advertising their increased defense spending as best they can to the new administration, much as corporations are touting months-old press releases on investment and job creation to placate a Twitter-happy White House.

But experts say credit for Germany's troop increase goes more to Russian President Vladimir Putin

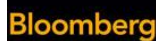
and the Islamic State than Donald Trump. Still, a nervous U.S. ally may not rush to correct Trump if he takes credit.

"While it is politically smart for the Germans to give Trump credit for this increase, the truth is that this is only an incremental improvement" over last year's announcement, said NATO expert Jorge Benitez with the Atlantic Council, a Washington-based think tank. Merkel first announced a heavy defense spending boost in October 2016, before Trump was elected.

"The Germans wouldn't do something like this just to curry favor with Trump," Townsend said.

Irrespective of motivation, it's a sorely needed investment for the country's cash-strapped military. After all, Germany's laggard defense capabilities led to embarrassing incidents in the past. The German air force had to ground nearly half of its ageing Tornado warfighter fleet over maintenance issues in 2015. Also that year, German army units had to use broomsticks instead of machine guns in a NATO military exercise because of lack of equipment.

That makes the boost in Germany's troop size a welcome, albeit modest, move. "Germany is doing the right thing, but in small doses," Benitez said.



Editorial : How Europe Can Defend Itself

The Editors

Say this for Donald Trump: He is forcing Europeans to think more seriously about how to protect and defend their continent.

The U.S. president's disparagement of NATO goes too far, and his focus on getting Europeans to spend more on defense is misplaced. That said, European nations have for too long treated their defense budgets as an extension of social policy.

Expenditure on personnel is more than 50 percent of military spending in nearly all EU countries, compared with about a quarter in the U.S. Meanwhile, spending on equipment and R&D is barely 20 percent in Europe, compared with around 30

percent in the U.S., and only about 22 percent of equipment procurement is collaborative.

The European Commission has a proposal to make European defense spending more rational. But such

top-down efforts generally haven't amounted to much. There are actually hundreds of cooperative military projects in Europe, such as the European Air Transport Command in the Netherlands. Many of these efforts are bilateral and ad hoc. Without a more coherent framework, they won't close the large gap in military spending and capabilities between Europe and the U.S., or make European militaries more effective.

NATO works, despite strains, for two main reasons: a clear mission -- the

collective security guarantee enshrined in its charter -- and American leadership.

Any EU plan for collective defense would require similar purpose and direction. Yet France, which will be the largest military force in Europe after the U.K. leaves the EU, has always seen an EU defense policy as a counterweight to American-dominated NATO rather than a goal in itself. Germany, meanwhile, has been reluctant to take charge, as other nations are wary of letting it.

Things may now be changing. Between Brexit and Trumpism, European nations may be finally getting realistic about the urgency of preparing for threats from both within and outside the continent. NATO's intervention in Libya showed that European nations are willing and capable of leading such missions.

None of this is to say that the EU needs its own army. It is only to point out that Europe needs to do more to ensure its collective security, and that part of the answer

lies in a more flexible (and less America-dominated) NATO. As Europeans consider any changes, their focus should be less on whether NATO members meet the alliance's requirement for overall defense spending and more on how and where they spend their money. The better Europe is able to defend itself, the better off it -- and the U.S. -- will be.

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Bloomberg

Gilbert : Maastricht's Flaws Still Plague Europe, 25 Years Later

Mark Gilbert

Twenty five years ago this month, the representatives of 12 countries gathered in the Dutch city of Maastricht to sign the Treaty on European Union. Its claim to mark "a new stage in the process of creating an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe" looks grandiose and overblown a quarter of a century later. More importantly, the economic convergence it promised looks further away than ever.

That's a problem in more ways than one. It presents the European Central Bank with the dilemma of how to set monetary policy for a multi-speed economy, with Germany in particular chafing at ultra-low interest rates. The lack of convergence also undermines support for the European project, with the economic benefits harder to argue for in, say, Italy, which is suffering an unemployment rate of 12 percent, twice Germany's 5.9 percent jobless level.

QuickTake Can the Euro Survive?

It's fair to say that there's little popular enthusiasm these days for the notion of ever-closer union. Turnout at European parliamentary elections has dropped at every vote, reaching a low of 42.6 percent at the most recent ballot in 2014. The European Commission's latest Eurobarometer survey of public opinion shows trust in the EU at 36 percent, down from between 44 percent and 57 percent between 2004 and 2009. One of the treaty's founding signatories, the U.K., is on the verge of leaving the bloc. And a second, France, has a presidential candidate in the form of Marine Le

Pen who says she'll seek a similar exit from the euro if she wins.

The introduction of the common currency was simultaneously the most concrete achievement of the Maastricht treaty and its biggest fudge. By setting five so-called convergence criteria for countries wanting to adopt the euro, the treaty sought -- at Germany's insistence -- to ensure that only the economically fittest could qualify.

Three of the Maastricht targets -- on inflation, exchange rates and long-term borrowing costs -- proved almost trivial at the time, since impending membership of the common currency in effect produced convergence in a self-reinforcing fashion. Of the two remaining criteria, on budget deficits and debt ratios, Germany and France quickly broke the rules in 2003; France still does but has plenty of company. Once those two nations escaped the punishment laid down in the Stability and Growth Pact, other countries felt emboldened to ignore their own slippage. And, as the following chart shows, while the euro zone as a whole has recently achieved the deficit target shown by the red line, France and Spain are still falling short:

Even in the government bond market, convergence has disappeared. Two-year Italian yields, for example, are about 0.05 percent. Spanish yields are about -0.24 percent, which is about twice what French yields are at -0.46 percent, which in turn are about twice what Germany levels are at -0.9 percent. There's a similar dissonance in 10-year borrowing costs:

It's in the ratio of national debt to gross domestic product, though, where the euro project has consistently ignored the Maastricht strictures. The target was relaxed at the outset, with a debt-to-GDP ratio that was approaching the 60 percent ceiling "at a satisfactory pace" deemed sufficient, rather than a hard limit that would have barred Belgium, for one, from joining the euro.

As the chart below shows, however, the 60 percent target has basically been ignored for the past decade. The euro zone as a region has a debt ratio of 90 percent as of the most recent annual Eurostat figures for the end of 2015; Italy is above 130 percent, and even Germany's obligations are running at more than 70 percent of GDP:

Source: Bloomberg

For the ECB, that multi-speed economy is fast becoming a threat. It's already under fire from Germany, where accelerating inflation is increasing the calls for tighter monetary conditions -- Bundesbank President Jens Weidmann said on Thursday that he opposed the recent decision to extend the time frame of the central bank's quantitative easing program, even as it reduced the scale of bond purchases. Deciding when and how to taper QE will only get harder as economic measures such as consumer prices and unemployment diverge even more.

For now, the currency union limps on. One member, Greece, looks increasingly ill-fitted for membership, but is unlikely to face exit pressure with Dutch, French and German

elections looming this year. Even if Le Pen beats the polls and wins the second round of the French election, she'll struggle to get a referendum on euro membership through parliament, or to win the plebiscite; but the election by a core member of an anti-euro leader would nevertheless undermine investor faith in the common currency's future.

With its fiscal and monetary conditions, the Maastricht criteria set out to dodge an issue many economists have agreed on, both at the time of the euro's introduction and since: That Europe was far from what's called an optimum currency area, not least because there is no fiscal union, as in the United States, so that imbalances can be rectified with federal transfers. And despite the free movement guarantee, labor mobility remained limited by language differences and subtler barriers. A quarter of a century later, the divergence of economic performance within the euro zone suggests the critics were correct. The open question is how much longer the euro can muddle through without facing an existential crisis.

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Bloomberg

Fox : What's So Great About Europe?

Justin Fox

A man in the audience was going on and on in a Swabian accent and a querulous tone when I walked into the Stuttgart Playhouse on Tuesday night a few minutes after the start

of a discussion titled "Do We Really Need the European Union?" I couldn't understand what the guy was getting at, but then the moderator, veteran German television journalist Joerg

Armbruster, summed it up in easy-to-understand TV-Deutsch:

"So the bureaucracy bothers you."

"Yes," the man responded.

"Any specific examples?"

"No, I don't have any."

This was great, I thought. I was witnessing Europe's malaise, in the flesh. Even the Germans are cranky about the EU! And they don't exactly know why!

But then, after one more monologue of Swabian complaint (all I got of it was Armbruster's translation: "If I understand you correctly, you don't have much trust in the European Union"), the tone changed. Armbruster kept polling the audience ("collecting voices," he called it), but people stopped complaining.

A woman said that maybe the problem with the European Union -- or at least the common currency, the euro -- was that it was too advantageous to Germany. "Because we have a common currency, we get an edge in exports," she said. "I profit from this. Thanks!"

"Do you think this is harming our neighbor countries?" Armbruster asked.

"Yes, definitely," she responded.

"Germany was always a problem in Europe," interjected Andre Wilkens, a Berlin-based policy wonk who was one of the evening's featured speakers but mostly sat and listened. "The EU was formed to solve that problem."

Others got up to say that Europe needed more solidarity, with Germans leading the way. It needed more of a sense of community. More attention needed to be paid to the millions of jobless young people in Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain.

The New York Times

hours after the German cabinet approved tapping cellphones and attaching electronic bracelets to illegal migrants who might be deemed a threat, a group of Afghan men were put on a plane at a Munich airport Wednesday night and deported.

The deportation was only the third such mass expulsion to Afghanistan since last fall, and in combination with new antiterrorism measures, it was a clear sign of the stiffening political headwinds that have made Europe, like America, a less welcoming place for migrants.

Across the Continent, Europeans find themselves increasingly caught up in a debate over the treatment of migrants as rising hostility to newcomers clashes with long-held values of tolerance and openness.

Many governments are restricting their welcome to strangers. Sweden tightened immigration rules last year. Britain is leaving the European Union in large part to stem the flow of foreigners. Italy has embarked on a plan to train Libyans to scoop up

Then things shifted to straight-out Euroenthusiasm. "To be totally honest, I think Europe is super," said a woman sitting in the front row. Added a man a few rows back: "There are problems that we Germans alone can't solve." By working together with the rest of Europe, he went on, Germany had a better shot at fighting climate change and preventing war.

It isn't exactly news that a bunch of people gathered in a theater in downtown Stuttgart support the idea of Europe and even, for the most part, the reality of the European Union. The home of Daimler AG, Porsche Automobil Holding SE and Robert Bosch GmbH is one of the continent's great economic success stories -- and its residents' political views aren't necessarily shared by other Germans. On the whole, Germans see the EU in a more positive light than the citizens of most other European countries (I've included the 10 most populous EU member countries in the chart below), but they're still pretty negative about it.

Who Still Likes the European Union

Percentage of respondents with a "positive image" of the EU

Source: Autumn 2016 Eurobarometer

The gang at the Stuttgart Playhouse was well aware of this. About two-

thirds of the way through the discussion, Armbruster called on Ronan Collett, an English baritone who sings with the Stuttgart Opera in the building next door. Collett, who acquired Irish citizenship via his grandparents after the U.K.'s Brexit vote to ensure against career derailment, said -- in English -- that the parts of the discussion that he'd been able to follow seemed reasonable and relevant. But, he added, "what I can say from experience is that for the people who want to destroy Europe, they're not relevant."

So that became the new focus of the discussion: How do we make Europe relevant, and attractive, to more Europeans? Similar people have been asking themselves similar questions all over the Western world lately. And while I know that such exercises must come across to some as absurd and out of touch, I have to admit that I found the Stuttgart version pretty endearing.

There was no cursing out of backward-thinking xenophobes, just suggestion after suggestion: Give the European Parliament, the EU's main democratic institution, more power and take some away from the appointed European commissioners. Let people vote for the parliament on a Europe-wide basis, not country by country. Take to the streets to show support for Europe (there's a

march planned for Sunday in Stuttgart). Create more exchange programs between European countries (several people pointed out after that suggestion that there are already a lot of such programs). Build more Europe-wide institutions ("We have the Champions League," joked Armbruster). Come up with a true common language and get everybody in Europe to learn it. Establish a holiday to celebrate Europe. And so on.

One major theme that emerged was that Europe needs a defining idea or set of ideas. Wilkens suggested at one point that while the European Union has come to be seen mainly as an economic institution, more emphasis should be given to its founding idea: "After centuries of war, how about peace?" His fellow panelist, Heidelberg-based novelist and journalist Jagoda Marinic, said the quest for unifying European ideas ought to reach back much further. You know, *liberté, égalité, fraternité* and all that.

Modern Europe has delivered remarkably well on liberty, and for a while there it seemed to be making big strides on equality. Fraternity, though -- that's the tough one.

Migrants Face Deportations and Walls in Europe, Too

Alison Smale

BERLIN — Just

migrant boats off their shore. Hungary sees the shift against migration as affirming the "correctness" of its decision to build its own wall to seal its border.

Then there are some states, like Germany, that are taking more assertive steps to ensure that those who have been denied asylum actually leave, like the 18 Afghans deported Wednesday. That has not always been the case.

Chancellor Angela Merkel's government, itself facing a tough election challenge this year, is taking steps to speed up deportations after some terrorism suspects were found to be immigrants who had been designated to be sent home.

Police officers at a settlement near Calais, in France. The authorities broke up the camp, drawing criticism that they had not given the migrants adequate information beforehand. Mauricio Lima for The New York Times

"Nobody is sent back to their country of origin," said the French nationalist Marine Le Pen, who has set herself up as an advocate for deportation as

she enters the homestretch of France's presidential race as a leading contender.

"Everybody stays. Everybody settles down," she said last week on French television. "Seven million unemployed, nine million poor, our health system is saturated, and we continue to accept those who arrive."

Figures from countries across Europe suggest that, while governments are scrambling to restrict arrivals, closing off migration routes as in the Balkans and defanging nationalist arguments, there is still a steady flow of arrivals.

The French government body that handles asylum requests, for example, reported 85,244 requests in 2016, up 6.5 percent from the previous year. Over 40 percent were granted.

At the same time, France's highest administrative court ruled against a request from human rights groups to remove Albania, Armenia, Kosovo and Senegal from a list of safe countries to which unsuccessful asylum seekers may be deported.

The deportation debate has flared in Germany since December when Anis Amri, a young Tunisian asylum seeker, drove a truck into a Christmas market in Berlin, killing 12 people and injuring 50. He had been expelled from Italy, had registered under at least 14 aliases for welfare and other benefits, and had been listed as a terrorist threat who should be deported.

Yet he could not be deported because his native Tunisia failed to provide identity papers. After his attack, he fled first to western Germany, then to the Netherlands and finally to Italy before being killed in a shootout with the police.

Migrants arriving in Sicily in 2016 after being rescued at sea. Italy has embarked on a plan to train Libyans to scoop up migrant boats off their shore. Uriel Sinai for The New York Times

Ms. Merkel, under pressure from both the right and the left as she seeks a fourth term in September elections, cited Mr. Amri's attack as she pressed Germany's 16 states — which are responsible for deportation — to stop "this considerable danger to life and

limb." She then pointedly urged the visiting Tunisian prime minister to redouble his country's battle against terrorism.

Still, human rights groups like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, and a number of national and regional organizations, have accused Europe's governments of being too harsh on migrants who they say are simply seeking a better life or striving to escape war and persecution.

When the French authorities broke up a settlement near Calais that had for years had hundreds of migrants, officials "failed to genuinely consult migrants or asylum seekers or provide them with adequate information prior to the eviction," Amnesty International said. Many were minors trying to reach Britain, where, they said, they had relatives, the group added.

In Britain itself, the debate over deportation has been somewhat subsumed by the louder discussion over immigrants from Europe who helped spur Britain's vote in June to leave the European Union. Controversy also envelops the question of how many people in Britain should be deported.

In Italy, Marco Minniti, a security expert, became interior minister in

December and has pushed through long-awaited measures aimed at curbing immigration by processing asylum applications faster. Asylum requests totaled 123,000 last year — a steep rise from 26,000 in 2013, when Italy was seen more as a transit country for migrants heading north to Central Europe.

The new decree eliminates the right to appeal an asylum rejection, and adds staff to process requests faster — something Germany is also grappling with after Ms. Merkel threw open her country's borders in fall 2015.

For migrants who are denied asylum or other forms of international protection, Italy will create "centers for repatriation" in all of its 20 regions. Similar centers were closed a few years ago after complaints about conditions, but the government now says these will be closely monitored.

Migrants in 2015 at a fence dividing Serbia and Hungary. Sergey Ponomarev for The New York Times

Shortly after Mr. Amri was killed outside Milan, Italy's police chief, Franco Gabrielli, ordered all police stations to check the status of migrants in their areas.

In Central and Eastern Europe, European Union countries have fiercely resisted taking in migrants, particularly Muslims, arguing that they are ill equipped culturally and economically to shelter many strangers.

In 2015, Hungary's prime minister, Viktor Orban, was the first European Union leader to resist mass migration. He built a fence along his country's borders with Serbia and Croatia to block refugees fleeing the war-afflicted Middle East via a Balkan route; that route largely shut down last spring after the union persuaded Turkey to stanch the flow, and governments along the way shut their borders for the most part.

But Mr. Orban apparently still sees political capital in taking a hard line on migration. He takes a broad view of what he sees as its inherent perils — and is one of the few leaders actively aligning with Mr. Trump. "We believe a change in perspective in the U.S. helped others to respect the Hungarian position," Mr. Orban's spokesman, Zoltan Kovacs, said in London this month.

Hungary's defense minister, Istvan Simicsko, said, "The goals of the new government of the United States confirm the correctness of Hungarian security policy thinking."

He was referring to a speech made by Vice President Mike Pence at last weekend's annual security conference in Munich.

"The U.S. and Hungary also have very similar views with regard to reinforcing NATO and the fight against radical Islamism," Mr. Simicsko said.

New measures likely to be passed by Hungary next month foresee the closing of camps where migrants who have been rejected for asylum have effectively waited while planning new attempts to cross into Austria and beyond. Migrants would instead be held in much more restricted conditions, possibly in violation of European Union law and international conventions on refugees.

Amnesty International and the Hungarian government are locked in a war of words over the proposals.

"Rounding up all men, women and children seeking asylum and detaining them months on end in container camps is a new low in Hungary's race to the bottom on asylum seekers and refugees," Gauri van Gulik, Amnesty International's deputy director for Europe, said in a statement.

The New York Times

Danish Man Who Burned Quran Is Prosecuted for Blasphemy

Kimiko de Freytas-Tamura

The decision to charge the Quran burner was made by a regional prosecutor in Viborg, on the Jutland peninsula, and had to be approved by the country's attorney general.

The blasphemy law has been invoked only a handful of times since its creation in 1866, most recently in 1971, when two people broadcast a song mocking Christianity and stirred a debate over female sexuality. They were acquitted.

No one has been convicted of the crime since 1946, when a man dressed himself up as a priest and mock-baptized a doll at a masquerade ball.

In the current case, the suspect, who was not identified by the authorities but called himself John Salvesen on Facebook, uploaded video footage of a Quran being burned in his backyard. In the 4-minute, 15-second clip, the clicking sounds of a lighter are heard before flames engulf the large leather-bound book.

The video was posted on Dec. 27, 2015, to a Facebook group called "Yes to Freedom — No to Islam."

Above the video, shared 415 times, were the words: "Consider your neighbor, it stinks when it burns." One commenter wrote: "If I had the Quran I'd also burn it, that's the only thing it's good for. Gives a bit of heat."

The man's Facebook page was full of messages critical of Islam, refugees and women. In one post, he even wrote, "I hate children."

The video did not get widespread attention at the time. The defendant — his true name is still not clear and under Danish law cannot be released unless he is convicted — was charged last year with hate speech, but the indictment was later changed to blasphemy, a decision prosecutors announced on Wednesday. A trial has been scheduled for June. If convicted, the defendant faces up to four months in prison or a fine.

His lawyer, Rasmus Paludan, argued that his client had burned the Quran in "self-defense."

"The Quran contains passages on how Mohammed's followers must kill the infidel, i.e. the Danes," he said. "Therefore, it's an act of self-defense to burn a book that in such a way incites war and violence."

Mr. Paludan also noted that in 1997, a Danish artist burned a copy of the Bible on a news show by a state broadcaster but was not charged. "Considering that it is legal to burn a Bible in Denmark, I'm surprised then that it would be guilty to burn the Quran," he said in a phone interview.

Mr. Paludan said his client "loves freedom of expression and loves Denmark." Speculating on the decision to bring charges, he said, "The fear of Islam and Muslims may be far greater now, and the prosecution service may be a lot more apprehensive of Islam and its followers."

Jan Reckendorff, the regional prosecutor who brought the charge against Mr. Salvesen, said in a statement: "It is the prosecution's view that circumstances involving the burning of holy books such as the Bible and the Quran can in certain cases be a violation of the blasphemy clause, which covers public scorn or mockery of religion."

Jacob Mchangama, director of Justitia, a Danish civil liberties group, called the decision to file charges the latest sign of a declining respect for free speech in Europe. "It's a sad development but one that

mirrors developments elsewhere," he said.

Mr. Mchangama said he thought the prosecutor was motivated by a desire to fend off the threat of terrorist attacks. "Danish authorities are afraid that the Quran burning could spark a new crisis, and if they say that they've actually charged this person, this is a way to appease or at least avoid such a crisis," he said.

Blasphemy laws protect religious dogma from ridicule, and therefore the feelings of believers, Mr. Mchangama argues, while hate speech laws protect religious groups from degrading expressions.

Denmark is one of only five countries in the European Union that has a blasphemy law on the books. Some say the case could lead to a rallying cry to abandon such laws once and for all.

"One might speculate that this is one more straw on the back of the camel, so that more politicians will be in the favor of abolishing the law," said Per Mouritsen, a professor of political science at Aarhus University. Danes, he said, generally believe that "Muslims should be able to stand up to ridicule as much as Christians would

routinely put up with, and that everyone should take a joke.”

Mr. Mouritsen, noting the 1997 decision not to prosecute, asked, “Why should this all of a sudden be an issue, when everybody agrees that the blasphemy law is a thing of the past?”

The decision to press charges was condemned by the right-wing, anti-immigration Danish People’s Party, which said it would push to rescind the blasphemy law.

“I’m not going to recommend people burn either Qurans or Bibles, but it’s a waste of public resources to spend time on such things,” Peter Kofod

Poulsen, the party’s spokesman for legal affairs, told Ritzau, a Danish news agency. “We have more important things to busy ourselves with in 2017 than to take people to task over burning books.”

But Trine Bramsen, a member of Parliament and a spokeswoman of the Social Democrats, an opposition party, defended the blasphemy law. “I struggle to see how that we’ll achieve a stronger society, or how we’ll enrich the public debate, if the burning of holy books was permitted,” she told Ritzau.

The 2005 cartoon controversy was followed by deadly attacks that have left Western Europe deeply shaken.

In 2010, Kurt Westergaard, who had drawn a cartoon for Jyllands-Posten that showed Muhammad with a bomb in a black turban, narrowly escaped an assassination attempt, fleeing into a safe room at his home in the port city of Aarhus to escape a young Somali armed with an ax and a knife. In 2013, Lars Hedegaard, an outspoken critic of Islam and a defender of Lars Vilks, a Swedish cartoonist who had lampooned Muhammad, was shot at outside his Copenhagen home by a gunman disguised as a postal worker.

In January 2015, 12 people died an assault on the French satirical newspaper Charlie Hebdo, which

had lampooned Islam. The next month, the police in Copenhagen shot and killed a man after he killed someone outside a synagogue and sprayed bullets into a cafe where Mr. Vilks, the Swedish cartoonist, was speaking.

In Denmark, “the very idea that religion is taken seriously is the antithesis of being a good citizen,” said Mr. Mouritsen, the political scientist. “This is very important.

INTERNATIONAL

The Washington Post

Krauthammer : Trump and the ‘madman theory’

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At the heart of President Trump’s foreign policy team lies a glaring contradiction. On the one hand, it is composed of men of experience, judgment and traditionalism. Meaning, they are all very much within the parameters of mainstream American internationalism as practiced since 1945. Practically every member of the team — the heads of State, Homeland Security, the CIA, and most especially Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and national security adviser H.R. McMaster — could fit in a Cabinet put together by, say, Hillary Clinton.

The commander in chief, on the other hand, is quite the opposite — inexperienced, untraditional, unbounded. His pronouncements on everything from the one-China policy to the two-state (Arab-Israeli) solution, from NATO obsolescence to the ravages of free trade, continue to confound and, as we say today, disrupt.

The obvious question is: Can this arrangement possibly work? The answer thus far, surprisingly, is: perhaps.

The sample size is tiny but take, for example, the German excursion. Trump dispatched his grown-ups — Vice President Pence, Defense Secretary Mattis, Secretary of Homeland Security John

Kelly and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson — to various international confabs in Germany to reassure allies with the usual pieties about America’s commitment to European security. They did drop a few hints to Trump’s loud complaints about allied parasitism, in particular shirking their share of the defense burden.

Within days, Germany announced a 20,000-troop expansion of its military. Smaller European countries are likely to take note of the new setup. It’s classic good-cop, bad-cop: The secretaries represent foreign policy continuity but their boss preaches America First. Message: Shape up.

President Trump expects “real progress” by the end of the year among NATO allies to step up their defense spending, Vice President Mike Pence said on Feb. 20 at NATO headquarters in Brussels. Trump wants NATO to step up defense spending: Pence (Reuters)

(Reuters)

John Hannah of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies suggests that the push-pull effect might work on foes as well as friends. On Saturday, China announced a cutoff of all coal imports from North Korea for the rest of 2017. Constituting more than one-third of all North Korean exports, this is a major blow to its economy.

True, part of the reason could be Chinese ire at the brazen assassination of Kim Jong Un’s half

brother, who had been under Chinese protection. Nonetheless, the boycott was declared just days after a provocative North Korean missile launch — and shortly into the term of a new American president who has shown that he can be erratic and quite disdainful of Chinese sensibilities.

His wavering on the one-China policy took Beijing by surprise. Trump also strongly denounced Chinese expansion in the South China Sea and conducted an ostentatious love-in with Japan’s prime minister, something guaranteed to rankle the Chinese. Beijing’s boycott of Pyongyang is many things, among them a nod to Washington.

This suggests that the peculiar and discordant makeup of the U.S. national security team — traditionalist lieutenants, disruptive boss — might reproduce the old Nixonian “madman theory.” That’s when adversaries tread carefully because they suspect the U.S. president of being unpredictable, occasionally reckless and potentially crazy dangerous. Henry Kissinger, with Nixon’s collaboration, tried more than once to exploit this perception to pressure adversaries.

Trump’s people have already shown a delicate touch in dealing with his bouts of loopiness. Trump has gone on for years about how we should have taken Iraq’s oil for ourselves. Sunday in Baghdad, Mattis wryly backed off, telling his hosts that “All

of us in America have generally paid for our gas and oil all along, and I am sure we will continue to do so in the future.”

Yet sometimes an off-center comment can have its uses. Take Trump’s casual dismissal of a U.S. commitment to a two-state solution in the Middle East. The next day, U.S. policy was brought back in line by his own U.N. ambassador. But this diversion might prove salutary. It’s a message to the Palestinians that their decades of rejectionism may not continue to pay off with an inexorable march toward statehood — that there may actually be a price to pay for making no concessions and simply waiting for the U.S. to deliver them a Palestinian state.

To be sure, a two-track, two-policy, two-reality foreign policy is risky, unsettling and has the potential to go totally off the rails. This is not how you would draw it up in advance. It’s unstable and confusing. But the experience of the first month suggests that, with prudence and luck, it can yield the occasional benefit — that the combination of radical rhetoric and conventional policy may induce better behavior both in friend and foe.

Alas, there is also a worst-case scenario. It needs no elaboration.

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



O’Hanlon and Gordon : Surprise! Trump’s foreign policy is turning out OK

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Secretary of State Rex Tillerson in Bonn, Germany, on Feb. 17, 2017. (Photo: Pool photo by Brendan Smialowski)

President Trump's foreign policy is going surprisingly well abroad, whatever might be happening on any given day at 1600 Pennsylvania Ave.

The president deserves no sympathy for his tirades, tweets and White House turbulence. But while his domestic policy ideas seem quite outside the mainstream, his national security team is performing much better than it is being given credit for.

To be sure, it is far too soon to breathe a sigh of relief about this administration; Trump's mercurial temperament has not abated since his inauguration. For whatever the reason, though, he has chosen a national security team that appears excellent — and that has already calmed many nerves around the world.

The most recent news, the appointment of Army Lt. Gen. H.R. McMaster as national security adviser, will reinforce this trend. None of the world's crises is about to be resolved any time soon. But let's give credit where it's due relative to what are reasonable expectations for the first month of any new administration, especially one run by a populist non-politician known for three decades of extreme rhetoric.

Let's do a quick tour of the world:

On East Asia policy, Secretary of Defense James Mattis took the administration's first overseas trip to visit Tokyo and Seoul. He made the case for strong U.S.-Korea and U.S.-Japan alliances, endorsed the stabilizing Obama policy to defend Japan's Senkaku islands from any

military moves by China, voiced non-militaristic and calming words about how to address China's behavior in the South China Sea, and talked pragmatically about how to cooperate in addressing North Korea's nuclear and missile threats.

The president himself, when hosting his golf weekend with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe thereafter, followed suit even after North Korea's latest missile launch.

In addition, Trump himself informed Chinese President Xi Jinping that the U.S. will remain committed to the "One China" policy. Because Beijing would likely go to war against Taiwan to prevent independence, a conflict that might well suck in the United States, this is not a risk we can afford to exacerbate. Despite his desire to shake things up on the world stage, Trump was dissuaded from his earlier statement about staying agnostic on this policy. That was hugely reassuring news, but the Washington talking heads circuit treated it like just a momentary news blip, before getting back to the latest innuendo over Michael Flynn or a new Trump tweet.

Similarly, the president backed away both from moving quickly to declare China a currency manipulator and from imposing large across-the-board tariffs on Chinese goods. Although the president will no doubt take a tough stance on China's trade policies, he is avoiding the most counterproductive policy options that had been on the table.

Turning to the Middle East, Trump has also sought to reassure U.S. allies, including both Israel and key Arab states, who had strained relations with President Obama, especially over the Iran nuclear deal. In his meetings with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu and Saudi King Salman, Trump dampened expectations that the

United States would walk away from the agreement by instead emphasizing the need for much more stringent verification of Tehran's compliance.

Moreover, like all his predecessors, Trump is being drawn into the Arab-Israeli peace-making vortex. Both King Salman, in his phone call with Trump, and Jordanian King Abdullah in his face-to-face meeting with the president almost certainly pushed him to restart diplomacy between Israel and the Palestinians. After the president briefly challenged the need for a two-state solution, Nikki Haley, our ambassador to the United Nations, clarified that such a policy was indeed still supported by America.

Moving to Europe, Defense Secretary Mattis spent last week there; Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Vice President Pence also visited. Although they attempted to keep a bit of the fear in the minds of allies as they pushed for greater alliance and military burden-sharing, they clearly reiterated the U.S. commitment to NATO. They were right to do so, on both points. The question of America's commitment is not an issue to play around with, given the possibility that Russia could otherwise feel emboldened to challenge the sovereignty of former Soviet or Warsaw Pact states such as Latvia, Estonia and Poland.

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

Speaking of Russia, Mattis told NATO's military chiefs that there would be no military cooperation between the U.S. and Russia in the near future. Ambassador Haley clarified that the U.S. does not recognize the Russian seizure of Crimea and will join with European allies in sustaining sanctions against Russia until its aggression against Ukraine ended. Trump still

rightly hopes to get along better with Russian President Vladimir Putin, but there will be no unconditional lifting of sanctions on Russia anytime soon.

The brouhahas with the news media that Trump complains about are largely of his own making. But many pundits do seem more concerned about faux pas and political incorrectness rather than actual national security policies. While the administration remains full of the former, the latter are looking much better than could have been expected a few short months ago.

Even so, Trump needs to keep in mind that he now stands astride the biggest stage in the world. His every word and action will — and should — be intensively scrutinized and debated. As long as his own rhetoric and his White House's internal dysfunctions stoke the situation, the news tempest will continue, whether it is fair or not. Maybe everyone needs to take a deep breath.

Michael O'Hanlon, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, is the author of The \$650 Billion Bargain: The Case for Modest Growth in America's Defense Budget. David Gordon was director of policy planning for Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and vice chairman of the National Intelligence Council. He is now senior adviser to the Eurasia Group.

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Trump to Add Some Muscle to U.S. Strategy to Fight Islamic State

Gordon Lubold, Dion Nissenbaum and Julian Barnes

Updated Feb. 23, 2017 8:30 p.m. ET

WASHINGTON—President Donald Trump's new strategy to accelerate the fight against Islamic State will, at least initially, tweak and add a little more muscle to the existing plan, U.S. officials said.

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis is expected to provide to Mr. Trump a series of recommendations for that plan in the coming days. Mr. Trump on Jan. 28 signed an order directing his new Pentagon chief to come up

with a preliminary draft of the plan to fight Islamic State within 30 days.

The president will consider a range of options that are expected to include sending additional troops to Syria and Iraq, at least in limited numbers, according to U.S. officials.

Two other possible steps could involve loosening battlefield restrictions, the officials said. One such step would give commanders more decision-making power on the use of U.S. forces in the field. A second would ease rules designed to minimize civilian casualties, according to U.S. officials. Loosening the civilian casualty rules would have the effect of increasing

the number and rate of operations against Islamic State, officials said.

"What we're trying to do ... is to outline the options that exist for dealing with the ISIS threat ... but also to clearly outline for him the consequences, the opportunity costs, the risks associated with each one of the options that we present," said the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Joe Dunford, at a think-tank event in Washington. Gen. Dunford declined to answer questions about the changes.

There's little indication that Mr. Trump's ultimate decision will fundamentally shake up the existing

approach, said U.S. officials and analysts, which relies heavily on indigenous forces taking on the fight against Islamic State with limited numbers of American advisers following closely behind.

American and foreign diplomats have pointed to the Trump administration's decision to keep Obama administration holdover Brett McGurk on as the State Department's coordinator for the U.S. coalition against Islamic State as a sign that the U.S. approach to the conflict is unlike to change dramatically in the short term.

"There will be some difference in terms of rules of engagement, the

number of advise-and-assist and [special operations forces] elements involved, but I don't think it's going to be dramatically different," said Kathleen Hicks, director of the international security program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. "The plan as it's being executed right now is proving to be quite successful. They will take the best of that and build out areas that they think need to be beefed up."

Some adjustments in the U.S. approach already have been made within the past month, Gen. Dunford said. And last fall, battlefield commanders were given more latitude in making their own decisions about conducting airstrikes, and American troops in Iraq now are operating in closer proximity to their Iraqi counterparts.

Mr. Trump also is expected to decide whether to directly arm the Kurdish force known as the People's Protection Units, or YPG, a move thought to be key to the elimination of Islamic State by breaking its grip on its de facto capital of Raqqa in Syria.

A decision by Mr. Trump to directly arm the YPG would anger Turkey, which classifies the group an extension of Kurdish separatists classified in Turkey as a terrorist group.

"What we don't want to do is bring [the president] options that solve one problem, only to create a second problem," Gen. Dunford said at the Brookings Institution on Thursday.

Many U.S. officials want to move quickly on Raqqa to prevent Islamic State leaders from escaping and setting up operations elsewhere to continue planning attacks on Western targets.

Turkey has offered to help with the fight for Raqqa, but only if the Kurds aren't part of the ground force, U.S. officials said. Kurdish fighters are willing to take part in the fight for Raqqa, but only if Turkey is excluded, the officials said.

Mr. Trump is aggressively exploring the option of creating informal safe zones in Syria, an idea that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has pushed for years. The Pentagon has long opposed the

idea of creating official Syrian safe zones due to costs and necessary military commitments.

But there is growing receptiveness to the idea of setting up unofficial Syrian safe zones—which some officials have dubbed "interim de-escalation areas"—along the Turkey and Jordan borders.

The zones wouldn't have to be new areas taken over by the U.S. military, as officials have explained them. One area in question in northern Syria along the Turkish border is now controlled by the Turkish military and the Syrian rebel groups backed by Ankara.

The Turkish military, backed by U.S. special operations forces and American airstrikes, entered Syria last August and Turkey and its allies and have seized more than 650 square miles of territory. Mr. Erdogan has vowed to create a 2,000-square-mile safe zone that would include housing for Syrian refugees.

Some U.S. officials see the area Turkey has created as a good place to expand a safe zone should the U.S. back such a policy,

discussions that remain in the early stages, U.S. officials said.

If Mr. Trump expands the American presence in Iraq, Syria and beyond, it's likely that allies would be willing to contribute more.

France is willing to increase its military effort in Syria, for example, should the U.S. decide to step up its efforts there, according to a Western diplomat.

French officials told the U.S. last week in Europe that they'd like to see efforts in Raqqa be sped up, even if they don't want to see a radical change in strategy for the campaign in Syria, a diplomat said. No final decision on sending additional troops has been made by Paris as French officials await Mr. Trump's decisions.

—Mathew Dalton contributed to this article.

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'Al-Qaeda is eating us': Syrian rebels are losing out to extremists (UNE)

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GAZIANTEP, Turkey — The biggest surviving rebel stronghold in northern Syria is falling under the control of al-Qaeda-linked extremists amid a surge of rebel infighting that threatens to vanquish what is left of the moderate rebellion.

The ascent of the extremists in the northwestern province of Idlib coincides with a suspension of aid to moderate rebel groups by their international allies.

The commanders of five of the groups say they were told earlier this month by representatives of the United States, Saudi Arabia and Turkey that they would receive no further arms or ammunition until they unite to form a coherent front against the jihadists, a goal that has eluded the fractious rebels throughout the six years of fighting.

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The freeze on supplies is unrelated to the change of power in Washington, where the Trump administration is engaged in a

review of U.S. policy on Syria, U.S. officials say. It also does not signal a complete rupture of support for the rebels, who are continuing to receive salaries, say diplomats and rebel commanders.

Rather, the goal is to ensure that supplies do not fall into extremist hands, by putting pressure on the rebels to form a more efficient force, the rebel commanders say they have been told.

Instead it is the extremists who have closed ranks and turned against the U.S.-backed rebels, putting the al-Qaeda-linked groups with whom the moderates once uneasily coexisted effectively in charge of key swaths of territory in Idlib, the most important stronghold from which the rebels could have hoped to sustain a challenge to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

Moderate rebels still hold territory in southern Syria, in pockets around Damascus, and in parts of Aleppo province where they are fighting alongside Turkish troops against the Islamic State.

But the loss of Idlib to the extremists has the potential to prolong — or at least divert — the trajectory of the war at a time when the United Nations is reconvening peace talks in Geneva aimed at securing a political settlement. The talks

opened Thursday with little sign that progress was likely.

[How the Syrian revolt went so horribly, tragically wrong]

The Syrian government and its ally Russia will now be able to justify intensifying airstrikes against the area, perhaps in alliance with the United States, which is already carrying out its own strikes against al-Qaeda targets in Idlib, analysts say.

"Idlib is now basically being abandoned to the jihadis. This might be the end of the opposition as understood by the opposition's backers abroad," said Aron Lund, a fellow with the Century Foundation. "They won't have any reason to support it."

The al-Qaeda-backed offensive appears to have been triggered by the Russian push last month to make peace with the same moderate rebel groups that the United States had in the past sought, unsuccessfully, to protect from Russian airstrikes. The al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat Fatah al-Sham — which is still widely referred to by its previous name, Jabhat al-Nusra — has since led a series of raids, abductions and killings against moderate rebels, activists and Western-backed administrative councils across Idlib.

The most radical rebel groups have joined a new coalition created by Jabhat al-Nusra called Hayat Tahrir al-Sham. More moderate ones have sought protection by allying themselves with the largest non-al-Qaeda group, Ahrar al-Sham, which subscribes to a school of Salafist jihadism that is considered too extreme for the United States and its Western allies to countenance.

"Al-Qaeda is eating us," said Zakaria Malahifji, an official with the U.S.-backed Fastaqim rebel group, explaining why his group has chosen to join with the Ahrar al-Sham alliance. "It's a military alliance only, for protection from al-Qaeda," he said. "Politically, we don't share their views."

Around a dozen U.S.-backed groups are still holding out against the pressure to join forces with the extremists, but they acknowledge that their cause is increasingly hopeless.

Radicals "are controlling every aspect of life, the mosques and the schools. They are radicalizing 14-year-old boys. Al-Qaeda ideology is spreading everywhere and we have been abandoned," said Lt. Col. Ahmed Saoud, a Syrian army officer who defected and commands a rebel unit in the U.S.-backed Free Idlib Army, one of the groups that has stood aloof from the jihadists.

Suspending the supplies seems guaranteed only to ensure that al-Qaeda continues to expand, the rebel commanders say. "Of course if you cut off the moderate rebels, al-Qaeda will grow more powerful," Malahifji said.

Under the three-year-old program initiated by the United States, rebel groups that have been vetted by the CIA receive support in the form of salaries, light arms and ammunition, and limited quantities of antitank missiles. The supplies are overseen by a military operations center known as the Musterek Operasyon Merkezi, or MOM, comprising representatives of the U.S.-backed Friends of Syria alliance.

But even if the supplies are restored, it is unclear whether the rebels will now be in any position to challenge al-Qaeda. One rebel group burned its stores of ammunition rather than let them be captured by Jabhat al-Nusra. Some

supplies have already been captured. A video posted on YouTube this week by the new Nusra-led alliance showed its fighters destroying a government gun position using one of the U.S.-made TOW antitank missiles that were supplied to the moderate rebels, presumably seized by al-Qaeda allies.

Al-Qaeda-linked groups do not yet control the main border crossings into Syria from Turkey, but they control the access routes and towns and villages around them, enabling them to commandeer any supplies that come across, said Charles Lister of the Middle East Institute.

The al-Qaeda alliance now "has almost total control over what goes through the border," Lister said. "There has to be more rebel unity before the international community can take the risk."

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Rebels Claim Capture of Syrian City From ISIS

Raja Abdulrahim

Updated Feb. 23,

2017 7:52 p.m. ET

Turkish-backed rebels said they had seized one of Islamic State's last urban strongholds in northern Syria on Thursday, as the opposition began a new round of peace talks with the regime in Geneva.

Turkey said forces had entered the center of al-Bab. The capture of the city would further shrink the extremist group's territory, which still includes its de facto capital in Syria, Raqqa, as well as large parts of the surrounding province and the neighboring province of Deir Ezzour. In the Iraqi city of Mosul, U.S.-backed government forces dealt Islamic State another loss on Thursday by taking part of the international airport.

"We rid the whole city from ISIS this morning and now we are headed toward Tadir," said Mutasim Abbas, a commander with the rebel Mutasim Brigade, part of a coalition of opposition groups in the battle for al-Bab. Tadir, on the southern outskirts of al-Bab, sits on the highway leading to Raqqa and could mean the Turkish-backed forces intend to eventually launch an offensive on the city.

Turkey has played a central role in the fight for al-Bab, and has launched airstrikes on targets in the city.

"Today we can say that almost all of al-Bab has been taken under control, and that [forces have] entered the center of town," Turkish

defense minister, Fikri Isik, told Turkish television. "We will say that al-Bab is completely cleared of Daesh elements when search and screening activities are finished," he said, using an Arabic acronym for Islamic State.

The peace talks, backed by the United Nations, opened as escalating regime airstrikes and clashes between the two sides showed the fragility of a two-month-old cease-fire. Talks in Kazakhstan in January and February were meant to secure the cease-fire, but failed to put in place a monitoring mechanism to ensure it wasn't violated.

U.N. Syria envoy Staffan de Mistura said Wednesday that Russia, a key regime backer, had asked Damascus to halt airstrikes on rebel-held areas during the course of the talks, which are expected to continue into next week.

"I'm not expecting a breakthrough...but a beginning of a series of rounds that should enable to go much more in depth on the substantive issues that are required for a political solution in Syria," Mr. de Mistura said.

Islamic State is excluded from the Geneva talks and has been steadily losing territory across Syria and Iraq as many forces—some also at war with one another—have battled against the militants.

Which force will lead the battle to take Raqqa has been the subject of much diplomatic debate.

[Syria has secretly executed thousands of political prisoners, rights group says]

The rebels now face an existential choice — to join the radical groups and risk being annihilated from the air by Russian and U.S. warplanes, or to unite to confront al-Qaeda and its allies and risk defeat on the ground by the better-armed and highly motivated Islamist militants.

Turkey, the rebels' closest ally, is offering a third option: to leave the Idlib area entirely and head east to join the Turkish-backed operation, known as Euphrates Shield, underway against the Islamic State — a rival of al-Qaeda. As Turkey presses to convince the United States that it can muster a force strong enough to provide an alternative to the Syrian Kurds to participate in the battle for the Islamic State's capital of Raqqa, it has been heavily recruiting support among the moderate rebels of Idlib.

Turkey, an important U.S. ally in the fight against Islamic State, has been pushing to sideline the Kurdish-led SDF, a U.S.-backed force fighting the terror group elsewhere in Syria, in favor of one dominated by Arab rebel fighters. Raqqa is a predominantly Arab city.

But U.S. officials have long maintained that it would be difficult to launch a successful assault on Raqqa without the Kurdish YPG militia that leads the SDF.

The offensive against al-Bab began months ago as Turkish-backed rebels gradually took control over much of the surrounding countryside. Turkey credited U.S. warplanes with helping to launch airstrikes on militant targets ahead of ground assaults.

At the same time, forces loyal to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad were also advancing near the city, raising the specter of clashes between the two sides which are in open warfare elsewhere in Syria.

The two-week offensive inside the city was slowed as a result of the entrenched Islamic State militants who dug trenches, planted mines and sent suicide car bombers, said Mahmoud Hamo, a spokesman with Faylaq al-Sham, a U.S.-backed rebel faction under the umbrella of the Free Syrian Army. In addition, thousands of civilians weren't able to flee their homes and hunkered down amid the fighting and daily airstrikes.

More than 120 civilians, including 38 children, were killed since Feb. 7 as a result of Turkish airstrikes and

But Idlib rebels do not want to surrender their territory to the jihadists to go fight on a different front, said Capt. Mohammed Junaid of Jaish al-Nasr, another U.S.-backed group that last week lost an estimated 69 members in a massacre of moderate rebels by one of the al-Qaeda affiliates.

"The whole of Idlib will be painted black, and that will give justification to the regime and Russian jets to bombard it," he said.

Yet even with the moderate rebels confronting likely annihilation, feuds among them persist, precluding the alliance their international sponsors are seeking, said Saoud, the rebel commander. He is gloomy about the prospects for the rebels' survival.

"If we don't get any more support, we will just keep fighting each other and killing each other until we all are dead," he said. "The regime will be watching us. This is what they want."

artillery, according to the U.K.-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Islamic State's media agency, Amaq, reported that more than 380 civilians were killed as a result of the airstrikes and offensive.

On Thursday, rebel forces supported by the Turkish military were already clearing mines and other explosives laid by Islamic State throughout al-Bab, reported Turkey's state-run Anadolu news agency.

Planting explosives before withdrawing from towns and cities is a common tactic by Islamic State and has led to the deaths of at least dozens of civilians in Syria, monitoring groups reported.

Some residents of al-Bab who had stayed throughout the two-week offensive were leaving their homes on Thursday as engineering units were beginning to comb the city looking for improvised explosive devices, including inside homes and public buildings, said Mohammad Al-Sheikh, a native of al-Bab and member of the First Regiment rebel faction.

"The homes are heavily planted with improvised explosive devices so they will leave until we clear and dismantle them," he said. "There is no life in the city, no electricity, no water, no infrastructure."

—Nour Alakraa, Noam Raydan, Ned Levin and Margaret Coker contributed to this article.

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For Syrian Refugees, There Is No Going Home

Anne Barnard

SOUAIRI, Lebanon — In the makeshift tent settlements that dot fields and villages in the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon, Syrian refugees are digging in, pouring concrete floors, installing underground sewerage and electric wires, and starting businesses and families.

What they are not doing is packing up en masse to leave, despite exhortations from Syrian and Lebanese officials, who have declared that safety and security are on the march in neighboring Syria and that it is time for refugees to go home.

But as a new round of peace talks convened Thursday in Geneva, Syrians interviewed at a randomly selected camp in the Bekaa Valley this week offered a unanimous reality check. Their old homes are either destroyed or unsafe, they fear arrest by security forces and they know that despite recent victories by pro-government forces, the fighting and bombing are far from over. They are not going anywhere.

About 1.5 million Syrians have sought refuge in Lebanon, making up about a quarter of the population, according to officials and relief groups, and there is a widely held belief in Lebanon that refugees are a burden on the country's economy and social structure.

Nearly six years into a war that began with a security crackdown on protests against President Bashar al-Assad, countries once eager to see him ousted are now more focused on containing the migrant crisis and defeating the Islamic State, and are willing to consider a settlement that allows Mr. Assad to remain in power.

That leaves many governments invested in vague hopes that such a settlement, however rickety or superficial, will somehow stop the metastasis of the Syrian crisis and ease fears of Islamic State terrorism — often conflated with concerns about ordinary Syrian refugees — that have fueled the rise of right-wing politicians.

Syrian refugees live in makeshift tent settlements in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley. Diego Ibarra Sanchez for The New York Times

And it gives many countries a strong stake in declaring Syria safe for return, even without resolving

the political issues that started the conflict, including human rights abuses by the Syrian government.

Mr. Assad, Syrian officials and their allies in Lebanon are reading that mood. The Hezbollah leader, Hassan Nasrallah, has called for the return of migrants, and Lebanon's president, Michel Aoun, has called on global powers to facilitate it.

But in a tent settlement in the village of Souairi, Syrians made clear that neither a fig-leaf deal nor an outright government victory would send many of them home.

Every family interviewed had at least one member who had disappeared after being arrested or forcibly drafted by the government. The refugees said they cared less about whether Mr. Assad stayed or went than about reforms of the security system. Without an end to torture, disappearances and arbitrary arrests, they said, they would remain wary of going back.

Virtually all said that they dreamed of going back, but that it was increasingly a dream for the next generation.

"If the Lebanese president would offer me the choice of staying in prison forever here and going back to Syria now, I would choose prison," said Khaled Khodor, 23, who spent four days in a Lebanese jail for sneaking across the border.

"They didn't torture me or beat me," he explained. "It was fine. In Syria, if you're taken, you're gone forever."

Mr. Khodor is wanted by the Syrian authorities because he defected from the Syrian Army in 2012. He had two reasons, he said: his own horror at taking part in shelling the rebellious neighborhood of Baba Amr in the city of Homs and threats from rebels in his hometown.

Mr. Assad has promised amnesty to soldiers who defected. But Mr. Khodor said a cousin of his who believed the offer had been detained in Syria five months ago and had not been heard from since.

The only way he would go back, he said, is if there were international guarantees of his safety. Asked how that would work, he smiled and said: "I don't know. That's why I lost hope."

This camp near the Syrian border is more pleasant than many, without the open sewers or trash heaps that blight many others. About 40

families rent patches of land from Mahmoud Hussein al-Tahan, who said the money was about the same as what he used to make growing eggplants and tomatoes.

Work is scarce, and most families are in debt to Mr. Tahan. A relief worker familiar with the camp said that only a small fraction of the children there were in school, and that parents said Mr. Tahan had made some of them work in his fields.

Mr. Khodor's tent, which he shares with eight relatives, including his wife and three children, had a television, a stove and a concrete floor. Back home, his house has been destroyed.

"But I don't care about the house," he said, adding that if he trusted that his family would be secure, "we could live in a tent like this in Syria."

At a settlement in Lebanon. Refugees said that without an end to torture, disappearances and arbitrary arrests, they would remain wary of going back to Syria. Diego Ibarra Sanchez for The New York Times

Instead, new refugees are still arriving.

Mustafa Selim, 19, fled Syria with his mother and siblings just last fall. Battles had erupted near their house, and one brother had been arrested and forcibly drafted as he was traveling to his university. They do not know if he is still alive.

"The regime is lying when they say it's safe and secure," he said. "To survive in Syria, you have to be a soldier. It's impossible to live as a civilian. And if you go to the army, it's kill or be killed."

Some refugees are managing to build new lives. Naumi Qassim, 38, rents a truck and drives from camp to camp selling vegetables and yogurt to those who cannot reach markets. He makes enough money to rent a room within walking distance of a school.

Still, his son, at 9, cannot read, he said. He said he believed that overwhelmed Lebanese schools shunted the worst teachers to the evening shift of classes packed with Syrians.

Mr. Tahan, a gregarious man who sought to portray himself as the refugees' benefactor, dismissed the idea that they are harming the country's economy and straining

social services. He said the government pushed that view to get more money from the United Nations.

Refugees, he said, benefit the Lebanese, from the generator operators providing them with electricity, to the owners of shops where they spend their United Nations food vouchers, to landowners who benefit from their cheap labor. It is an argument often heard from international organizations, which say the burden of hosting the refugees is largely offset by the economic stimulus they provide, not to mention \$1.9 billion in international aid in 2016 alone, the United Nations says.

Mr. Tahan said he expected the Syrians to stay for years, based on his experience in Lebanon's civil war.

A refugee at his temporary home in Anjar. Some refugees are digging in, pouring concrete floors, installing underground sewerage and electric wires and starting businesses. Diego Ibarra Sanchez for The New York Times

"We had hundreds of Geneva conferences before the war ended, and years later, things are still not good," he said.

In the camp, the new Geneva round inspired little hope. The refugees said neither the government nor the opposition negotiators represented them.

Mr. Qassim, the vegetable seller, summed it up: "The opposition wants Assad to go. The regime wants to keep him. All their lives, they will never agree."

Still, he hopes to return. "For us, it's too late, but we want our children to have a future in Syria," he said. "There is no future here."

Mr. Khodor was more pessimistic. After so much killing, revenge will go on for generations, he said. "Syria is finished."

At that, a neighbor who had just stopped in loudly objected. "Why? We want to go back!"

"This lady will take you back," Mr. Khodor joked, pointing at me.

"But on the condition that no one will hurt me?" he asked.

Mr. Khodor laughed. "We need a miracle," he said. "We need to make Syria vanish, and then make a new Syria."

Ben Kesling and Awadh Altaie

Updated Feb. 23, 2017 2:56 p.m. ET

MOSUL, Iraq—Iraqi military forces were nearly in control of Mosul's international airport on Thursday, Iraqi military officials said, a major step in their fight to retake the Islamic State-held western side of the city.

By sunset, troops came under occasional mortar fire by the extremists and prepared for the next day's push on dense Islamic State-controlled neighborhoods just beyond the airport. Iraqi commandos also attacked a former government military base next to the airport complex, sweeping through farmland along the Tigris river, the officials said.

"Now the battle for the west side has started," said Brig. Yahya Rasool, spokesman for Iraq's joint operations command, after meeting with other top officials near the front.

The highly symbolic victory gives Iraqi forces a foothold in the center of western Mosul, on the outskirts of which they have battled for days to push back Islamic State.

The extremist group seized Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city, in June 2014. It was there that its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi proclaimed a caliphate straddling Iraq and Syria.

The government offensive to remove the extremists from their last major urban stronghold in Iraq began in October in the city's east.

U.S.-backed Iraqi forces suffered heavy casualties as they recaptured eastern Mosul, declaring it fully retaken last month.

Following a weekslong pause to regroup, they announced Sunday the start of ground operations to reclaim areas of western Mosul. Troops quickly retook the strategic outlying village of Abu Saif, which sits on high ground next to the airport.

On Thursday, "we broke the enemy's defense lines," said Col.

Falah al-Webdan, a commander with the elite Emergency Response Division, which is at the front.

"The real fighting will start tomorrow," he added, referring to his troops' mission to start assaulting the first dense neighborhoods inside the western half of the city.

At a U.S.-supported aid station near the front, U.S. and Western allied medics treated a line of Iraqi troops suffering shrapnel and explosion wounds.

The fight for western Mosul is expected to involve house-to-house fighting in dense older neighborhoods and the use of some of the hundreds of thousands of civilians who remain there as human shields by Islamic State fighters.

"We can't use tanks or heavy artillery because of civilians," Brig. Rasool said.

Civilians in the west are already feeling the effects of the approaching fight.

Volunteer medics manning front-line aid stations said some 40 civilians were treated Thursday for wounds from shrapnel and explosions, and that five had died either on the way to the clinic or while being treated. One corpse was brought in on the back of a donkey, medics said.

Iraqi troops organized buses for women and children from western Mosul to be transported to camps for displaced people. Civilian men were loaded onto the back of military flatbeds to be screened to make sure they weren't extremists.

Fathay Ahmed squatted by the side of the crowded bus as her young son vomited in the dirt with an unknown ailment. She said her other son, who had a mental illness, had been killed hours earlier.

"He just ran toward Iraqi troops," the 45-year-old said. "An [improvised explosive device] went off and killed him."

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Lebanese Fear Being Caught in Trump's Push on Iran

Yaroslav Trofimov

Feb. 23, 2017 5:30 a.m. ET

BEIRUT—No country is more important for Iran's regional influence than Lebanon, where the Shiite militia Hezbollah plays an outsize role. Now that President Donald Trump seeks to roll back this Iranian sway, many Lebanese fear their country will end up paying the price.

In a nation of 18 officially recognized religious communities, Shiites account for about 27% of Lebanon's population, according to Central Intelligence Agency estimates. (No census has been held here since 1932.)

Hezbollah, which has repeatedly confronted Israel, is the only militia that emerged from Lebanon's 1975-1990 civil war with its arsenal intact. And, after the last five years of heavy combat in Syria, it has turned into one of the Middle East's most formidable military forces, one significantly stronger than Lebanon's multi-confessional regular army.

While designated as a terrorist organization by the U.S., Hezbollah is also a powerful part of Lebanon's government. After a 2½-year deadlock, it secured in October the ascension of a political ally, former army chief Michel Aoun, a Christian, as president.

President Aoun, in turn, this month described Hezbollah's weapons as an "essential part in defending the country"—a statement that prompted the United Nations envoy to remind him that a Security Council resolution calls for disarming the group.

The administration of Barack Obama, aware of the complex power dynamic in Lebanon, had chosen not to confront Hezbollah's influence directly. Instead, it aimed to build up central Lebanese government institutions, particularly the army, hoping that one day the regular military would become stronger than the Iranian-backed militia.

President Trump has adopted a far more confrontational stance on Iran and its allies. In a joint statement with visiting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu last week, he stressed the need to "counter the threats posed by Iran and its proxies."

Hezbollah is by far the most important of these Iranian regional proxies and the shift in Washington came just as Hezbollah, benefiting from regime victories in Syria, reached unprecedented authority inside Lebanon.

"Today, Hezbollah is acting as the main decision maker in Lebanon," said parliament member Samy Gemayel, president of the predominantly Christian Kataeb party which belongs to the Sunni-

led political grouping known as the March 14 alliance. "This is very dangerous. The Lebanese state as a whole can be sanctioned if it is considered to be under the umbrella of Hezbollah. This is what we fear."

There are many ways the Trump administration could squeeze Lebanon if it so desired—from targeting its banks to curtailing funding for the national army and for some 1.5 million Syrian refugees living here.

"Lebanon would be uniquely vulnerable to a U.S.-Iran escalation. Its banking system is exposed to Treasury actions that can be imposed quickly and painfully," said Emile Hokayem, a senior fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies

Lebanon's central bank governor, Riad Salameh, told The Wall Street Journal in an interview he hasn't received any communications from the new U.S. administration. Lebanon, he added, has already passed all the banking legislation that the U.S. had requested, and has established strict controls to make sure that Hezbollah or Iran aren't abusing the country's banking system, where 65% of deposits are held in U.S. dollars.

"The general policy we are following aims to keep Lebanon integrated in the global financial system," Mr. Salameh said. "The banking sector is a pillar for economic and social stability....We are implementing the

laws that have been enacted in countries where we have either correspondent banking or in countries where we use their currencies. Therefore the banking sector here is compliant in a strict but fair manner"

"The government is a coalition government and it does represent all the factions of the country, and it is normal that [Hezbollah] is included. But the government has also accepted that it needs to be compliant internationally," Mr. Salameh said. "Sanctions won't be warranted because we have done what is required to be in line with international practices."

Hezbollah last year harshly criticized the central bank and commercial banks for shutting down accounts believed to be connected to the organization's members.

Hezbollah didn't reply to an emailed request for comment.

Ali Bazzi, a lawmaker from the Shiite Amal bloc allied with Hezbollah, added that it would be counterproductive for the U.S. to halt aid to the Lebanese army just as it is being engaged against al Qaeda and Islamic State along the Syrian border.

"The Lebanese Army is doing a great job defending the country against terrorists. We really appreciate the assistance of the U.S. and any other country for this mission. But you are not just helping

us, you are also helping yourselves," he said.

Last year, Saudi Arabia withheld \$3 billion in funding for the Lebanese army and imposed many other restrictions as it decided to punish Lebanon for what it viewed as the country's tilt toward Iran in the regional power struggle.



Israel calls Human Rights Watch a propaganda tool, says it is not welcome

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JERUSALEM — The Israeli government is refusing to allow an American investigator from Human Rights Watch into the country, saying Thursday that the group is "systematically anti-Israel" and works as a tool for pro-Palestinian propaganda.

Officials at Human Rights Watch — one of the most prominent rights monitors in the world — denounced the decision to deny entry to Omar Shakir, its recently named Israel and Palestine country director. Shakir is a U.S. citizen. His parents were from Iraq.

The New York-based group shared a Nobel Peace Prize in 1997 as a founding member of the International Campaign to Ban Land Mines. One of the top backers of Human Rights Watch is financier and philanthropist George Soros.

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"Our staff can't work in Cuba, Egypt, North Korea, Sudan, the United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, and Venezuela. This is not a club that Israel wants to join," said Sari Bashi, Israel and Palestine advocacy director for Human Rights Watch. Bashi, an Israeli, is based in South Africa.

Authorities in Egypt in 2014 barred two senior executives of Human Rights Watch from entering the country as the

Saudi relations with Lebanon, however, warmed up after the October compromise over parliament's election of President Aoun—which also involved appointing a Saudi-backed candidate, Sunni politician Saad Hariri, as prime minister.

pair were about to release a year-long investigation of mass killings of anti-government demonstrators at the hands of security forces.

In a letter dated Monday, Israel's immigration service, which approves visas for foreign workers, said it based its rejection on an advisory from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which noted that "for some time now, this organization's public activities and reports have engaged in politics in the service of Palestinian propaganda, while falsely raising the banner of 'human rights.'" It did not cite specifics in the letter.

Emmanuel Nahshon, a top spokesman for Israel's Foreign Ministry, confirmed that Israel rejected the visa request for Shakir, basing its decision not on the individual but on its low opinion of Human Rights Watch.

"We said no. It's very simple. We consider the group to be biased, systemically hostile toward Israel. In a way, we consider them absolutely hopeless," Nahshon said.

He said the refusal to allow the Human Rights Watch investigator into the country does not signal a new get-tough policy against nongovernmental organizations, as its critics charge.

"This doesn't mean that Israel will not allow human rights organizations to work in Israel. On the contrary, we're keen to work with them," Nahshon said. He added that decisions are made on a case-by-case basis.

"This decision and the spurious rationale should worry anyone

Mr. Aoun's allies say they hope the Trump administration, just as the Saudis have done, will realize that its campaign against Iran won't benefit from hurting Lebanon as a whole.

"Whatever happens between the U.S. and the Iran, the interest of the West is for Lebanon to remain

stable," said Charbel Cordahi, an economic adviser at the president's Free Patriotic Movement party. "If the stability here is threatened, it's not only the Lebanese who will be paying the price."

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concerned about Israel's commitment to basic democratic values," Iain Levine, program director at Human Rights Watch, said in a statement.

Bashi said that in the past year, Human Rights Watch has not only reported on alleged violations by the Israeli government but also investigated and condemned the arbitrary detention of journalists and activists by the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and executions by Hamas authorities in Gaza. It also probed and denounced a Jerusalem bus bombing claimed by a suspected affiliate of Hamas, the Islamist militant organization that runs the Gaza Strip and has been designated a terrorist group by the United States and Israel.

Homegrown rights groups here, such as B'Tselem and Peace Now, and global organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have long been accused by Israelis of unfair treatment. The Israel-based group NGO Monitor, which provides information to the Israeli government on Palestinian incitement, charges that Human Rights Watch "disproportionately focuses on condemnations of Israel" and "promotes an agenda based solely on the Palestinian narrative of victimization and Israeli aggression."

On its website, NGO Monitor features a short video clip of Shakir speaking at the University of California at Irvine in 2010 in favor of the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement, which supporters say is designed to force Israel to end its almost 50-year

military occupation and practices it compares to "apartheid" against Palestinians. Shakir was not working for Human Rights Watch then.

Israelis say the BDS movement seeks to "delegitimize" Israel. A number of U.S. governors and state houses have come out with executive orders and bills against the boycotts.

Israel's right-wing government has recently targeted Israeli human rights groups for extra scrutiny and warned European governments to stop funding them. Members of anti-occupation groups, such as Breaking the Silence, which is composed of Israeli army veterans, have been called "traitors."

The Israeli parliament in July passed a bill to increase transparency for Israeli NGOs that get most of their funding from abroad. Leaders of the nongovernmental organizations, who make up the core of Israel's "peace camp" and are stalwarts of the dwindling left wing in Israel, said the law was written by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government to muzzle opposition to the military occupation of the West Bank.

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Ignatius : Russia's assault on America's elections is just one example of a global threat

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One of the most startling allegations in a January report by U.S. intelligence agencies about Russian hacking was this sentence: "Russia has sought to influence elections across Europe." This warning of a

campaign far broader than the United States got little attention in America.

We may be missing the forest for the trees in the Russia story: The Kremlin's attempt to meddle in the 2016 U.S. presidential election is part of a much bigger tale of

Russian covert action — in which Donald Trump's campaign was perhaps a tool, witting or unwitting. This secret manipulation, if unchecked, could pose an "existential threat" to Western democracy, argues Gérard Araud, France's ambassador to Washington.

The investigations begun by the FBI and Congress hopefully will reveal or debunk any connections between the Trump team and Russia's hidden manipulators. A larger benefit is that these inquiries will bolster transatlantic efforts to reclaim the political space the Kremlin is trying to infiltrate.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said last weekend in Munich that the world is entering the “post-West” era. Unless the United States stands solidly with its allies, Lavrov’s claim may prove accurate.

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The Russians are masters of what they call “active measures” in the “information space.” Their intelligence services have been using “fake news” and stolen information for more than a century to try to manipulate Europe and the United States. What’s different now is that the power of digital technology allows intelligence agencies to alter the very landscape of fact.

The assault on the United States’ elections signaled a “new normal” in Russian influence operations, warned the U.S. intelligence community on Jan. 6. “We assess Moscow will apply lessons learned from its campaign aimed at the U.S. presidential election to future influence efforts in the United States and worldwide, including against U.S. allies and their election processes.”

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

and Robbie Whelan

Updated Feb. 23, 2017 11:24 p.m. ET

MEXICO CITY—Top Trump administration officials tried Thursday to soften the message on expanded U.S. immigration-enforcement efforts during talks here, but Mexican officials signaled little progress had been made in bridging differences that threaten to further fray ties between the two countries.

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly faced a skeptical Mexican government as they sought to explain Washington’s decision to step up the enforcement of immigration laws, outlining policies to enlist local authorities in the U.S. to jail and deport more people and to send detainees back to Mexico—even if they aren’t Mexican.

Meanwhile in Washington, President Donald Trump made comments that seemed to sharpen the tone.

“All of a sudden for the first time we’re getting gang members out, we’re getting drug lords out, we’re getting really bad dudes out of this country at a rate that nobody’s ever seen before,” the president said during a White House event with

Let’s look at Germany, which faces parliamentary elections in September. The German government told the Bundestag in a Dec. 22 report that German computer networks were hit once a week last year by foreign intelligence services.

The German government warned “there might be a Russian cyberattack on the federal election in Germany” this fall, based on the U.S. 2016 campaign, and cautioned that the Bundestag itself was “the focus of Russian intelligence interest.” The report found a direct Russian role in attacks last May and August on the Bundestag and German political parties, which it attributed to malware known as APT 28, identified by the FBI as a Russian hacking tool.

Bruno Kahl, the head of Germany’s intelligence service, was blunt about the foreign hackers’ aim. “The perpetrators have an interest in delegitimizing the democratic process,” he told the newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in late November. Hans-Georg Maassen, head of Germany’s FBI equivalent, told journalists: “Recently, we see the willingness of Russian

U.S. Talks With Mexico Clouded by Mixed Message (UNE)

manufacturing executives. “And it’s a military operation because they’re allowed to come into our country.”

“We’re going to have a good relationship with Mexico I hope,” Mr. Trump said. “And if we don’t, we don’t.”

In midday meetings in Mexico City, the U.S. cabinet members delivered two key assurances to their Mexican counterparts: that they wouldn’t institute “mass deportations,” and that the U.S. military wouldn’t take part in rounding up and ejecting illegal migrants.

Gabriela Cuevas, the head of the Mexican Senate’s foreign relations committee, said she was deeply troubled by the apparent discrepancy between what the U.S. envoys said in Mexico City and Mr. Trump’s actions and words.

“I see a different message coming from the White House and from the secretaries visiting here,” she said. “One doesn’t know if Secretary Tillerson and Secretary Kelly are telling the truth or not. It’s a problem of credibility. Did they come to tell lies? Or are they just not coordinating with their boss? Who do you believe?”

Later Thursday, the White House sought to walk back Mr. Trump’s use of the word “military” in

intelligence to carry out sabotage.” And beyond these cyberattacks, Russia has a vast array of business supporters and fixers in Germany who regularly press Moscow’s case, according to a November report by the Atlantic Council.

France offers a similar opportunity for Russian political manipulation in its presidential election this spring. A Moscow-based bank loaned money to the party of right-wing candidate Marine Le Pen in 2014, according to the Atlantic Council. Le Pen is openly pro-Russia in her policies.

Russia was apparently behind a devastating April 2015 hack against cable news channel TV5 Monde that was linked to the APT 28 software. And last October, the French intelligence service briefed political parties about hacking threats, according to *Le Monde*.

French journalists suspect a Kremlin hand in recent rumor-mongering about Emmanuel Macron, the leading anti-Russian candidate in the presidential election. Macron’s top aide claims attacks on the campaign’s website “are coming from the Russian

reference to the immigration enforcement.

“The president was using that as an adjective. It’s happening with precision and in a manner in which it’s being done very, very clearly,” said Sean Spicer, the White House press secretary, at a news briefing. “The president was clearly describing the manner in which this was being done.”

Nonetheless, Mr. Trump’s comments had the effect of driving home his administration’s determination to up the tempo of enforcement and deportation operations, regardless of their effect on the U.S.’s southern neighbor.

Raúl Benítez, a security analyst at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, said while mass deportations haven’t begun, Mr. Trump’s statements and the newly published U.S. guidelines have sown fears among the U.S.’s 55 million-person Hispanic community.

“There’s a very toxic climate of terror,” said Mr. Benítez. “Whatever they agree to here seems of dubious value for the relationship.”

Messrs. Kelly and Tillerson met with their Mexican counterparts, Foreign Minister Luis Videgaray and Interior Minister Miguel Ángel Osorio Chong, later meeting with President Enrique Peña Nieto. The meeting between the U.S. officials and the

border,” but he didn’t offer direct evidence. Russian propaganda outlets have published stories suggesting that Macron is gay.

The transatlantic alliance has survived nearly 70 years of Russian manipulation, but it’s fragile these days. That’s why Americans should care if a shady Ukrainian parliamentarian tried to use Trump business associates to deliver a pro-Russian peace plan to the White House last month, or if Trump boasted in 2013 about meeting “almost all of the oligarchs” at a dinner in Moscow that year, or about news reports alleging Russian contacts last year with Trump’s campaign.

So pay attention: The hacking issue isn’t a “ruse,” as Trump claimed last week. This is how the Russians try to subvert politics — boldly, secretly and often corruptly. They’re good at it. If the United States and its allies don’t resist, a post-West era may indeed be next.

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president went ahead even after a top Mexican official had suggested earlier that Mr. Peña Nieto might cancel.

Mr. Peña Nieto’s office said the president stressed to the U.S. envoys that Mexico’s priority was protecting the citizens’ rights in the U.S., adding that the meetings underscored both governments’ desire to work past the current turbulence.

Mr. Videgaray, speaking to reporters Thursday alongside Messrs. Tillerson, Kelly and Osorio, emphasized the anger and “irritation” that Mr. Trump’s policies and statements have caused among Mexicans.

He called for talks dealing with the entire relationship, linking immigration and security issues to the continued trade relationship.

“Reaching agreements with the U.S. will be a long road, but today we have taken a step in the right direction,” Mr. Videgaray said after the meeting. “The differences persist, and we will continue to work on issues of interest for Mexicans as they will continue to do so for Americans.”

Mr. Videgaray said the talks were taking place at a “complicated moment,” adding both countries agreed on the need to continue

talks. Mr. Tillerson said the sides both aired their grievances.

"We jointly acknowledged that, in a relationship filled with vibrant colors, two strong sovereign countries from time to time will have differences. We listened closely and carefully to each other as we respectfully and patiently raised our respective concerns," Mr. Tillerson said.

The Trump administration earlier this week unveiled the new immigration and deportation policies, based on an executive order issued by Mr. Trump last month. The policy calls for enlisting local U.S. authorities to enforce immigration law, jailing more people while they wait for their hearings, and trying to send border crossers

back to Mexico to await proceedings. The latter rule would apply even to those who are not Mexican.

Mr. Videgaray said he told the U.S. officials that it was "legally impossible" for the U.S. to take unilateral decisions affecting both countries. Such decisions should be taken jointly and be the result of a process of dialogue and mutual agreement, the foreign secretary said.

One Mexican official described Mr. Kelly's assertion that "there will be no use of military forces in immigration" as encouraging, seeing it as an apparent contradiction to Mr. Trump's earlier statement.

Mr. Kelly said his statements were intended to correct inaccurate reporting by journalists, even though one appeared to contradict Mr. Trump. Opponents of Mr. Trump's immigration policies often refer to expanded U.S. efforts in such terms.

Mr. Tillerson said the U.S. reiterated its commitment to stopping the illegal flow of weapons and cash on the border. "There is no mistaking that the rule of law matters along both sides of our shared border," he said.

The officials discussed efforts to curtail irregular migration, by securing Mexico's southern border and supporting efforts of Guatemala, Honduras and El

Salvador to improve conditions there.

Mr. Videgaray said Mexico was no longer producing illegal migrants, who are now coming from Central America. More than 220,000 migrants, most from Central America, were detained by the U.S. Border Patrol in the past fiscal year. Last year, Mexico in turn deported some 140,000 Central American migrants who were headed to the U.S.

—Ted Mann in Washington contributed to this article.

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The New York Times As Kelly and Tillerson Visit Mexico, Their Reassurances Differ From Trump's Stance

Azam Ahmed, Gardiner Harris and Ron Nixon

MEXICO CITY — In the White House, President Trump was telling American chief executives on Thursday that the days of being treated unfairly by Mexico — on trade, on immigration, on crime — were over.

"You see what's happening at the border: All of a sudden, for the first time, we're getting gang members out," Mr. Trump said, referring to his instructions to increase deportations of undocumented immigrants. "And it's a military operation."

But in Mexico, his homeland security secretary, John F. Kelly, was saying the opposite, trying to tamp down fears of a military operation and to assure the public that American soldiers would not be used to police the border.

"I repeat: There will be no use of military in this," Mr. Kelly said at a news conference on Thursday, appearing with Secretary of State Rex W. Tillerson. "At least half of you try to get that right, because it continues to come up in your reporting."

Mr. Trump has a penchant for dropping unwelcome surprises during visits between the United States and Mexico. Last month, on the first day of a trip to Washington by Mexico's foreign minister, Mr. Trump signed an executive order to build a wall between the two countries.

Then, this week, just before Mr. Kelly and Mr. Tillerson touched down in Mexico, his administration released policies that vastly expanded the potential for deportation of undocumented immigrants.

Mr. Trump is certainly not the only American president to clamp down on illegal immigration. His predecessor, Barack Obama, deported record numbers of immigrants, including gang members. But Mr. Trump's actions and disparaging remarks about Mexico have helped push relations between the two countries to their lowest point in decades.

His steady stream of provocative policies and statements has enraged the Mexican public and left their leaders to consider their own leverage in the event of a meltdown in ties between the two countries, whether on trade, migration or security.

On Thursday, the contradictions between the president and his top staff raised a pressing question: Which version of Washington will come to bear on Mexico in the coming months? Will it be the aggressive approach of the president or the more reassuring stance of Mr. Kelly, who will be assigned to oversee some of the proposals likely to antagonize Mexico the most?

"Let me be very, very clear," Mr. Kelly said, assuring Mexicans that the rules for deporting people from the United States had not fundamentally changed — another possible contradiction of his boss. "There will be no, repeat no, mass deportations."

The statements during the visit offered a startling departure from past trips to Mexico by American diplomats. Four officials — two from Mexico and two from the United States — walked into a large ballroom with grim faces and made carefully worded comments without taking any questions.

It was the kind of cautious staging normally seen after tough negotiations between adversaries, not talks between friendly neighbors. No one suggested that a breakthrough had been made.

"Two strong sovereign countries from time to time will have differences," Mr. Tillerson said.

Foreign Minister Luis Videgaray of Mexico called it a "complex moment in the relationship."

In the last month, Mexican officials have shown cautious restraint, and even silence, in response to Mr. Trump's threats, often to the frustration of the Mexican people.

Their logic, officials say, is clear-eyed: To descend into a fight with the United States would serve no one, least of all the Mexican people who are spoiling for a harder line against Mr. Trump.

But that is not to say the Mexicans are without recourse. While they are hoping to avoid a confrontation, the whispers of discontent have started to spread.

The minister of economy has said there will be no trade talks without similar talks on security and migration, twin areas of vulnerability for the United States.

And Mr. Videgaray, responding to a directive from Mr. Trump broadening the scope of deportations in America, has vowed to bring to the United Nations any actions by the United States to send non-Mexicans to Mexico.

Mexico is keenly aware of its leverage in the bilateral relationship: billions of dollars in agricultural purchases by Mexico, a decade of security cooperation to dismantle

cartels and intercept drugs destined for the United States, and the detention of hundreds of thousands of migrants passing through Mexico on their way to America's southern border.

On trade, putting aside the supply chains of vehicles and electronics engineered by the North American Free Trade Agreement, agriculture is a major vulnerability for the United States. Mexico is an immense purchaser of American farm goods.

The nation is the No. 1 purchaser of American corn, dairy, pork and rice. Mexico purchased nearly \$2 billion of corn in 2016 and also bought large amounts of soybeans, wheat, cotton and beef.

A Mexican lawmaker recently proposed a bill to redirect purchases of corn away from the United States, a tactic that could devastate American corn farmers in the heartland of Mr. Trump's base. Both Brazil and Argentina offer alternatives to the American Corn Belt, experts and officials say.

"There are a lot of jobs in agriculture that are dependent on NAFTA in America," said Gregorio Schneider, the founder of TC Latin America Partners, a New York-based private equity firm that invests in Mexico. "You are talking about the center of the United States."

On national security, Mexico also plays a large role. The government could slow down extraditions to the United States, keeping sought-after drug lords like Joaquín Guzmán Loera, known as El Chapo, instead of sending them north. It could also stop deporting American fugitives who have fled to Mexico.

Perhaps more threatening to the United States would be a reconsideration of Mexico's participation in the drug war. For more than a decade, the Mexican authorities have cooperated in arresting top cartel leaders and intercepting drug shipments destined for the United States.

Mexico could also leverage its participation in the sharing of intelligence. The vast majority of drugs funneled — and tunneled — through Mexico are not for domestic consumption.

"We receive information from Mexican authorities on a daily basis that helps us better target drugs smugglers at the border," said Gil Kerlikowske, who was the commissioner of Customs and Border Protection in the Obama administration. "These are ties we want to strengthen, not weaken."

Mr. Kerlikowske said Mexican federal police officers were stationed in Tucson and in Laredo, Tex., where they assist American law enforcement in identifying drug

cartels and human smugglers by sharing information in Mexican criminal history databases.

Likewise, American Customs and Border Protection officers are assigned to a joint program in Mexico City, where they share information on possible drug traffickers through the use of American law enforcement databases.

In 2015, joint operations between the Border Patrol and Mexican law enforcement led to the discovery of 30 drug tunnels and about 80,000 pounds of drugs.

Whether policing the southern American border to prevent unwanted migrants from entering the United States or examining passenger manifests to ensure terror-related suspects cannot enter through Mexico, the authorities here have been a critical component of America's national security strategy.

In 2014, Mexico launched Plan Frontera Sur to safeguard its southern border from migrants

trying to enter from Central America. The plan has essentially served as a dragnet 1,000 miles south of the Texas border, catching hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans, Hondurans and Guatemalans en route to the United States.

Some experts and officials have suggested that Mexico could simply ease up on its border patrols, granting passage to large numbers of Central Americans. That would not only swamp the American authorities, but might enable potentially dangerous migrants to slip into the country.

Sean Spicer, the White House press secretary, tried later in the day to clarify the contradiction between Mr. Trump's and Mr. Kelly's remarks. He said that Mr. Trump had not meant to characterize the deportation efforts as a military operation, arguing that the president had been using the word "military" as an adjective.

"It's being done with precision," Mr. Spicer said.

The meetings here on Thursday produced a modicum of agreement between the United States and Mexico. Both Mr. Tillerson and Mr. Kelly acknowledged the significance of border cooperation to address the flow of migration from Central America to the United States.

It is a topic that Mr. Kelly, who led more than 1,000 military personnel of the United States Southern Command, knows something about. He has in the past outlined a more balanced approach to protecting the borders, saying security cannot "be attempted as an endless series of 'goal-line stands' on the one-foot line at the official ports of entry or along the thousands of miles of border between this country and Mexico."

This could place him once more at odds with the mandates of his boss, Mr. Trump, whose executive order to build a wall will fall directly among Mr. Kelly's responsibilities.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

China Shakes Up Top Economic Team Ahead of Major Power Shuffle (UNE)

Lingling Wei and Chun Han Wong

Updated Feb. 23, 2017 8:54 p.m. ET

BEIJING—President Xi Jinping is shaking up his economic team ahead of a major power shuffle as China battles rising financial risks at home and friction with its trading partners.

The change, according to people familiar with the matter, involves China's top banking regulator, the commerce minister and the top economic-planning official, who have all reached the usual retirement age of 65. Slated to succeed them are two close associates of Mr. Xi and a well-known technocrat, the people said.

The shakeup, expected to be made public within days, was decided on at a Tuesday meeting of the Communist Party's Politburo hosted by Mr. Xi, one of the people said.

It comes as Beijing prepares to decide the power structure for Mr. Xi's second term. A twice-a-decade party congress in the fall will give Mr. Xi a chance to pad high-level party and government organs with loyalists, reinforcing his already formidable clout. One of the three economic officials leaving was appointed by Mr. Xi's predecessor, and the other two following horse-trading with retired leaders as Mr. Xi was forming his administration.

Since coming to power in late 2012, Mr. Xi has eroded the consensus-driven, collective-leadership model of his recent predecessors, taking personal charge of the military, the economy and most other levers of power.

China's economic mandarins ultimately answer to the leadership, and they have less power in deciding the future course of the economy than some of their Western counterparts do. Still, they can help shape important policies and regulations by recommending specific action plans.

In recent months, Mr. Xi's promised restructuring of the economy, including weaning Chinese companies off debt, has appeared to be stuck. In some cases, years of financial liberalization efforts have been dialed back.

Many economists inside and outside China have raised questions about whether Mr. Xi has the resolve to push ahead with overhauls that could put China's economy on a stronger footing longer term. For now, that remains an open question, and it isn't clear how the new economic team might help influence Mr. Xi's thinking.

The new team faces a host of challenges from rising debt levels, asset bubbles, capital outflows and increased political tensions over trade. In the U.S., a key market for Chinese goods, President Donald

Trump has pledged to be tough on China.

"There is a lot of uncertainty over the economy right now," said an official with knowledge of the ongoing shakeup. Mr. Xi has set stability as the overarching goal and "steady hands are needed for those important posts," the official said.

In November, China's finance minister, who had aggressively pushed for measures that could squeeze China's short-term growth, was abruptly replaced by a low-profile bureaucrat.

One surprise in the latest shuffle involves the China Banking Regulatory Commission.

Guo Shuqing, currently governor of the prosperous Shandong province in eastern China, is slated to be the next commissioner after the current one, Shang Fulin, retires. Mr. Shang had been appointed by Hu Jintao, Mr. Xi's predecessor.

Mr. Guo, a former banker and top securities regulator, had long been considered a strong contender as the next central-bank governor, a higher post that has been held by Zhou Xiaochuan for 15 years.

Mr. Zhou was allowed to stay on beyond the usual retirement age by Mr. Xi when he took office. But Mr. Zhou is now 69 and the succession question at the People's Bank of

China has been water-cooler talk for several years.

The people familiar with the latest shakeup said Mr. Zhou isn't part of it for now.

Before going to Shandong, Mr. Guo, now 60, served as China's top securities regulator. But his efforts to clean up the stock markets and attract foreign capital put him on a collision course with state-owned companies looking to go public and other regulatory agencies that have seen their roles diminish.

When he was dispatched to Shandong, it was seen by some officials within the party as his ticket to eventually return to the national stage in a bigger role. Candidates for top jobs are often given provincial leadership roles to gain broader experience.

But as banking regulator, Mr. Guo will be equal in rank to a provincial governor. According to the people with knowledge of the personnel shakeup, the leadership is considering letting him oversee a potential merger between the banking and insurance regulatory agencies.

For months, Beijing has been weighing how to consolidate financial regulation following embarrassing missteps that exacerbated market turmoil. The goal is to fix a fragmented system in which the banking, securities and

insurance regulators and the central bank often act in isolation and sometimes even at cross-purposes. The process has been stalled by powerful groups that are unwilling to cede turf.

“Guo Shuqing is tough,” an official close to him said. “He might be able to help move that process along and then get a bigger role afterward.”

The reassignment of Mr. Guo, who couldn't be reached for comment, was announced within the Shandong government on Thursday. Mr. Guo was scheduled to take an evening train to Beijing, according to an official itinerary reviewed by *The Wall Street Journal*, and attend a meeting Friday at the party's Organization Department, which handles personnel matters.

The shuffle also is set to put two of Mr. Xi's associates in charge of key economic agencies.

Zhong Shan, currently a vice commerce minister and China's top trade representative, will succeed Commerce Minister Gao Hucheng, according to one of the people with knowledge of the matter.

Mr. Gao's departure is unrelated to his alleged involvement in the so-called princelings scandal involving J.P. Morgan Chase & Co., according to the same people.

The U.S. bank was accused of hiring relatives of government officials in Asia—including Mr. Gao's son—to try to win business. The bank settled the case with the U.S. Justice Department in November, agreeing to pay \$264 million and admitting it violated a U.S. law against bribery.

Mr. Zhong, 61, spent the bulk of his career in his home province of Zhejiang, where he was vice governor from 2003 to 2008—overlapping with Mr. Xi's tenure as the top party official there from 2002 to 2007.

He Lifeng, who turns 62 this month, is slated to succeed Xu Shaoshi at the National Development and Reform Commission, the person said. Currently an NDRC deputy director, Mr. He had worked under Mr. Xi in the southeastern city of Xiamen, where Mr. Xi was vice mayor from 1985 to 1988.

The three agencies and the information office at the State Council, China's cabinet, didn't respond to requests for comment.

One of the first signs of the shakeup came when Mr. Gao abruptly canceled a trip leading a business delegation to the Philippines, according to a person familiar with the matter.

China informed the Philippines about the cancellation on Wednesday, citing “urgent domestic matters,” the person said.

Mr. Gao's trip had been seen as part of Beijing's effort to reward Manila with economic benefits in

exchange for a less contentious approach to territorial disputes in the South China Sea under Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Geng Shuang said Thursday in Beijing that a planned meeting on commercial ties between the two countries had been postponed “due to some scheduling issues.” He didn't elaborate.

Charles Jose, spokesman for the Philippines Department of Foreign Affairs said he had no information on the matter.

—Brian Spegele, Liyan Qi and James Hookway contributed to this article.

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Gewirtz : Stop writing China off as an enemy. Millennials don't.

By Julian Gewirtz

By Julian Gewirtz

February 23 at 7:28 PM

Julian Gewirtz is the author of “Unlikely Partners: Chinese Reformers, Western Economists, and the Making of Global China.”

President Trump's “America First” philosophy has increased tensions around the world, but the biggest shoe has yet to drop: He hasn't laid out his policies toward China, a country he has repeatedly denounced. As a 27-year-old American who grew up traveling to the country and studying its language, I fear that Trump's aggressive actions toward China could be his most potent threat to the long-term safety and prosperity of the world that my generation will inherit. A reckless, belligerent policy upending decades of stability in U.S.-China relations is not what most members of my generation want.

Trump has presented China as a major foe of the United States — second only, it would seem, to “radical Islamic terrorism.” Trump's strong anti-China rhetoric has emboldened those calling for a more confrontational approach, and his chief strategist, Stephen K. Bannon, once even predicted a war with China in the South China Sea “in five to 10 years.” Overall, just 37 percent of Americans have a favorable view of China, according to a 2016 Pew Research Center survey.

But that doesn't tell the whole story. When you break out the figures by age, a remarkable pattern emerges: Americans between 18 and 29 hold much more favorable views of China than those over 50. Similarly, China has the largest generation gap regarding views of the United States of any of the countries surveyed by Pew, with close to 60 percent of Chinese people between 18 and 29 — more than double the number of those over 50 — holding a favorable view.

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This startling generation gap — apparent in both countries — should inform policy. Trump appears poised to treat China as an enemy, but my generation will have to live in a far less prosperous and more dangerous world should U.S.-China relations fall apart. So I have a message for our elders: Don't throw in the towel yet. It's too important — and too soon — to give up on tenaciously seeking a more cooperative, forward-looking U.S.-China relationship.

China isn't an abstraction for me. After a Chinese folktale captured my imagination as an 8-year-old, I closed the book and announced to my parents that I wanted to learn Chinese. I've been studying China ever since and have lived and worked there extensively. China is a part of who I am: I have grown to

understand China and its complexities better at the same time that I have come to understand myself and my place in the world.

These experiences are emblematic of a new generation of Americans who started learning about China early in our lives. My connection may be much greater than most other peoples, but all of us have come of age alongside China: In 1989, the year I was born, China's gross domestic product was \$348 billion; by 2015 it was \$11 trillion, second largest in the world. Thanks to high levels of tourism, educational exchange and immigration, we've grown up with Chinese Americans and Chinese citizens as friends.

Yet as we've become adults, we increasingly seem to live in a country where people see China as an adversary. There's no doubt that China's economic boom has caused painful dislocation for many hard-working Americans, and that policies to help those U.S. workers transition to new jobs haven't kept pace. With its growing military power, China's sovereignty claims and nationalism pose security challenges. Just as there is mistrust of China in many U.S. quarters, many in China are inclined to see the United States as China's enemy. China has also disappointed many of the most buoyant hopes that the country's economic reforms would lead its political system to become more open and democratic. China has become rich but remained illiberal, and President Xi Jinping's recent

crackdown is a sobering reminder that the Chinese Communist Party still runs the show.

But China is not monolithic. The incompatibility of our political systems makes it even more important that we seek out areas where we can build strong, resilient ties. These areas exist within our governments, of course, from our partnership to fight climate change to our cooperation on the Iran nuclear deal. But they also exist on a profoundly personal level — in individual relationships that allow us to reduce distrust and benefit both countries. If the United States under Trump stops trying to build a constructive, cooperative relationship with China, it will only become easier for Xi's lieutenants to isolate Chinese liberals from their friends around the world and prevent the next generation of independent reformers and internationalists from engaging with outside influences.

The right path isn't dovishness or toadying but rather policies that seek to achieve a constructive U.S.-China relationship based on both the premise of U.S. strength and an understanding that we will need to work with China to solve major global problems. This surely should include greater reciprocity in the economic domain, especially pushing China for greater openness to U.S. investment, resolve against any military challenges and vigorously protecting U.S. interests and values. But our relationship is simply too important to be guided by a quest for decades-late economic

retribution or some desire to find enemies on the world stage. Our

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Kim Jong Nam Killed With U.N.-Banned VX Nerve Agent, Malaysia Says

Ben Otto and Yantoultra Ngui

Updated Feb. 24, 2017 3:42 a.m. ET

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia—The chemical substance used to kill Kim Jong Nam last week was an extremely toxic United Nations-banned nerve agent called VX, police here said, significantly raising the political stakes in a case that has already frayed diplomatic ties between Malaysia and North Korea.

Experts believe North Korea possesses several thousand metric tons of chemical weapons and nerve agents—including VX—that are banned by the U.N. and considered weapons of mass destruction.

Khalid Abu Bakar, Malaysia's inspector general of police, said Friday in a statement that identification of the substance came from a preliminary report. He said swabs were taken from the eye and face of the victim.

"The cause of death of Kim Chol is VX nerve gas," Mr. Khalid said, referring to the name listed on Mr. Kim's diplomatic passport, which he used to enter the country. "We will investigate how the VX came into the country."

Mr. Kim, the half brother of North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un, was attacked at Kuala Lumpur International Airport on Feb. 13 while waiting to board a flight to Macau; he died on his way to the hospital. Malaysian police arrested four suspects, including the alleged attackers—two women holding passports from Indonesia and Vietnam—and a North Korean citizen who was living in Kuala Lumpur. Police this week said they would release a Malaysian man, leaving three people in custody. They are looking for at least seven more North Korean suspects in the case.

At about 1 a.m. on Wednesday morning this

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

North Korea Mocks China for 'Dancing to U.S. Tune'

Jonathan Cheng in Seoul and Chun Han Wong in Beijing

Updated Feb. 23, 2017 8:46 p.m. ET

North Korea appeared to lash out at Beijing in a state-media commentary published Thursday, aiming unusually pointed rhetoric at

leaders must do all they can to bridge U.S.-China differences, and

week, a team of about a dozen forensic specialists swept the area around an airport restaurant where several North Korean male suspects and the two female suspects sat for an hour or more before the attack, an airport employee said. The employee didn't know whether they also checked nearby check-in kiosks where the attack took place.

Later that day, police and specialists in hazmat suits seized chemicals from a condominium elsewhere in Kuala Lumpur, the local Star newspaper reported.

The nerve agent VX is a highly toxic synthesized chemical that is banned under the U.N.'s Chemical Weapons Convention, which compels signatories to destroy their stockpiles. North Korea is one of a handful of countries that hasn't signed and ratified the agreement. According to the International Crisis Group, nongovernmental policy research group based in Brussels, North Korea may possess between 2,500 and 5,000 tons of a number of chemical weapons.

As a gas, VX is odorless and tasteless; as a liquid, it is amber-colored and evaporates slowly. In either state, it is lethal to humans. Exposure—through the skin, inhalation or eye contact—can cause symptoms including blurred vision, nausea, convulsions and loss of consciousness. Exposure to a small amount of VX can be lethal. Antidotes are available, but must be applied quickly, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Questions remain about how the attackers applied the chemical to Mr. Kim's body. Immediately after the attack, police sources suggested one or both of the female attackers wiped a wet cloth across Mr. Kim's face or used a spray. This week, Malaysia's police chief said both women used their bare hands in applying the toxic substance to Mr. Kim's face. But a senior police official told The Wall Street Journal

a powerful neighbor that Pyongyang has long relied on for economic and diplomatic support.

The commentary, published by the state-controlled Korean Central News Agency, didn't name China but left little doubt about its target: "a neighboring country, which often

my generation will do our part to contribute to the better future for

that at least one of the women applied a cream-like substance to gloves before the attack on Mr. Kim.

On Friday, Mr. Khalid said one of the female suspects vomited after the attack. Asked to confirm his earlier statement that the women used their bare hands, he said "I don't want to elaborate; just stick to what I said." He also said police are making arrangements with Malaysia's nuclear technology agency to decontaminate all locations visited by the two female suspects.

Diplomatic ties between Malaysia and North Korea have worsened following Mr. Kim's death. Relations between the two countries had been relatively warm for several years due to business connections, lax travel restrictions and direct flights.

But in the week and a half since the killing, police have identified seven North Koreans they suspect planned and help carry out the attack on Mr. Kim. They said one of those suspects is a second secretary at the North Korean embassy, while another is an employee of state-owned airline Air Koryo. Police said they would ask the embassy to turn over both men, who are believed to still be in Malaysia.

The North Korean embassy in Kuala Lumpur has reacted harshly to the investigation, calling for the release of "the innocent females from Vietnam and Indonesia," in addition to the detained North Korean, Ri Jong Chol, a man who reportedly trained as a chemist.

Malaysia previously declined a request from the North Korean side to release the body to their embassy. It also said no to a North Korean offer to conduct a joint investigation into the killing. Malaysian police also said someone tried to break into the morgue where Mr. Kim's body is being kept, leading them to tighten security.

North Korea's efforts to halt the autopsy were aimed at ensuring the

claims itself to be a 'friendly neighbor.'

The article lambasted China for playing down North Korea's nuclear capabilities and for curbing foreign trade—an apparent reference to China's weekend announcement that it would suspend coal imports

U.S.-China relations that remains possible.

results wouldn't get out, said Bruce Bennett, a senior researcher at Rand Corp. in Santa Monica, Calif. His work has focused on North Korea's chemical, biological and nuclear weapons programs for decades.

"The less evidence that's around, the more likely they get away with it," he said. "They probably would have wanted it to be absorbed entirely into his skin so that it wouldn't be easily detected."

Cheong Seong-chang, a senior fellow at the Seoul-based Sejong Institute, said the biggest problem with North Korea's advanced capabilities to produce nerve agents and chemical weapons is that South Korea isn't well prepared for such an attack. "Such a threat is even more serious and realistic than that of nuclear weapons or ballistic missiles," he said.

Mr. Bennett said that estimates of North Korea's stockpiles haven't changed in decades. "That suggests that the intelligence on North Korea's capabilities is likely dated and inaccurate," he said. "We don't have a shadow of a clue."

Mr. Bennett predicted that the incident would raise concerns about the wider use of such chemical weapons.

"It raises the shock value to another level," Mr. Bennett said. "It tells other defectors of North Korea around the world that they could be next. It tells them, 'Don't get on the news, don't be visible or else we're coming after you.'"

—Jonathan Cheng and In-Soo Nam in Seoul and Jake Maxwell Watts in Kuala Lumpur contributed to this article.

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from North Korea for the rest of the year.

North Korea is heavily reliant on its giant neighbor for trade, while China sees North Korea as a buffer against South Korea and Japan, both U.S. allies.

But Beijing's patience wore thin after Pyongyang conducted a series

of nuclear and ballistic-missile tests last year, prompting China to back fresh United Nations sanctions in November that target North Korea's coal exports.

According to the KCNA report, the unnamed country "has unhesitatingly taken inhumane steps such as totally blocking foreign trade related to the improvement of people's living standard under the plea of the U.N. 'resolutions on sanctions' devoid of legal ground."

While an early round of U.N. sanctions restricted coal imports from North Korea, China is widely believed to have used a so-called humanitarian exception to exceed that cap.

That loophole was tightened in November's U.N. resolution, and North Korea's protest suggests that Beijing has made clear it intends to adhere to the new rule, said Adam Cathcart, a scholar who focuses on China-North Korea relations at the University of Leeds in the U.K.

"I would take this editorial as hard evidence that

China has told North Korea it is narrowing the definition of coal exports for 'humanitarian purposes,'" Mr. Cathcart said, adding that it was rare for North Korea to criticize China so directly.

Mr. Cathcart called the KCNA editorial "a frontal assault," a shift from the oblique critiques of China that North Korea usually turns to when it expresses its displeasure.

In Thursday's piece, North Korea even adopted a mocking tone, saying that the country is "styling itself a big power, is dancing to the tune of the U.S."

The KCNA statement also vowed that cutting its exports wouldn't deter North Korea from developing its nuclear arsenal.

"It is utterly childish to think that the DPRK would not manufacture nuclear weapons and intercontinental ballistic rockets if a few penny of money is cut off," it said, using the acronym for its formal name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

China's Foreign Ministry didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

North Korea and China, which were founded as Communist states within a year of one another after World War II, have long enjoyed a close relationship, frequently described as that of "lips and teeth."

Beijing has been an economic and political benefactor for Pyongyang since they fought alongside each other in the Korean War of the early 1950s. But bilateral ties have become increasingly strained, as China opened its economy through market-style reforms while North Korea grew more isolated and pursued a nuclear-weapons program that antagonized the region.

North Korea's apparent anger at China comes amid an escalating diplomatic row with another friendly nation, Malaysia, after authorities in Kuala Lumpur identified a North Korean embassy official and a state-owned airline employee among seven suspects still at large in the killing of dictator Kim Jong Un's half brother.

North Korea has denied involvement in the Feb. 13 slaying of Kim Jong Nam. Malaysian authorities have refused to turn over the corpse to North Korea, as the embassy there has demanded, instead conducting its own autopsies—a move decried by North Korea as part of a broader conspiracy engineered by South Korea and the U.S.

Just hours before its broadside against China, KCNA published a report blaming Malaysia for an "undisguised encroachment upon the sovereignty of the DPRK."

"The biggest responsibility for his death rests with the government of Malaysia as the citizen of the DPRK died in its land," KCNA reported, quoting a group called the Korean Jurists Committee.

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Editorial : North Korean Terror Notice

Updated Feb. 23, 2017 7:13 p.m.

ET 59 COMMENTS

Malaysian police are assembling evidence that Pyongyang is responsible for last week's chilling airport murder of Kim Jong Nam, the estranged older brother of North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un. This is one more reason the U.S. should redesignate North Korea a state sponsor of terror, a status it never should have lost in 2008.

According to investigators and video from the scene, the attack was carried out by two women, from Indonesia and Vietnam, who had practiced in local shopping malls under the direction of several North Korean men who joined them at the airport and flew out of the country minutes later. On Wednesday police said a senior diplomat from Pyongyang's embassy and an employee of its state airline are wanted for questioning. North Korea has denied involvement, slammed Malaysia's investigation as a corrupt foreign plot and

demanding repatriation of the body.

Pyongyang is the prime suspect because Kim Jong Nam, who began living in China after falling out with his family in 2001, had criticized the North Korean regime for mismanaging its economy and perpetuating hereditary succession. Kim Jong Un might have feared that his brother would seek to replace him, perhaps via a foreign-backed coup. South Korea disrupted several previous North Korean plots to assassinate Kim Jong Nam.

Many questions remain, including the poison the killers used. Footage from the Kuala Lumpur airport shows the two women attacking Kim Jong Nam for fewer than three seconds, then fleeing in opposite directions. Police think they may have had different chemicals on their hands that became fatal when rubbed together on the victim's face.

Beyond question is that this attack fits a pattern for North Korea, which has long targeted defectors and

critics in China and especially in South Korea. Two North Korean agents pleaded guilty in South Korea in 2010 to trying to assassinate Hwang Jang Yop, formerly the North's chief ideologist and its senior-most official ever to defect. In 2011 South Korea foiled a plot by North Korean agents to assassinate defector and balloon-launching human-rights activist Park Sang Hak with a poisoned needle disguised as a pen.

These incidents followed the Bush Administration's unfortunate decision to delist North Korea as a state sponsor of terror in 2008, in exchange for denuclearization promises that Pyongyang broke as always. The U.S. put North Korea on the list in 1988 after its agents bombed a Korean Air jet in 1987 and a South Korean diplomatic delegation in Burma in 1983.

Pyongyang's post-2008 terror record goes far beyond assassinations. The United Nations Panel of Experts has repeatedly cited North Korean shipments of

illicit arms and munitions to Iran, the world's leading state sponsor of terror, and of chemical weapons-related materials to Syria, which has used such weapons against civilians and is also a designated terror sponsor. Pyongyang's 2014 cyberattack on Sony Pictures may not qualify as terrorism, but its threats against movie theaters might, as would its attempts to hack and damage South Korean nuclear-power plants.

The U.S. last year placed significant new sanctions on North Korea, so labeling it a terror sponsor would have less practical effect today than years ago. But it would signal that the new Trump Administration is willing to recognize the North Korean threat as it is, not as some wish it to be. Especially if followed by long-overdue sanctions on the Chinese firms that sustain the Pyongyang regime, this would put Kim Jong Un and his Chinese patrons on notice.

The New York Times

Lee : North Korea's Palace Intrigue

Jean H. Lee

Though he once appeared as the favorite to succeed his father, Kim Jong-nam began living abroad in exile after being caught in 2001 trying to enter Japan with a fake Dominican passport (the portly Mr. Kim used the name Pang Xiong,

Chinese for "fat bear," a detail that hints at his sense of humor).

The elder brother was better known for gambling than for politics. His young son, Kim Han-sol, affirmed that image in a 2012 interview in which he said, "My dad was

definitely not really interested in politics."

Still, Kim Jong-nam had been vocal in his criticism of the North Korean leadership. In 2010, as Kim Jong-un was being groomed to become leader, Kim Jong-nam told TV Asahi he opposed his father's decision to

pass leadership onto a third generation. And in a book published in Japan, Kim Jong-nam was quoted as predicting that North Korea would collapse without economic reform. These were damning words from a son of Kim Jong-il and could be cause for

prosecution for treason under North Korean law.

The 2013 execution of Kim Jong-nam's uncle Jang Song-thaek was an omen. Mr. Jang, the husband of Kim Jong-il's sister who at one time was treated as a regent for the young Kim Jong-un, was accused of plotting to overthrow the regime. His execution was meant to send North Koreans a message about the dangers of crossing Kim Jong-un and ushered in an extended purge. Kim Jong-nam was said to be close to his uncle.

The state media haven't mentioned Kim Jong-un's name in the reports on the death of a North Korean citizen in

**THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL**

Amb. Prosor : How Congress Can Boost Haley at the U.N.

Ron Prosor

Feb. 23, 2017 6:56 p.m. ET

Ambassador Nikki Haley got off to a good start at the United Nations last week. After a Security Council session on the Middle East—which focused solely on criticism of Israel—she offered a review that was the most honest I have ever heard from a U.S. diplomat. “The United States will not turn a blind eye to this anymore,” she said. “I’m here to emphasize the United States is determined to stand up to the U.N.’s anti-Israel bias, and we will push for action on the real threats we face from the Middle East.”

Congress could back her up. Last year \$9.2 billion of American tax dollars went to the U.N.—\$659 million to cover 22% of the U.N.’s annual operating budget, \$2.6 billion toward peacekeeping and a “voluntary” contribution of \$5.9

Malaysia, but word of the assassination has most likely circulated among elites. While Kim Jong-nam has not appeared much in the state media since falling out of favor with the regime more than 15 years ago, he was well known among elites and North Koreans who have spent time abroad — diplomats and, of course, defectors. These are the people who Kim Jong-un may have wanted to reach.

The death comes at a time when an unprecedented number of members of the North Korean elite are defecting to South Korea, most notably Thae Yong-ho, the dapper former deputy ambassador to Britain. Mr. Thae had been making the rounds divulging the inner

billion.

If the U.N. were advancing democratic values or making the world safer, the money would be well-spent. A new U.S. administration and new U.N. secretary-general provide a golden opportunity to help the U.N. return to its core values, challenge its inefficiency, and halt its frequent attacks on American values and allies. The message should be clear: the U.N. must reform or the U.S. could cut its funding. An action plan along these lines involves three stages:

- *Transparency.* Ms. Haley should appoint a special delegate to the U.N. budgetary committee, to monitor the purposes for which the U.N. and its agencies are using American funding. The U.N. currently has no obligation to provide its funders with detailed annual reports on the use of their funds based on global accounting

workings of the Kim Jong-un regime, a blow to Pyongyang and a coup for Seoul.

As someone who traces her lineage to King Taejo, I have a personal interest in his long-ago palace drama. In 2013, I visited Taejo's hometown, Hamhung, in North Korea, where locals shared details of the family legends.

The feuding among Taejo's sons, I was told, so disheartened the king that he abandoned his palace in Seoul and retreated to Hamhung. For years, he refused to meet with the murderous son who eventually ascended to the throne. Legend has it that envoys bearing entreaties from the son, who ruled as King

Taejong, were ordered slain before they could deliver their messages. The murdered envoys were called “Hamhung chasa” — messengers who never made it back home.

With his death, and all the speculation surrounding it, Kim Jong-nam has become a modern-day Hamhung chasa — a doomed man who never made it back home. And at least until we know more about the case, Kim Jong-nam's demise will be seen as a warning to North Koreans of the fate they risk if they cross their leader.

standards and supervised by a third-party auditor. The relationship is based on “expectations” to report and “appreciation” of efforts. That's not good enough for a small business filing its taxes. For an organization spending billions it's ridiculous.

- *Diligence.* A decade ago, after revelations of systemic abuse, the U.S. launched the U.N. Transparency and Accountability Initiative. It turned out to be all bark, no bite. Things got worse. Institutions like the Human Rights Council remained hijacked by human-rights violators like Cuba, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela. Congress should reinvigorate the initiative, launching a new phase under which it will work alongside an independent investigator to ensure that U.N. agencies are upholding their mission statements in keeping with U.S. standards, interests and values.

- *Accountability.* The idea that the U.N. can police itself is a fantasy, but the states that fund it can demand a higher standard. The U.S. should flex its financial muscle. Where performance is lackluster, inefficient, corrupt or abhorrent, America could demand rapid reform. If there is no improvement, Congress must be able to withdraw funding.

The U.N. can no longer remain hostile, opaque and unaccountable and expect to get a star-spangled paycheck. Churchill defined an appeaser as one who feeds a crocodile, hoping it will eat him last. I hope Ambassador Haley's words send the message—to Turtle Bay and Capitol Hill—that feeding time is over.

Mr. Prosor is a former Israeli ambassador to the U.N. He is affiliated with the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya and the Hudson Institute.

The Washington Post Editorial : When nature is a terrorist

Opinion A column or article in the Opinions section (in print, this is known as the Editorial Pages).

February 23 at 7:24 PM

BILL GATES, the world's richest man, who has devoted much of his philanthropy to improving global public health, gave a speech the other day at the Munich Security Conference that should have caught everyone's attention. Mr. Gates insisted that world leaders think differently about public health and national security. They should listen.

In 2001, bioterrorism was suddenly a very real security problem. After the anthrax attacks that year, the United States spent billions of dollars to develop and stockpile

medical countermeasures and build warning systems. But in the years that followed, the villain that appeared to cause death and illness was not a bioterrorist, but Mother Nature, in a series of naturally occurring outbreaks: severe acute respiratory syndrome, or SARS; swine flu; and Ebola, among others. Each could not be stopped by existing therapeutics or vaccines, raising the question: How can nations and societies defend against such fast-moving waves of peril? It is simply impossible — and too expensive — to develop countermeasures in advance of every possible threat. Moreover, effective therapeutics, vaccines and diagnostics require long lead times, while a pandemic demands a rapid response.

Mr. Gates insists that the pandemic threat be taken as urgently and seriously as major national security issues. This has often not been the case until it is too late. Public-health systems, especially in poor and war-torn nations, have long suffered underfunding and neglect. The world was late in attacking Ebola. Just last year in the United States, Congress dithered for months over money to fight the Zika virus. Why, Mr. Gates asks, does the world not approach pandemic risk on a level with preventing nuclear war or climate change? “We ignore the link between health security and international security at our peril,” he declared.

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There is a dawning realization about this in governments, but Mr. Gates is correct that much more can be done before another disaster strikes. He noted that vaccines, so important in stopping an epidemic, typically take up to 10 years to develop, but recent advances in genomics offer the prospect of vaccines that could be created on the fly. This has long been a dream of biomedicine, and Mr. Gates is right that it will need a lot more support and research to become reality. He also called for devoting more time and resources to surveillance so that disease outbreaks can be spotted sooner. Finally, he suggested preparing for epidemics “the way the military

prepares for war," with exercises and training.

"Imagine if I told you that somewhere in this world, there's a weapon that exists — or that could

**The
New York
Times**

Editorial : Twinkle, Twinkle Little Trappist

The Editorial Board

Seven Earth-size planets orbit a dwarf star named Trappist-1 about 40 light-years from Earth. NASA

So, we may have been looking for alien life in the wrong place! Not long ago, scientists scouring the cosmos for Earth-like planets with the right stuff to generate life were looking around sun-like stars. It turns out that the first such planets they've found — seven of them — are circling something quite different: what scientists call an "ultracool dwarf" in their ultracool terminology, though in this case the reference is to the temperature of a dim star barely one-twelfth the mass of the sun.

The discovery is enormously exciting, for several reasons. One is

emerge — capable of killing tens of thousands, or millions, of people, bringing economies to a standstill and throwing nations into chaos," Mr. Gates said. "You would say that we need to do everything possible

to gather intelligence and develop effective countermeasures to reduce the threat. That is the situation we face today with biological threats. We may not know if that weapon is man-made or a

product of nature. But one thing we can be almost certain of. A highly lethal global pandemic will occur in our lifetimes."

that the little star, which in their whimsical way the scientists named Trappist-1 after the telescope in Chile initially used to study it, is a mere 40 light-years from Earth, which is next door in cosmic terms. The search for alien life can now start far sooner than anticipated, especially with new telescopes about to come into service, and some answers might be available within a decade.

Then there's the fact that cool red dwarfs like Trappist-1 are the most common type of star, so there are probably many more potentially life-supporting worlds out there than were previously suspected. Astronomers have always presumed that other stars must have their planets, but it was only in 1995 that an exoplanet — one orbiting a star other than the sun —

was confirmed. More than 3,400 of these have been discovered since.

The Trappist-1 cluster, however, is the first discovery of planets that are about the size of Earth and might have the right composition and temperature to have oceans of liquid water, and therefore, possibly, life. The planets were discovered by measuring dips in the light emitted by Trappist-1, which enabled astronomers to calculate their number and size. The next step will be to observe the planets for signs of the gases that would indicate life exists on them. In the meantime, astronomers will be checking other ultracool dwarfs to see what's orbiting around them.

What makes this story so irresistible is the mystery and allure of the cosmos that all of us know from the

first time we looked up at the stars. The article in the journal *Nature* announcing the discovery, signed by a large team of astronomers led by Michaël Gillon of the University of Liège in Belgium, began with the simple declaration that searching for Earth-like exoplanets is "one aim of modern astronomy." There was no effort, and no need, to further justify the enormous commitment of resources, ingenuity, time and effort in a project that, on the face of it, has no obvious commercial or practical benefit.

There is always the possibility of collateral benefits, of course, but none could be greater than finding out whether anyone else is out there.

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**THE WALL
STREET
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Schools Assess Bathroom Policies After Trump Rescinds Obama Order

Tawnell D. Hobbs

Updated Feb. 23, 2017 4:07 p.m. ET

School districts are assessing transgender bathroom access after the Trump administration officially put the decision back in their court by withdrawing an Obama administration policy that directed schools to allow students to use the bathroom of their choice.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions said in a statement Wednesday that "the prior guidance documents didn't contain sufficient legal analysis or explain how the interpretation was consistent" with federal law.

The Obama directive was temporarily suspended in U.S. District Court in August, leading some districts to hold off on creating new rules for transgender bathroom use.

But after Wednesday's decision, districts are looking at taking a more definitive stance on the issue. Some say their policies won't change,

while others say they will make a decision on transgender bathroom access.

In Texas, some state legislators are hailing the new decision as they consider a bill that would require transgender people to use bathrooms in public institutions, including public school districts, based on biological sex.

"It is a common sense, privacy and public-safety policy for everyone," Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick said in a statement about the proposed bill.

At least 10 other states are considering similar legislation, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Many activists are pinning their hopes on a Supreme Court case brought by a transgender Virginia school student, Gavin Grimm, to win a favorable ruling that interprets prohibited sex discrimination to include discrimination on the basis of gender identity.

That could open the way for the application of the Civil Rights Act's provisions to transgender adults, they say.

In Ohio, the new guidance has Highland Local Schools looking to end an appeal of a federal-court decision that requires it to let a transgender student use the girls' bathroom.

The case, which the district filed against the U.S. Department of Education, has been temporarily stayed in anticipation of the Supreme Court ruling, said Gary McCaleb, senior counsel for Alliance Defending Freedom, a conservative legal organization representing the school district.

"This is very good news for Highland. I think it bodes very well," Mr. McCaleb said of the new guidelines. "We'll be notifying the court, making some recommendations. I would anticipate that the federal government might ask to be excused from the case at this point."

In Minnesota, Gov. Mark Dayton voiced disappointment with the administration's decision, calling it a "human rights issue." He said it appears each school district in his state now has the authority to develop its own guidelines for transgender bathroom use.

"However, despite this action by the Trump Administration, I strongly urge school board members to adhere to the directives established by the Obama administration," Mr. Dayton said in a statement.

New Jersey Department of Education spokesman David Saenz said in a statement that school districts in the state are encouraged to address the gender-identity issue through their local school boards. He said "that conversations need to happen on the local level so districts can craft their policies with community input."

U.S. Education Secretary Betsy DeVos in a statement underlined a commitment by the department to protect all students, including

LGBTQ students, from discrimination, bullying and harassment.

"We have a responsibility to protect every student in America and ensure that they have the freedom to learn and thrive in a safe and trusted environment," she said.

In liberal cities like Chicago, the change of guidance won't affect policies already in place.

"While tonight federal protections for transgender students have been rolled back, I want to be clear that the city of Chicago's and Chicago Public Schools' policies providing equal

rights to transgender residents and students will remain unchanged," said Mayor Rahm Emanuel.

The Trump administration's guidance staked a position in a contentious debate about transgender rights, including whether schools and states can require people to use sex-segregated facilities, including bathrooms, that correspond to the sex on their birth certificates.

Last year, the Obama administration warned states, including North Carolina, that in its opinion such requirements violated the Civil Rights Act, which

broadly bars discrimination on the basis of sex.

Transgender activists said they were organizing campaigns aimed at businesses, and rallies, including one in Washington, D.C., on Wednesday night.

"This should serve as a clear sign that every single person needs to stand up for LGBTQ people and transgender kids in particular," said Sarah McBride, a spokeswoman for the Human Rights Campaign, a group that describes its mission as pursuing lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender equality. "HRC is going to be standing side-by-side with these young people."

Socially conservative groups, who had railed against the Obama administration's interpretation, praised the change.

"The Trump administration's reversal of this mandate on schools is a victory for parents, children, and privacy," Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research Council, said in a written statement.

Write to Tawnell D. Hobbs at Tawnell.Hobbs@wsj.com

**The
New York
Times**

Editorial : President Trump Breaks a Promise on Transgender Rights

Board

Protesting near the White House on Wednesday, the day the Trump administration rescinded a policy on bathrooms for transgender students. Jonathan Ernst/Reuters

On the campaign trail, Donald Trump broke with Republican Party orthodoxy by vowing to protect lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Americans from violence and oppression. Soon after taking office, President Trump announced that he intended to continue enforcing an executive order his predecessor issued to protect L.G.B.T. people from workplace discrimination.

"President Donald J. Trump is determined to protect the rights of all Americans, including the L.G.B.T.Q. community," the White House said in a statement on Jan. 31. Then along came Attorney General Jeff Sessions.

During his first week in office, Mr. Sessions halted

the Justice Department's efforts to defend in court the legality of the Obama administration's guidance to school districts on how to provide a safe and inclusive environment for transgender students. A key part of that guidance advised school officials to allow transgender students to use restrooms based on their gender identity.

This week, Mr. Sessions and the Department of Education rescinded the guidance entirely. His baffling rationale was that it added to the confusion around an issue that has prompted spirited debates and legal fights around the country.

In fact, it did the opposite. Next month, the Supreme Court will hear arguments in the case of Gavin Grimm, a transgender student who has been fighting his Virginia school district for the right to use the boys' restroom on campus. Under the Obama administration, the Department of Justice took the position that existing federal law already confers that right. Mr. Sessions has reversed the government's course.

Of all the matters of consequence before the new attorney general, it is curious that Mr. Sessions made repealing this guidance, and abandoning its defense, priorities. He clashed earlier in the week with Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, who reportedly felt uneasy about rescinding the guidelines, a move that will make students vulnerable. After the two made their case to the president, Mr. Trump sided with his attorney general.

This is unsurprising. Mr. Trump has demonstrated time and again that his stated personal convictions are malleable. A genuine champion of gay and transgender rights would have steered clear of politicians like Mr. Sessions and Vice President Mike Pence, who have gone to great lengths to vilify and oppress gay and transgender Americans.

On Wednesday, the White House press secretary, Sean Spicer, justified revoking the transgender school guidance by saying Mr. Trump is a "firm believer in states' rights." This inglorious justification has been deployed repeatedly by

those on the wrong side of history in earlier civil rights battles. It was used to fight abolitionists, the women's suffrage movement, the repeal of Jim Crow laws and, most recently, same-sex marriage.

As the federal government turns its back on transgender students, there is much that local officials, school administrators and parents can do to foster inclusive and safe learning environments. The federal government's shift is no reason to abandon a set of common-sense guidelines that were informed by years of research by medical professionals.

This should be a clarifying moment for the L.G.B.T. movement. Mr. Trump has offered no evidence that he is committed to advancing L.G.B.T. rights. Unless and until that changes, safeguarding the remarkable progress this community has made over the past decade will fall on ordinary Americans.

**The
Washington
Post**

Editorial : The White House just told transgender students they're on their own

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

Opinion A column or article in the Opinion section (in print, this is known as the Editorial Pages).

February 23 at 12:57 PM

PREVIEWING THE Trump administration's decision to rescind federal protections for transgender students, White House spokesman Sean Spicer explained that the issue is not "something that the federal government should be involved in, this is a states' rights issue." It was a rather startling position given that what is at issue

is a *federal* law that prohibits sex discrimination in education. That this administration seems to accept no responsibility in the law's fair application harks back to a dark time in our nation's history when the rights of individuals were determined by where they live.

A joint letter sent Wednesday from officials at the Justice and Education departments told the nation's schools to disregard guidance issued last year by the Obama administration regarding their obligations to transgender students under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which bars discrimination by sex for

schools receiving federal funds. The Obama administration said the law applies to gender identity, and "this means that a school must not treat a transgender student differently from the way it treats other students of the same gender identity." Requiring transgender students to use facilities that correspond with the sex listed on their birth certificates, Obama officials determined, would be a violation.

[I'm transgender and can't use the student bathroom. The Supreme Court could change that.]

The nonbinding guidance has been in abeyance since a judge issued

an injunction in a lawsuit brought by 13 states. Shortly after Jeff Sessions was sworn in as attorney general, the Justice Department decided to drop its challenge to that injunction. On Wednesday, it notified the Supreme Court of its change in posture in a case brought by a transgender student in Virginia, Gavin Grimm, who has been barred from using the boys' bathroom at his school. The Gloucester County student had used the boys' facilities without problem or incident until the school board let itself be swayed by the irresponsible fear-mongering that too often is directed at transgender people.

Indeed, there was a time when President Trump himself seemed able to see through this hysteria, expressing support for the rights of transgender people to “use the bathroom that they feel is appropriate” and saying Caitlyn Jenner was welcome to use whatever bathroom at Trump Tower she wanted. That he apparently

overrode the objections of Education Secretary Betsy DeVos in endorsing the rollback of protections will inflict needless suffering on transgender students, a vulnerable population already subjected to harassment and bullying.

[If abortion rights fall, LGBT rights are next]

“No young person should wake up in the morning fearful of the school day ahead” was the poignant plea from more than 1,000 parents of transgender students. “When this guidance was issued last year, it provided our families — and other families like our own across the country — with the knowledge and security that our government was

determined to protect our children from bullying and discrimination.”

In abdicating its federal responsibility, the Trump administration sends the reprehensible message that these students are now on their own.

**The
Washington
Post**

Duncan and Lhamon : The White House’s thoughtless, cruel and sad rollback of transgender rights

By Arne Duncan and Catherine Lhamon

By Arne Duncan and Catherine Lhamon February 23 at 7:38 PM

Arne Duncan was U.S. education secretary from 2009 to 2015. Catherine Lhamon, assistant education secretary for civil rights from 2013 until January, is chair of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.

This week’s decision by the Trump administration to withdraw guidance to school communities about how to protect transgender students reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of the federal role in protecting the civil rights of students. Worse yet, it confuses states and school districts, and puts real, live children at greater risk of harm.

In the 1972 law commonly known as Title IX, Congress said that educational institutions that receive federal funds may not discriminate on the basis of sex, and authorized the Justice and Education departments to enforce those rights. It is categorically false for the Trump administration to say that guidance developed by the Obama administration was devised without “due regard for the primary role of the states and local school districts in establishing education policy.”

[The White House just told transgender students they’re on their own]

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Before the guidance was issued in May of last year, we listened to transgender and non-transgender students. We listened to educators, parents, advocacy groups, school boards and administrators. We researched the law and the state of medical guidance. We reviewed the many, varied ways that school districts and colleges and universities address issues affecting transgender students.

We heard from moms such as Katharine Prescott in San Diego about the pain of losing her transgender son to suicide after he was bullied in school. We heard from transgender students about the pain of not being called by their names, and of having to answer intrusive questions at school about their anatomies.

We heard questions about safety in locker rooms and participation on sports teams. We heard from administrators about the difficult choices they had to make about when to recognize a student in transition and how to protect all students’ privacy. We heard from school districts and boards about how to advise their members and the various choices they face.

Having listened, the departments shared guidance about how to satisfy the federal nondiscrimination mandate. Students, and their teachers, deserve no less. They face daily choices — which bathroom line to stand in, what name or pronoun to use, whether to share information with a class,

among so many more. They need answers, right now, so students — all students — can enjoy their right to nondiscrimination.

Students required to attend school every day need to know that they are safe, welcome and respected as learners. Educators and administrators need concrete information about how to safeguard their federal civil rights. Withdrawing guidance, offering no information instead, and noting that the federal government wants to “more completely consider the legal issues” is a dangerous default to “local control” politics instead of honoring the letter and the spirit of the law.

[Transgender kids are bullied all the time. The White House is helping the bullies.]

Leaving these questions to states means some students in some schools will have less protection than students in other schools. What will happen when a transgender student transfers? This decision is thoughtless, cruel and sad and was implemented without serious consideration for the students it affects.

While some states and districts will independently choose to protect transgender rights, Congress was crystal clear that this was a federal responsibility when it enacted Title IX 45 years ago. The law says that “no person” shall be subjected to sex discrimination at school. Unless the Trump administration is arguing that transgender students are not people, it must extend these basic protections to all students.

News reports suggest that Education Secretary Betsy DeVos initially refused to join Attorney General Jeff Sessions in withdrawing the guidance but ultimately backed down when faced with the alternative of resignation. If that is true, we give her some credit for trying, but this offers no comfort to a nation increasingly divided by background, race and income.

If DeVos can’t win on this issue, what would happen if the law-abiding children of undocumented parents, kids who have spent most of their lives in the United States, were deported like common criminals? Would she win if federal education funds targeted to low-income children were instead spent on higher-income children?

Would she win if students with disabilities were illegally denied the educational supports they need and deserve? Would she win if students of color continued to be suspended and expelled far out of proportion to their numbers? Would she block schools from discriminating in other nefarious ways?

On issues such as standards and curriculum, the federal government rightly defers to states and districts, but when it comes to protecting students, the law is clear: Civil rights are paramount. These are real issues affecting real people and carrying consequences every day for children in classrooms.

They deserve better.

**The
Washington
Post**

Bannon vows a daily fight for ‘deconstruction of the administrative state’ (UNE)

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

The reclusive mastermind behind President Trump’s nationalist ideology and combative tactics made his public debut Thursday, delivering a fiery rebuke of the media and declaring that the new administration is in an unending

battle for “deconstruction of the administrative state.”

Stephen K. Bannon, the White House chief strategist and intellectual force behind Trump’s agenda, used his first speaking appearance since Trump took office to vow that the president would

honor all of the hard-line pledges of his campaign.

Appearing at a gathering of conservative activists alongside Chief of Staff Reince Priebus, Bannon dismissed the idea that Trump might moderate his positions or seek consensus with political opponents. Rather, he said, the

White House is digging in for a long period of conflict to transform Washington and upend the world order.

“If you think they’re going to give you your country back without a fight, you are sadly mistaken,” Bannon said in reference to the

media and opposition forces. "Every day, it is going to be a fight."

He continued, "And that is what I'm proudest about Donald Trump. All the opportunities he had to waver off this, all the people who have come to him and said, 'Oh, you've got to moderate' — every day in the Oval Office, he tells Reince and I, 'I committed *this* to the American people, I promised *this* when I ran, and I'm going to deliver on *this*.'"

[Stephen Bannon's nationalist call to arms, annotated]

Bannon and Priebus shared the stage at the Conservative Political Action Conference for 25 minutes in a buddy routine that inspired flashbacks to Oscar and Felix in "The Odd Couple." They strove to prove that they are not rivals in Trump's competing power circles, as has been reported, but rather partners working from 6:30 a.m. until 11 p.m. each day, often in the same office suite, to muscle through Trump's desired changes.

Bannon framed much of Trump's agenda with the phrase, "deconstruction of the administrative state," meaning the system of taxes, regulations and trade pacts that the president says have stymied economic growth and infringed upon U.S. sovereignty. Bannon says that the post-World War II political and economic consensus is failing and should be replaced with a system that empowers ordinary people over coastal elites and international institutions.

At the core, Bannon said in his remarks, is a belief that "we're a nation with an economy — not an economy just in some global marketplace with open borders, but we are a nation with a culture and a reason for being."

Bannon repeatedly used the phrase "economic nationalism" and posited that Trump's withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement was "one of the most pivotal moments in modern American history."

Nigel Farage, the British politician who led the successful Brexit movement in the United Kingdom to withdraw from the European Union, said in an interview at the conference that Bannon has the right vision to reorder world powers.

"I've never met anyone in my life who has such focus and is so clear in the direction that he intends to go in," Farage said. "Steve is the person with an international perspective on all of this. He's got a good feel for the direction that he wants to see across the West."

(Bastien Inzaurrealde/The Washington Post)

Republican students attending the Conservative Political Action Conference on Feb. 23 expressed enthusiasm about President Trump's first weeks in office. Republican students attending the Conservative Political Action Conference on Feb. 23 expressed enthusiasm about President Trump's first weeks in office. (Bastien Inzaurrealde/The Washington Post)

[Stephen Bannon's not-so-subtle threat to the media]

Bannon's language goes beyond Reagan-era Republican talking points about cutting regulations and lowering taxes. It also sidesteps key elements of the state that Trump has pledged to maintain or expand, such as the Defense Department, Medicare and Social Security, two huge federal entitlement programs.

Bannon used some terms that are more often heard on the political left as negative labels, such as "globalist" and "corporatist." Such words are rarely heard in a traditional Republican platform and underscore how Trump's populism and suspicion of the world economy are in some respects similar to that of Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), a self-described democratic socialist.

"They're corporatist, globalist media that are adamantly opposed — adamantly opposed to an economic nationalist agenda like Donald Trump has," Bannon said.

Yet some of the most powerful officials crafting Trump's economic policies have deep roots in the global, corporate realm. Commerce Secretary nominee Wilbur Ross was a billionaire investor; Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin was a hedge fund manager; and National Economic Council Director Gary Cohn was president of Goldman Sachs, to cite three. And all are being tasked with carrying out an agenda that includes standard GOP fare, from cutting taxes for the wealthy to rolling back banking regulations.

Nonetheless, Bannon's appearance at CPAC signaled a profound shift in the conservative movement's center of gravity toward Trumpism. Kellyanne Conway, counselor to the president, suggested during her appearance that by the time Trump addresses the group on Friday morning, the conference would be known as "TPAC."

Bannon and Priebus were interviewed jointly on stage by Matt Schlapp, chairman of the American Conservative Union, which hosts CPAC. Priebus celebrated Trump's administration as "the best Cabinet in the history of Cabinets," and Bannon said that many nominees

"were selected for a reason, and that is deconstruction."

[Republicans distance themselves from Trump's agenda at rowdy town halls]

Bannon has emerged in the minds of many Trump opponents as a mysterious and menacing puppeteer, portrayed as a harrowing Grim Reaper on NBC's "Saturday Night Live." He is best known for being the former executive chairman of Breitbart News, a conservative news site. Bannon once called Breitbart a "platform" for the alt-right, a small movement whose adherents are known for espousing racist, anti-Semitic and sexist points of view.

Former Ohio governor Ted Strickland (D) said Bannon is a "dangerous person driven by an authoritarian ideology who, I fear, has more influence than anyone in the administration."

"This is a mean, vicious, intolerant group," Strickland continued. "I've never seen anything like this in my political life."

Bannon's path to the West Wing is complicated. Bannon, 63, grew up in a working-class household of Catholic Democrats in Richmond. He served in the Navy and then climbed the ladder in finance, graduating from Harvard Business School and working at Goldman Sachs.

He then transformed his career and appearance, growing his hair long, dressing in black and becoming an antagonist to the global political and financial elite. A documentary filmmaker, Bannon championed former Alaska governor Sarah Palin as a conservative heroine. And he helped revamp Breitbart into a media colossus on the right that argues as much with the Republican establishment as it does with liberals.

[Upheaval is now standard operating procedure inside the White House]

David Bossie, a longtime conservative strategist who was Trump's deputy campaign manager, said Bannon is "a modern-day Newt Gingrich."

"He recognizes that the conservative movement over the last 10, 12 years has missed the sharp edge of the sword," Bossie said. "He will be that sword."

After donning a dress shirt and tie Thursday morning for a White House meeting with corporate executives, Bannon changed into a black shirt (open collared, no tie), black blazer and khakis for his visit to CPAC. At one point, Priebus

looked at Bannon and quipped, "I love how many collars he wears. Interesting look."

Bannon and Priebus declared war against the media, taking their cues from the president, who tweeted last week that news organizations were "the enemy of the American People."

"I think if you look at the opposition party and how they portray the campaign, how they portrayed the transition and now they're portraying the administration, it's always wrong," Bannon said, referring to the media as the opposition.

Priebus agreed, saying that he thinks the biggest misconception about the Trump administration in its first month is "everything that you're reading." He and Bannon were defiant about their partnership, insisting that reports of power struggles were wrong.

Priebus said he most admires Bannon's doggedness and loyalty, while Bannon said he appreciates Priebus's steady nature. "I can run a little hot on occasions, but Reince is indefatigable," Bannon said. "I mean, it's low-key, but it's determination."

[Trump is turning to Wall Street for top jobs. Democrats hope to use that against him.]

Still, Bannon's power center in the White House is quite different from that of Priebus, the former Republican National Committee chairman. Bannon has found a kindred spirit in Stephen Miller, the conservative ideologue who is Trump's senior policy adviser. One of his assistants is Julia Hahn, a former Breitbart immigration writer who was a fierce critic of House Speaker Paul D. Ryan (R-Wis.), one of Priebus's closest allies.

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The scene at CPAC reflected Bannon's sudden star status on the right. At the Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center at National Harbor, college Republicans spoke of him as an icon who embodied their own anger against political correctness on their university campuses.

Writers for Breitbart, a main sponsor of CPAC, were treated as if they were ESPN anchors at a major sports event. Washington editor Matthew Boyle, who has scored several Trump interviews and counts Bannon as a mentor, was

trailed by a photographer from a magazine that is profiling him.

Bannon's trusted inner circle, including his

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Rebecca Ballhaus

Updated Feb. 23, 2017 5:25 p.m. ET

Steve Bannon, the chief strategist for President Donald Trump, blamed reports of internal rivalries and chaos in the administration on an intensifying feud with the media that he vowed would continue as the White House pushes to tighten immigration enforcement and cut federal regulations.

"If you think they're going to give you your country back without a fight, you are sadly mistaken," Mr. Bannon told activists gathered Thursday at the Conservative Political Action Conference in Oxon Hill, Md. "Every day, it is going to be a fight."

Mr. Bannon spoke to the conference alongside Reince Priebus, the White House chief of staff, in an appearance meant to show unity between the former chairman of Breitbart News and the ex-chairman of the Republican National Committee. The two men, one a creature of the conservative grass roots and the other a longtime leader in the party's establishment, have sought to play down reports of infighting in the West Wing.

The New York Times

OXON HILL, Md. — In an administration hardly five weeks old, Stephen K. Bannon's reputation has taken on almost mythic proportion as a fire-breathing populist, emerging power center, man of mystery.

When Mr. Bannon, President Trump's chief strategist, appeared in public on Thursday for the first time since the president was sworn in, it was to deliver, in his own combative way, a message of soothing reassurance to the conservative activists gathered here for their annual assessment known as the Conservative Political Action Conference.

Do not believe the "corporatist globalist media" that was "crying and weeping" on election night and is still "dead wrong" about what the Trump administration is doing. Inside the White House, Mr. Bannon

public relations adviser, Alexandra Preate, and GOP mega-donor Rebekah Mercer, were followed by an entourage of aides and friends.

Mr. Trump's first month in office has been marked by a series of missteps, from a court blocking his executive order that halted travel from seven Muslim-majority countries to the resignation of his national security adviser amid concerns about how truthful he was over contacts with Russia.

But Mr. Trump, who has seen his approval numbers slump, has largely laid the blame for these stumbles on the media, condemning the press last week as the "enemy of the American people."

On Thursday, Messrs. Bannon and Priebus picked up that line, describing the president as an underdog and the reporters covering him as "the opposition party."

Mr. Priebus offered cautious optimism that the relationship with the media would improve. "I think there's hope that it's going to change," he said.

Mr. Bannon countered: "The reason Reince and I are good partners is that we can disagree. It's not only not going to get better. It's going to get worse every day."

He added: "They're corporatist, globalist media that are adamantly opposed to an economic nationalist agenda like Donald Trump has."

said, everything is going according to plan. The "deconstruction of the administrative state" has just begun.

Appearing with Reince Priebus, the president's chief of staff, he joked about how well the two get along despite the friction that had always existed between them. "I can run a little hot on occasion," Mr. Bannon said, complimenting Mr. Priebus's equanimity.

Continue reading the main story

And he urged a ballroom full of activists to stick together against the forces that were trying to tear them apart. "Whether you're a populist, whether you're a limited-government conservative, whether you're a libertarian, whether you're an economic nationalist," he said, "we want you to have our back."

Photo

The ballroom at a Maryland resort was packed with conservative

They fielded questions about "Steve" — and not just from reporters.

But the air of secrecy remained.

Mr. Bannon said Mr. Trump is "maniacally focused" on delivering on campaign promises, including a continued push for deregulation, which Mr. Bannon referred to as "deconstruction of the administrative state." The senior White House official also vowed that the president's budget proposal would help fulfill other campaign promises.

"We have a team that's just grinding it through on what President Donald Trump promised the American people," he said. "And the mainstream media better understand something—all those promises are going to be implemented."

The CPAC conference started Wednesday and runs until Saturday. Earlier in the day, Republican governors warned conservatives that they need to keep pace with the resurgent activism from liberals, amid a wave of protests in Washington and at lawmakers' home-state town halls.

"You've got to match the energy on the left with the energy from the right," said Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback. "We've got to push and push aggressively. There's a lot of motivation out there and we've got to match it side to side."

Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker, speaking on the same panel, added

"I don't comment on the record," Mercer said flatly.

that conservatives are seeing a "unique opportunity in time to have transformational change."

Republican leaders urged the audience to pressure their representatives to enact major policy changes—including repealing the Affordable Care Act, overhauling the tax code and overturning federal regulations—while the GOP holds the White House and both chambers of Congress.

Sen. Ted Cruz (R., Texas), in a separate panel, marveled at the outpouring of Democratic protests. "The anger on the left, I've never seen anything like it," he said.

White House counselor Kellyanne Conway also appeared at the conference, criticizing the protests against the Trump administration and in particular the women's marches around the country after Mr. Trump's inauguration last month.

Later Thursday, Vice President Mike Pence will also speak, and Mr. Trump will address the gathering on Friday morning.

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addressed the meeting. Mr. Trump, she said, had to uproot the political system.

"Every great movement ends up being a little bit sclerotic and dusty after a time," she said. She predicted that CPAC would wholly embrace the new president.

"Well, I think by tomorrow this will be TPAC," she said.

Part of what has been so problematic in Mr. Trump's first month is that the disruption he promised to unleash on the federal bureaucracy so far seems to be occurring in the wrong place: his administration, which has been rife with infighting and rattled by early missteps. The destructive forces that Mr. Bannon and other conservatives complain about can sometimes come from within.

Mr. Trump's first nominee for labor secretary withdrew after allegations of domestic abuse and revelations

that he had employed an undocumented immigrant he did not pay taxes on. His hastily carried out executive order barring refugees and all visitors from seven predominantly Muslim countries has been tangled up in the courts and blocked from going into effect. He fired his national security adviser. And questions of how closely members of his inner circle may have worked with the Russians to sabotage Hillary Clinton's campaign continue to attract interest from investigators.

"Disruption is a good thing," said Matt Schlapp, the chairman of the American Conservative Union, which hosts CPAC. Still, he acknowledged, "on some days they do it better than others."

There is another lens through which to see the disorder that has characterized this White House, Mr. Trump and his supporters say. And that is to understand that the president's enemies — especially in the news media — want to distort his actions, exaggerate his mistakes and not discuss issues like safety and unemployment that are on the minds of his supporters.

Gov. Matt Bevin, Republican of Kentucky, said he was appalled by the "unbelievable incessant focus on the most mindless things," with regard to how the president is portrayed in the news media. "Let's talk about crime rates. Let's talk about economic viability. Let's talk

about joblessness," Mr. Bevin added. "Let's focus on things that matter and stop being so tabloid-like and titillated by idiocy."

Ms. Conway said the stories of disarray in the White House, including recent accounts that she has been sidelined lately, were nothing more than tiresome palace intrigue. And without naming names, she said the attacks directed at her were really desperate attacks against the president by political enemies still sore about the election.

"To try to remove me from the equation would remove one of his voices and one of his trusted aides. And that would be hurtful to him," she said. "They didn't see this coming. They weren't prepared for this result — even though they all ran around and said: 'We're a divided country! We're a divided country!'"

It was not as if the support for Mr. Trump, who will speak to the conference Friday morning, is not enthusiastic.

"I always said he's not a stupid man. And if he has the right people around him he's going to do the right thing," said Daniel Cirucci of Cherry Hill, N.J., who was standing in line on Thursday evening to listen to Vice President Mike Pence, a conservative he said he deeply admired. "I think he realizes the enormity of the job," Mr. Cirucci

added. "Now does that mean Trump is going to stop being Trump? No."

These should be good times for conservatives — and much of the time they are. They control not just the White House but both houses of Congress and appear on the verge of regaining a majority on the Supreme Court. They have not dominated so many state governments in close to a century.

But part of the subtext of CPAC this year has been how conservative leaders are trying to smooth out the rougher edges of their movement, not all of which involve Mr. Trump.

Because of the association that a fringe element of Trump supporters has with white nationalists, the CPAC organizers held a panel discussion on Thursday to signal their strong disapproval. Its title: The Alt-Right Ain't Right at All.

Yet after the panel was over, the white nationalist leader Richard Spencer stood in the hall just off the main stage and declared himself a conservative. "I'm a conservative in a deep sense, in a sense that I care about people and defending a culture."

And the organizers had to cancel a planned speech by Milo Yiannopoulos, the former Breitbart editor and Trump supporter who has a history of insulting Jews, Muslims, African-Americans and other minorities, after a tape

surfaced in which he condoned sex with boys as young as 13.

Kellyanne Conway, the White House counselor, left, acknowledged concerns over Mr. Trump's conservative credentials when she spoke on Thursday. Al Drago/The New York Times

The projections of placidity inside CPAC tried to mask how fractious the movement remains. Yet optimists were not hard to find.

Mr. Pence said the Trump victory has given conservatives "the most important time in the history of our movement."

"My friends, this is our time," he told the conference Thursday night. "This is the time to prove again that our answers are the right answers for America."

In his brief remarks, Mr. Bannon ended on a conciliatory note. He insisted that conservatives all had more in common than most people realized.

"We have wide and sometimes divergent opinions," he said. But the core of what conservatives believe is "that we're a nation with an economy, not an economy just in some global marketplace with open borders — that we're a nation with a culture and a reason for being."

"And I think that's what unites us," he added. "And I think that's what's going to unite this movement going forward."

The New York Times Trump Vowed to Protect the Safety Net. What if His Appointees Disagree?

Yamiche Alcindor

WASHINGTON — Two days before Election Day, Donald J. Trump traveled to Sioux City, Iowa, and proclaimed that he was the protector of federal programs aimed at helping elderly and low-income Americans. It was Hillary Clinton, he said, who was an untrustworthy steward of the working class and who would slash vital benefits.

"I am going to protect and save your Social Security and your Medicare," Mr. Trump said. "You made a deal a long time ago, a long time ago." The pledge followed earlier promises to enact a new paid-maternity-leave benefit and not to make cuts to Medicaid, the health insurance program for the poor.

When President Trump addresses Congress this Tuesday and follows the speech with a budget blueprint for the fiscal year that begins in October, his White House will finally address in concrete numbers one of his central contradictions: He campaigned as the populist

protector of programs for the working class, yet he has pledged to control the budget deficit, cut spending and cut taxes.

Moreover, Mr. Trump has surrounded himself with traditional small-government conservatives bent on cutting back or eliminating many of the programs he has championed. Many of his aides and cabinet members have expressed views that are fundamentally opposed to those he campaigned on.

Former Representative Mick Mulvaney of South Carolina, for example, the new White House budget director, has called Social Security a "Ponzi scheme" and helped engineer a government shutdown to cut spending. As House Budget Committee chairman, Tom Price, the new secretary of health and human services, supported converting Medicaid to strictly capped block grants to the states and turning Medicare into a voucherlike

program for future recipients. Ben Carson, the president's nominee to head the Department of Housing and Urban Development, has repeatedly said government programs to help the poor lead to dependency.

The disparity between Mr. Trump's rhetoric and his appointments has cheered many Republicans and left Democrats fearing that he will not only renege on his promises to protect the government's largest entitlement programs but that he will also slash programs he did not mention on the campaign trail that offer food, housing and child care support for the poor.

"The appointments that he's made are troublesome and very, very scary," Senator Al Franken, Democrat of Minnesota, said. "He made a pledge and sort of delineated himself from the rest of the Republican field by saying these things. Everything he's done since he's been elected is very worrisome."

Tom Price, the secretary of Health and Human Services, has backed changes to Medicaid. Al Drago/The New York Times

Already, Mr. Trump's budget office has hinted at cuts to come in a memo that singled out the Legal Services Corporation, which helps the poor manage legal issues, and the Appalachian Regional Commission, which targets economic development in some of the poorest parts of the country. The memo also said that AmeriCorps, a program that puts volunteers into poor communities, would be zeroed out, and that the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation, a nonprofit organization focused on urban development, would see its budget cut substantially.

On Capitol Hill, some Republicans are hoping Mr. Mulvaney and others will change the president's mind on far bigger targets and convince him that structural changes to Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid —

the biggest drivers of deficits that are projected to rise over the next decade — are needed to control the national debt and to preserve the programs without substantial tax increases.

Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid consumed nearly \$1.9 trillion of the government's \$3.9 trillion in spending in 2016, according to the Congressional Budget Office, and with the number of people 65 and over projected to rise by a third over the next decade, Social Security and Medicare spending is projected to increase from a third of all spending in 2017 to 42 percent by 2027. Including Medicaid and military and federal civilian retirement benefits, federal spending on older adults will rise from 37 percent of outlays in 2017 to 45 percent in 2027 if nothing is done to change the programs.

Even some liberal economists say that will amount to a transfer of funds from poor children and families toward better-off older Americans, because the budget office projects that discretionary spending — where most programs for poor families come from — will be squeezed from 6.3 percent of the economy now to 5.3 percent in 2027, the smallest level since 1962.

With those numbers on their side, Republicans are most likely to use their power in both the executive and legislative branches to push through large cuts to federal programs for poor and working-class Americans,

say Democrats and liberal policy analysts — if Mr. Trump eases up on his promises.

"This is the greatest threat to low-income people in my lifetime," said Olivia Golden, executive director of the Center for Law and Social Policy, a nonprofit organization focused on low-income Americans.

House Republican allies see no real contradiction in Mr. Trump's campaign promises and what they say he must now do. Since President George W. Bush's failed 2005 effort to partially privatize Social Security, Republicans have assured retirees and those nearing retirement that any changes or cuts to entitlement programs for older adults would not affect them.

Now, Republicans are retroactively applying those caveats to Mr. Trump's promises, saying the president understands that programs like Social Security and Medicare must be maintained for Americans who are currently receiving benefits but must be changed for younger Americans who may have to work longer before retiring and getting benefits.

"It was really about making sure that those people who are getting benefits or about to get benefits are protected," said Representative Mark Meadows, Republican of North Carolina and a leader of the hard-line conservative House Freedom Caucus. "If we do nothing, he will not save Medicare and Social Security."



Donald Trump Is Much More Resilient Than He Looks

David Francis | 2 hours ago

The White House might not be popular, or organized — but it's populist enough to keep a firm grip on power.

In these dark days for American democracy, some liberals are finding solace in the thought that bad as Trumpism might be, it cannot actually govern. Chaos reigns in the White House; the president himself clearly prefers campaigning and brawling to administration; and the Bannons and the Millers have so far exhibited what one observer has nicely called the "incompetence of evil."

These impressions fit neatly into a larger picture according to which populists are simply incapable of governing: Their policy ideas are supposedly so simplistic that they will immediately fail in practice; more important still, populism is always about protest, and, once in power, populist parties and movements realize that they cannot

protest against themselves. These are comforting thoughts — but they are also naive.

The world has seen plenty of populists take their countries in an authoritarian direction — think of Hugo Chávez, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, or Viktor Orban — and we all should have learned by now that populism in power is by no means a contradiction in terms. All these populist actors provoked serious opposition; all proved far more resilient than those initial impressions suggested. And the governing style of the Trump administration — if one can call it that — exhibits important similarities with the most successful ruling populists.

Populists claim that they and only they represent the people or what populists frequently call the "real people" or the "silent majority." Donald Trump brought out this logic almost textbook-style in his inauguration speech on Jan. 20, when he claimed that power had at last been given back to the people.

Representative Jeff Duncan, Republican of South Carolina, said he would be closely watching his former Freedom Caucus colleague, Mr. Mulvaney, as he settles in to work at the Office of Management and Budget. "I'm curious to see how Mick Mulvaney approaches this from O.M.B. because he is very like-minded with us here," Mr. Duncan said.

In fact, on the campaign trail and in interviews before the election, Mr. Trump did not suggest that he would maintain the programs in their current form only for older Americans. His rallies were attended by a cross-section of ages, who cheered his broad promises. And last March, Mr. Trump said during a debate among Republican presidential candidates that he planned to make no changes.

"I will do everything within my power not to touch Social Security, to leave it the way it is," Mr. Trump said. "I want to leave Social Security as is, I want to make our country rich again so we can afford it."

The pressure to break that promise will come not only from congressional Republicans but also from his own campaign pledges to build a wall along the Mexican border, increase spending on defense, border security and infrastructure, cut taxes "big league" and control the deficit.

"The last time we saw this kind of budgetary logic was at the beginning of the Reagan

administration when he came into office, pledged to beef up defense spending and cut taxes," said William A. Galston, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and a former aide to President Bill Clinton. "They tried to keep the spending increases down and the deficit increases down by whacking away at social safety net programs, many of which were cut during that period."

Even if Mr. Trump keeps his promise not to touch Social Security and Medicare, other programs like housing subsidies, child care assistance, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, also known as food stamps, could be cut, social welfare and budget analysts say.

And those cuts would not just affect poor minority voters, who tend to support Democratic candidates. A study released this month by the liberal-leaning Center on Budget and Policy Priorities research group shows that white working-age adults without a college degree, a critical voting block for Republicans, benefit the most from social safety net programs and poverty-reducing benefits.

"My fear is that we are going to see the biggest cuts that any president has ever proposed in programs for low- and modest-income families," said Bob Greenstein, the center's president. "It could be the biggest Robin Hood in reverse a president has ever offered."

In other words, if Trump rules, the people rule — it's as simple as that. By definition, then, whoever opposes Trump prevents the will of the people from being implemented — and thereby also reveals themselves as an anti-democratic elitist. Thus, any institution critical of the populist (let alone one thwarting the populist's will) can be attacked in the name of democracy. It is hence not surprising that Trump has maligned a judiciary that failed to go along with his "travel ban," while media critical of the president are denounced as the "enemy of the American people."

Apart from attacks on independent institutions such as courts and a free press, populists immediately try to politicize all aspects of state administration. Of course, in many countries political appointees are perfectly legitimate and in fact expected to enable the implementation of a particular political mandate. That is different, however, from attempts to destroy any neutral civil service with its own rules and professional ethics —

which we have witnessed in Turkey, Hungary, and, most recently, Poland. When civil servants do their job in ways that do not please populist rulers, they are accused of "betrayal" — just as Trump did with acting Attorney General Sally Yates last month. To be sure, Yates was a political appointee effectively on her way out, yet the way she was maligned as "weak on illegal immigration" and dismissed on account of what turned out to be a correct professional legal assessment shows that Trump will not have anything approaching a normal relationship with the bureaucracy. Populists will always tell their followers that all politicians try to take possession of the bureaucracy — hence the need to remove all who worked for their predecessors — but they are the only ones who do it truly for the people. After all, only the populists authentically represent the people, and it is only proper that the people appropriate the state for their proper purposes.

Populists also engage in what political scientists call “mass clientelism”: They give benefits and bureaucratic favors exclusively to their supporters. To be sure, many governing parties seek to reward their followers. The difference is that, as with the politicization of the bureaucracy, the populists can do this much more openly with recourse to what in their eyes is a moral argument — after all, when they claim to be the only representatives of the “real people,” they always imply that whoever does not follow them is by definition not part of the real people. As Trump put it at a campaign rally last year: “The only important thing is the unification of the people — because the other people don’t mean anything.” In other words:

Some people, even if they happen to be American citizens, simply won’t count.

Some people, even if they happen to be American citizens, simply won’t count. And it is only proper that the government looks exclusively after the “real people.”

What’s more, populists can form groups that conform to their image of the ideal people — and that are loyal to the regime. In Venezuela, Chávez created his Boliburguesía, which did very well indeed out of the Bolivarian revolution. Erdogan continues to enjoy the unshakeable support of an Anatolian middle class that emerged with the economic boom under his rule (and that also embodies the image of the ideal,

devout Turk, as opposed to Westernized, secular elites and to minorities such as the Kurds). Hungary’s Fidesz has built up a new group that conforms to Orbán’s vision of a “Christian national” culture, combining economic success, family values (having children brings many benefits), and religious devotion.

For some observers, populists cannot be all that bad and exclusionary in their approach, because these leaders so frequently talk about “unifying the people.” After the election, Trump tweeted messages such as “We will unite and we will win, win, win!” In his inauguration speech, he again invoked a “united” and “unstoppable” America, and in a press conference last week he ruminated at length about ending divisions in U.S. society.

But, in general, democracies are not in need of “unification.” As anyone remotely familiar with James Madison and the other founders will recall, democracy is about civilized, institutionally contained conflict, where political opponents respect each other as legitimate (the very thing populists fail to do). When populists say “unification,” it is always unification on the populists’ terms — or else one excludes oneself from the “real people” as defined by the populists. Populist talk of ending divisions is the very opposite of a message that different interests and identities in a democracy will be respected.

When there is protest against governing populists, it becomes supremely important to delegitimize dissent — even if it poses no real threat to the populists’ power.

When there is protest against governing populists, it becomes supremely important to delegitimize dissent — even if it poses no real threat to the populists’ power. After all, by definition it cannot be true that the people themselves are turning against their one and only authentic representative. Hence populists have followed a strategy pioneered by Vladimir Putin: They claim that what looks like genuine civil society protest is in fact steered from the outside. Putin held that all the “color revolutions” in Russia had been engineered by the West; the Turkish government, exhibiting an unusual degree of creativity with its conspiracy theories, concocted a story that the Gezi Park protests were the doing of Lufthansa (which was supposedly afraid of increased competition from Turkish Airlines); and, most recently, Orbán has vowed to go after foreign agents disguising themselves as Hungarian NGOs. Trump has attacked “professional anarchists, thugs and paid protesters” — clearly all un-American figures who by definition are opposed to real Americans who also by definition want to make America great again.

Populists thrive on conflict; for them, polarization and facing protests are not problems but in fact conditions for maintaining and, if possible, increasing their own power. To be

sure, they did not invent culture wars in Turkey, Hungary, or Poland — but they did everything they could to exacerbate them. Populists relish protests, as long as protesters can be presented as an alien minority bent on betraying the homeland — which then also goes to prove to the populists’ supporters that they are the majority or indeed the “real people” as such.

None of this is to say that protesters in the United States should stay home — far from it. Culture wars — let alone flagrant rights violations — that end up alienating a mobilized majority will also be a problem for populists, no matter how committed their own base. The point is that liberals should not be complacent in thinking that chaos and opposition on the street will necessarily be sufficient to delegitimize populists in power. They should also recognize that there is a method to the madness of Trump’s attacks on judges and the media; scapegoats are being put in place for when policies cannot be implemented or go horribly wrong. The critics of the likes of Erdogan and Orbán have had to learn the hard way that populists can entrench themselves in power — and find numerous ways of convincing their supporters that their authoritarian ways are in fact perfectly democratic.

**The
New York
Times**

Weakened Democrats Bow to Voters, Opting for Total War on Trump

Jonathan Martin
and Alexander

Burns

WASHINGTON — Reduced to their weakest state in a generation, Democratic Party leaders will gather in two cities this weekend to plot strategy and select a new national chairman with the daunting task of rebuilding the party’s depleted organization. But senior Democratic officials concede that the blueprint has already been chosen for them — by an incensed army of liberals demanding no less than total war against President Trump.

Immediately after the November election, Democrats were divided over how to handle Mr. Trump, with one camp favoring all-out confrontation and another backing a seemingly less risky approach of coaxing him to the center with offers of compromise.

Now, spurred by explosive protests and a torrent of angry phone calls and emails from constituents — and outraged themselves by Mr.

Trump’s swift moves to enact a hard-line agenda — Democrats have all but cast aside any notion of conciliation with the White House. Instead, they are mimicking the Republican approach of the last eight years — the “party of no” — and wagering that brash obstruction will pay similar dividends.

Gov. Jay Inslee of Washington, vice chairman of the Democratic Governors Association, said there had been a “tornado of support” for wall-to-wall resistance to Mr. Trump. Mr. Inslee, who backed a lawsuit against the president’s executive order banning refugee admissions and travel from seven majority-Muslim countries, said Democrats intended to send a stern message to Mr. Trump during a conference of governors in the nation’s capital.

“My belief is, we have to resist every way and everywhere, every time we can,” when Mr. Trump offends core American values, Mr. Inslee said. By undermining Mr. Trump across the board, he said, Democrats hope to split

Republicans away from a president of their own party.

“Ultimately, we’d like to have a few Republicans stand up to rein him in,” Mr. Inslee said. “The more air goes out of his balloon, the earlier and likelier that is to happen.”

Yet Democrats acknowledge there is a wide gulf between the party’s desire to fight Mr. Trump and its power to thwart him, quietly worrying that the expectations of the party’s activist base may outpace what Democratic lawmakers can achieve.

“They want us to impeach him immediately,” said Representative John Yarmuth, Democrat of Kentucky. “And of course we can’t do that by ourselves.”

Some in the party also fret that a posture of unremitting hostility to the president could imperil lawmakers in red states that Mr. Trump won last year, or compromise efforts to Democrats to present themselves to moderate voters as an inoffensive

alternative to the polarizing president.

Rarely have Democrats been so weakened. Republicans control the White House, both chambers of Congress and 33 governorships, and they are preparing to install a fifth conservative, Neil M. Gorsuch, on the Supreme Court.

Further, because of changes to Senate rules that were enacted under Democratic control, the party has been unable to block Mr. Trump’s cabinet nominees from being confirmed by a simple majority vote.

Democrats, in other words, have few instruments at the moment to wound Mr. Trump’s administration in the manner their core voters are demanding.

Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont, right, with Senator Chuck Schumer of New York, at a news conference on Capitol Hill in January. Mr. Sanders has so far not pushed to challenge Democratic lawmakers who have

accommodated Mr. Trump. Al Drago/The New York Times

Still, a mood of stiff opposition has taken hold on Capitol Hill, with Democrats besieged by constituents enraged by Mr. Trump's actions — and lawmakers sharing their alarm.

"We have to fight like hell to stop him and hopefully save our country," said Senator Jeff Merkley, Democrat of Oregon, echoing the near-apocalyptic stakes liberal voters are giving voice to at crowded town hall meetings.

Senator Thomas R. Carper of Delaware, a middle-of-the-road Democrat up for re-election in 2018, cautioned that loathing Mr. Trump, on its own, was not a governing strategy. He said he still hoped for compromise with Republicans on infrastructure funding and perhaps on a plan to improve or "repair" the Affordable Care Act.

"There is this vitriol and dislike for our new president," Mr. Carper said. "The challenge for us is to harness it in a productive way and a constructive way, and I think we will."

But Mr. Carper said the deliberations over Mr. Trump's cabinet appointments had woken up Democrats, recalling that he had heard from thousands of voters about Scott Pruitt, Mr. Trump's Environmental Protection Agency administrator, and Betsy DeVos, his education secretary. Virtually every message expressed seething opposition, he said.

At times, Democratic frustration with Mr. Trump has already flared well beyond the normal range of opposition discourse: In Virginia, Tom Perriello, a former congressman seeking his party's nomination for governor, apologized after calling Mr. Trump's election a "political and constitutional Sept. 11." And in New Jersey, Phil Murphy, a former Goldman Sachs banker and ambassador to Germany, drew criticism in his campaign for governor after likening the current political moment in America to the rise of Adolf Hitler.

Among rank-and-file Democrats, however, it is far from clear that the rhetoric of heated opposition is

unwelcome. A survey published on Wednesday by the Pew Research Center found that nearly three-quarters of Democrats said they were concerned the party would not do enough to oppose Mr. Trump; only 20 percent were concerned Democrats would go too far in opposition.

A handful of liberal groups have already sprung up threatening to wage primary challenges against incumbent Democrats whom they see as insufficiently militant against Mr. Trump, raising the prospect of the same internecine wars that plagued Republicans during President Barack Obama's administration.

In the race for the chairmanship of the Democratic National Committee, which concludes with a vote in Atlanta on Saturday, the restive mood of liberal activists has buoyed a pair of insurgents, Representative Keith Ellison of Minnesota and Mayor Pete Buttigieg of South Bend, Ind., against the perceived front-runner, Thomas E. Perez.

Mr. Perez, who was Mr. Obama's labor secretary, is still viewed as a favorite in the race, and he has been backed by former Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. But he has struggled to dispel the impression that he is an anointed favorite of Washington power brokers.

And Mr. Ellison and Mr. Buttigieg have continued to collect high-profile endorsements: Mr. Ellison won the support of Representative John Lewis of Georgia, the civil rights leader, on Tuesday, and Mr. Buttigieg was endorsed Wednesday by Howard Dean, the former party chairman who remains admired on the left.

In a sign of how little heed Democrats are paying to traditional forces, Mr. Ellison remains viable despite being bluntly attacked as "an anti-Semite" by Haim Saban, one of the most prolific donors to the party and its candidates.

Representative Keith Ellison of Minnesota, a candidate for Democratic National Committee chairman, at a forum in Baltimore. He is an insurgent candidate running against the perceived

favorite, Thomas E. Perez. Joshua Roberts/Reuters

Christine C. Quinn, a vice chairwoman of the New York State Democratic Committee, who was a prominent surrogate for Hillary Clinton last year, said she backed Mr. Ellison, who was the first Muslim elected to Congress, in part because of the forcefulness of his criticism of the White House.

"This is not a normal Republican president, and these are not normal times," said Ms. Quinn, a former speaker of the New York City Council. "This isn't a time for polite parties anymore. This is a time to take a different posture of true aggressiveness."

Martin O'Malley, a former Maryland governor who has endorsed Mr. Buttigieg, said impatient Democrats might challenge even members of their own party in their enthusiasm to take on Mr. Trump. Mr. O'Malley said the party base plainly wanted leaders who would be "willing to fight the fight and where necessary filibuster and otherwise obstruct."

He said he expected younger, fired-up liberals to run against some Democratic incumbents as well as Republicans. "That's a good thing, and it's overdue," he said.

So far, the most prominent leaders of the Democratic Party's activist wing, including Senators Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts and Bernie Sanders of Vermont, have not encouraged challenges to sitting Democratic lawmakers who have accommodated Mr. Trump. Mr. Merkley, an ally of Mr. Sanders, suggested liberals seeking scalps would get no help from progressive senators if they try to unseat Democratic senators from conservative Missouri, Montana, North Dakota and West Virginia, calling those lawmakers "perfectly suited to those states."

Two mayors in Democratic cities, however, have gotten a taste of what awaits those who do not bow completely to the demands of the anti-Trump forces: When Carolyn Goodman of Las Vegas, a Democrat turned independent, and Levar Stoney of Richmond, Va., a Democrat, resisted deeming their municipalities "sanctuary cities," each was met with anger from

supporters of expanding protection against deportation for undocumented immigrants.

"They want change to happen overnight," Mr. Stoney said of the newly energized activists.

Nowhere is it more clear, however, that the protesters are leading the politicians than on Capitol Hill.

Senate Democratic leaders had hoped to capitalize on Mr. Trump's nomination of Tom Price as health secretary by assailing Republicans for wanting to trim Medicare, an issue Democrats aim to run on in 2018. But Mr. Price was vastly overshadowed by the nomination of Ms. DeVos, who galvanized the new activists like no other cabinet pick.

"Part of what I think the Bernie campaign taught us, even the Trump campaign taught us, and now the resistance is teaching us, is just ditch the consultants and consult with your conscience and constituents first," said Senator Brian Schatz of Hawaii, warning his fellow Democrats that "it's a fool's errand to try to plan this out like it's a traditional political operation."

Mr. Merkley boasted that "we're doing things in the Senate that are less conventional," efforts he said were aimed at conveying to anti-Trump voters that "hey, we're here and we're fighting."

Those efforts have included tactics like walking out on nomination hearings and opposing even less controversial cabinet appointments, such as that of Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao, the wife of the Senate Republican leader, Mitch McConnell.

The fear factor is real, said Adam Jentleson, a former Senate Democratic aide. Images of angry constituents jeering Senator Sheldon Whitehouse, a reliable liberal from Rhode Island, at a town hall-style meeting in late January for supporting the selection of Mike Pompeo as C.I.A. director quickly circulated among other Democratic senators, he said.

"It was eye-opening," Mr. Jentleson said, "because it made clear that the base is not going to let them off the hook."

POLITICO The left rallies to save Obamacare with passion but little cash

By Rachana Pradhan

Obamacare is blowing up congressional town hall meetings from California to Virginia. But high-rollers aren't stepping up to write checks to defend the law and

possibly turn voter outrage over losing coverage into a sustainable movement.

Though many Republicans charge the town hall sessions are stoked by moneyed interests and professional protesters, health care groups and

foundations that have been crucial to the ACA cause have remained on the sidelines. Without cash, the smaller progressive organizations left could be hard-pressed to fight a long battle as conservatives spend heavily to pressure lawmakers to

finish off the law and, possibly, revamp Medicaid.

Story Continued Below

"If you're looking for where funding used to go to fight for the health care bill ... I think you gotta keep looking," said Ezra Levin, a former

Democratic congressional staffer now helping direct the Indivisible Project, which is organizing pro-Obamacare demonstrations and other protests against President Donald Trump's agenda. "It's not coming to us, at least not right now."

The flow of funds began slowing not long after the law was passed. After securing former President Barack Obama's signature domestic policy achievement, key players involved with messaging and advocacy declared victory and moved on without fully completing the sales job. The Health Care for America Now coalition, one of the most audible voices in getting the law enacted, folded in late 2013 after mounting a \$60 million campaign to pass Obamacare and protect it during implementation.

It's left to groups such as the Indivisible Project to confront GOP lawmakers and tap outrage or voter anxiety over the party's repeal-replace effort. The progressive forces also include the Protect Our Care campaign backed by health consumer groups, and some of the original backers of Health Care for America Now. Another group, the Alliance for Healthcare Security, has aired several rounds of ads that are largely being funded by the Service Employees International Union, though the SEIU declined to specify how much it had contributed.

Huge amounts of cash for advertising and outreach may not be as essential in a social media-fueled crucible, where town hall confrontations can almost instantly go viral and organizers can rely on Facebook and other tools to mobilize. The pro-ACA groups scoff at the notion advanced by the Trump administration and some GOP lawmakers that Democrats are paying protesters to make a ruckus over Obamacare at town halls. "To say that we're a 'grassstops' thing is a complete lie," said Indivisible Project co-founder Angel Padilla.

But the pro-ACA groups are up against formidable foes. Republicans intent on not only dismantling the ACA but capping the open-ended nature of Medicaid

are getting backing from money powerhouses such as the American Action Network, which is aligned with House Republicans, and One Nation, a group with ties to Senate GOP leadership that's spending millions of dollars targeting vulnerable Democratic senators up for re-election in 2018.

Progressive activists similarly capitalized on generous support from pharmaceutical manufacturers and nonprofits such as Atlantic Philanthropies and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation during the heated debate to pass Obamacare. Nearly eight years later, most of the big donors have moved on, leaving health law defenders to make do with paltry budgets.

Levin said most of the 7,000 donations the Indivisible Project has received come from "small dollar" donors who pony up about \$50. Padilla said the sum is "just enough to keep us going."

"We have gotten enough to keep us going another three or four months," said Padilla, who also works on health issues for the National Immigration Law Center.

"There's never enough money in the health care advocacy community," said Ethan Rome, who led Health Care for America Now during the run up to pass Obamacare and is trying to revive it. "That's never stopped us."

The activists for now are relying on grassroots passion. Obamacare supporters argue that Republican plans to dismantle Obamacare will cut the safety net for 20 million people who obtained coverage for the first time through the law's insurance exchanges or its expansion of Medicaid. Even more could be affected if the GOP makes good on plans to revamp Medicaid and end the open-ended funding mechanism of a program covering roughly one in five Americans.

"We didn't have any illusions to think that this would be just about the ACA," said Robert Restuccia of Community Catalyst, part of the Protect Our Care campaign. "It will be an expanded fight."

Community Catalyst has received "hundreds of thousands [of dollars] in new funding" from foundations and individual donors, according to a spokesperson. Health Care for America Now organizers are also relaunching efforts with state partners to try to thwart Republicans — an effort that Rome says will comprise field operations around the country and be "lightly funded."

In contrast, Health Care for America Now spent \$48 million between July 2008 and March 2010 to get Obamacare passed, 40 percent of which went for advertising. The coalition managed to secure additional cash to continue defending Obamacare during the early years of implementation. But it was soon outgunned by conservative groups tapping anger over the law from the political right and closed its doors in late 2013. About half of the \$60 million campaign it mounted at the end was bankrolled by Atlantic Philanthropies, a foundation that will shut down entirely by 2020.

Richard Kirsch, one of the individuals involved in relaunching Health Care for America Now, maintains that far less needs to be spent on ads today, where voter angst over repeal has become standard fare on Facebook, Twitter and other social media channels.

"We don't need the kind of budget we had last time because we've got this huge upsurge of what you can't buy — that's total genuine outrage," Kirsch said.

"A lot of what we're seeing in the country over the last several weeks has really been organic," said Leslie Dach, a former Obama administration official who is leading Protect Our Care. "It's come from people who realize that, 'Oh my God, they might really take my health care away.'"

Health care advocates and other Obamacare defenders say they have received some additional funding from foundations, individuals and organized labor. They expect to see more, but still come up short against conservatives' haul.

Through the Alliance for Healthcare Security, advocates have spent \$3 million on ads in six states and the District of Columbia targeting moderate Republican senators over Obamacare repeal, with the funding largely coming from SEIU, according to several sources.

That's less than the \$5.2 million the American Action Network spent in January alone on ads to boost the repeal efforts. The group on Wednesday announced it would spend another \$2.2 million on Obamacare-related ads. Separately, One Nation, a conservative group with ties to Senate Republican leadership, on Wednesday announced a \$2.3 million ad buy that will target vulnerable Democratic senators up for re-election in 2018, as well as GOP moderates.

Funding from health industry groups also hasn't materialized, unlike eight years ago, when powerful lobbying organizations with a stake in reshaping the health system poured massive sums into helping pass Obamacare. Drug companies devoted substantial resources to helping the Obama administration pass the law. Many such groups now are eager not to antagonize Republicans who control both houses of Congress and the White House.

"I expect more resources will be raised," said Bob Greenstein, president of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a left-leaning think tank. "I'm not sure they will be anything comparable to what's on the other side."

Liberals facing an uphill battle on funding is nothing new, Rome said. He argues, however, that GOP lawmakers will continue to experience huge blowback, because they're trying to take something away from their constituents.

"These are programs that have powerful constituencies," he said. "They can't politicize an issue that is fundamentally personal to people."

POLITICO 2020 race lures sprawling Democratic field

By Gabriel DeBenedetti

An extraordinary alignment of ambition, opportunity and timing is raising the prospect that the Democratic Party in 2020 could have its biggest presidential field in a generation.

A sprawling roster of potential primary candidates is already

surveying the political climate and reaching out to campaign consultants in stealthy meetings and calls, according to roughly a half-dozen party operatives familiar with the initial conversations.

Story Continued Below

At least a dozen senators are widely thought to be in the mix — including Vermont's Bernie Sanders,

Massachusetts' Elizabeth Warren, New Jersey's Cory Booker, California's Kamala Harris, Ohio's Sherrod Brown, Oregon's Jeff Merkley, New York's Kirsten Gillibrand, Connecticut's Chris Murphy, and both Minnesotans, Amy Klobuchar and Al Franken. But the depleted bench of Democratic governors is also stocked with possible White House hopefuls,

expanding the list of credible presidential prospects to as many as two dozen.

"You say there are 7,000 Democrats who think they're going to be president? Well 3,500 of them have a good shot at it," said Democratic strategist Erik Smith, a veteran of multiple presidential campaigns, including Barack Obama's. "There are so many

candidates who have held back over the last 10 years. A lot of them didn't get into the race because Hillary Clinton was running in 2007, and then a lot stayed out in 2016 because she ran again, so you have a whole generation that's been waiting in the wings for years. Those calls are definitely happening."

A handful of the party's top contenders will be showcased at this week's upcoming National Governors Association conference in Washington. New York's Andrew Cuomo is high on the list of expected candidates, Washington's Jay Inslee has caught operatives' attention with his strident anti-Trump proclamations in recent months, and both Montana's Steve Bullock and Virginia's Terry McAuliffe are also surfacing on long-lists. Colorado's John Hickenlooper pointedly refused to rule out a run just this week, telling CNN, "There's going to be a lot of things on the table."

"They're all just thinking, 'I have no idea what the world is going to look like in a year, so instead of methodically plotting out my march to the nomination, all I'm trying to do is be relevant in this environment, not do anything that closes a door on any future, and make sure I can carve out something that I'm known for so that when people ask, 'where were you,' you're ready with an answer,'" said a Democratic campaign veteran who declined to talk about the 2020 race on the record. "Everyone assumes in four years it's going to be a referendum on [Trump]. But what's it going to be a referendum on? He's a liar?"

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo is high on the list of expected candidates in 2020. | AP Photo

With repeated trips to Iowa, 2016 candidate Martin O'Malley is another possibility. And unlike many of the other prospects who are

playing coy about their intentions while thinking 'why not me,' the former Maryland governor has openly admitted his interest in running again. "As for the question of whether I might run for president in 2020, I just might," he told NBC News in January.

The expansive list also takes into account the growing number of wealthy party donors and activists who are considering whether Trump's victory is evidence that prior political experience is no longer necessary for a viable presidential bid. That slate includes environmentalist hedge fund billionaire Tom Steyer — long expected to mount a gubernatorial bid in California next year — and billionaire Dallas Mavericks owner Mark Cuban, who has also refused to shy away from the speculation.

The last time the Democratic field appeared so open — and so bereft of candidates with a claim on the nomination — was 1992, when more than a half-dozen Democrats entered the race to take on President George H.W. Bush.

Since then, the seemingly iron-clad rules of presidential politics have changed dramatically — never more drastically than after Donald Trump's victory. Now, as potential candidates consider their rationales for running, there's constant refrain in Democratic circles from Capitol Hill to California: No one expected Obama at this point in 2005 either.

Yet it's the shadow of Donald Trump, not Obama, that looms largest as the presidential field begins to take shape — the party's animus toward the president is accelerating the types of pre-presidential conversations that usually would not get started so soon after the last election.

Clinton's team didn't begin laying the groundwork for her latest run until late 2013, while Sanders' team

started assembling in 2014. But Trump's unpopularity has Democratic operatives and potential candidates assuming that their eventual nominee will be the favorite to win in 2020.

Until recently, few Democrats had given any thought at all to 2020 since Clinton's expected 2016 win was widely thought to seal off any 2020 campaign within the party.

As a result of the vacuum left by Clinton's defeat, many more Democrats than usual are taking a look at running, calling media consultants, political strategists, and organizing operatives around Washington to sound out ideas for what a campaign starting in just over two years might look like. The early behind-closed-doors moves to court the relatively small group of top-level, battle-tested campaign operatives reflect the widely-held belief that the primary field is likely to be larger than any other in years.

Multiple operatives are already advising ambitious candidates to have a clear message and rationale for running, using the example of Sanders and Trump — and contrasting with Clinton. But so far, the conversations have largely been hypothetical, say Democrats familiar with several of those discussions.

Prospective candidates are mindful of the difficulties inherent in facing a brawler like Trump, but they're also careful not to project too far into the future with such an unpredictable president in power.

"The biggest mistake people can make four years out — and now more than ever before — is trying to project what the landscape is going to look like and bake in your plan," said Democratic strategist Dave Hamrick. "How do you extrapolate from this cycle to the next one? I really don't think you can. And if you say you can, I really think you're full of it. Is politics as we know it

completely and forever changed? Or will there be a regression to the mean?"

Accordingly, with few exceptions, the potential candidates' public steps toward a White House bid have veered away from the standard script, even as their behind-the-scenes preparations get underway. None but O'Malley has visited Iowa or New Hampshire, and there is little chatter in those states about such potential visits. The traditional process of wooing donors hasn't even picked up.

"The activist community is so engaged right now that there's a lot you can do without just going to Iowa and New Hampshire," said Smith. "Before you had to go to San Francisco to raise money, but maybe now you just have to ask, 'What's the top podcast?'"

Absent an obvious roadmap toward the nomination, Democrats are being especially careful not to close any doors amid the uncertainty. They are also sensitive to the perception that Trump's early stumbles and subpar approval ratings is what spurred them to take a closer look at the race, rather than their own vision.

"What Trump does has no correlation to what I may or may not do. And it's far too early to guess what impact his election and approach to governing will have on future elections," said Cuban, who has gone out of his way to needle Trump, publicly toying with the idea of a White House run of his own — including wearing a number 46 jersey to last weekend's NBA All-Star Celebrity game, in reference to Trump's status as the 45th president.

But asked if it's safe to say he's not sealing off any potential avenues for what comes next, Cuban responded, "Correct."



Psaki : Democrats, why not give Mayor Pete a chance?

Jen Psaki

Story highlights

- Jen Psaki: To rebuild party, Democrats must seek a chairman presenting an optimistic and positive vision for the future
- She says South Bend Mayor Peter Buttigieg is a young, energetic, and a military veteran. Why not give him a chance?

Jen Psaki, a CNN political commentator and Spring Fellow at the Georgetown Institute of Politics,

served as the White House communications director and State Department spokesperson during the Obama administration. Follow her: @jrpsaki. The opinions expressed in this commentary are hers.

(CNN)Debates rarely change the course of history. Instead they cement what viewers already think about a candidate's strengths or weaknesses.

I came away from the CNN debate among candidates for the Democratic National Committee chairmanship Wednesday night even more certain that Democrats

heading to Atlanta to vote this weekend should give Mayor Pete Buttigieg a chance.

Yes, each of the other candidates brings something to the table. Keith Ellison has connected with the same anger and frustration that helped draw millions to Bernie Sanders during the primary campaign (we should not lose that). Jehmu Greene shows the kind of spirit and straight talk that is currently lacking in most leaders of the two parties in Washington.

Tom Perez would be a good, maybe even a great DNC chairman. He has an uncanny ability to bring

people from different viewpoints together, as he did around issues related to overtime rules and trade during his time as labor secretary. He would get the ship in order and be an accessible and open-minded chairman at a time when the party is in serious need of rebuilding.

But the times we are in do not call for safe choices. We may have won the popular vote, but we lost the presidency, and Senate seats in North Carolina, Indiana and even Wisconsin that we should have won. We only picked up six House seats, including three that were the result of redistricting.

We Democrats have spent a lot of time licking our wounds since the election in November. We have debated who was at fault, whether it was a foreign power, a flawed candidate, an angry electorate or a combination.

We need to stop reliving and relitigating what happened and focus all our energy on preventing it from happening again. That means pushing harder for an independent investigation into the Russia hacks of the election, investing in a year-round organizing infrastructure across the country and thinking hard about the kind of people we want to lift up and put forward to represent the future of our party at the local and national level.

For a while we hung on to Barack Obama for dear life. In his final weeks in office, we asked questions about whether he would be vocal in opposing Trump policies, whether he would lead the party in the shadow government, whether Michelle Obama would save us all in 2020. The answer to all those questions is no.

There has been some criticism, fair criticism, of whether he and the Obama apparatus did enough during his time in office to rebuild the party, to stack the bench in local races and to find the next leaders. My bet is he is going to spend some time working on that in the months and even years ahead. He will raise money and help find and train the kind of leaders

who will lead our party in the future. But he will be a citizen, not the President or a candidate for office.

It is time for a new voice, even a new set of voices. A proxy fight between the supporters of two former candidates, Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders -- in their seventies and with no plans for higher office -- is not a battle that represents the party's future.

We should be looking out for leaders who can relate to the challenges Americans are facing, who can articulate why they are running for office and who they are fighting for with the kind of authenticity that sent our last two Democratic presidents into the White House.

I am still practicing how to pronounce South Bend Mayor Pete Buttegieg's last name, though people apparently call him Mayor Pete. But here is what everyone should know. He is a young, energetic, second-term mayor. He was re-elected with 80% of the vote in 2015. He is a military veteran and serves as a lieutenant in the Naval Reserve, deploying to Afghanistan as recently as 2013. And he is the first openly gay executive to serve in Indiana, a red state.

But even more important than his bio is what he has to say about the future of the Democratic Party and where we go from here. He recognizes what is the most pivotal

challenge for Democrats during the Trump presidency. "Yes, we've got to take the fight to him," he said at the CNN debate. "But we can't let him dominate our imagination, because it's our values and our candidates that matter."

This is not just about opposing, about shouting louder than our neighbors, about protesting. That is important, too, and the energy we have seen at town halls, and the grass-roots movement to hold elected officials accountable, is encouraging.

But we also must be focused on rebuilding the party and presenting an optimistic and positive vision for the future, whether that means taking on how we are going to address income inequality or how we will start talking truth about the impact of the rise of automation and technology on communities that have long relied on human labor. People want to vote for something, not just against.

This period is also about the organizing we do on the ground. Howard Dean may have been on to something with the 50-state strategy. We need to stop making it a false choice between focusing on the Southwest, states like Iowa, Wisconsin, Michigan and even Ohio, in the Midwest.

The Democratic Party has become a group of Christmastime churchgoers where church is the presidential campaign. We make T-

shirts, we door-knock, we organize our hearts out every four years. And then we disengage. This needs to change.

Finally, let's stop telling ourselves we won. Yes we won the popular vote. Yes we have some great new members of Congress who lend not just new voices, but much needed diversity. But we didn't win.

On the flip side, let's not get too depressed. Hillary Clinton won 23 House districts that are currently represented by Republicans. Those are good places to start.

We must be thinking about more than picking a DNC chair — it is much bigger than that. There is still a massive vacuum in the Democratic Party.

For many of the people biting their nails and wondering who will lead the party, the answer is: Maybe you will. It's not time to just focus on the big names including Elizabeth Warren and Kirsten Gillibrand, Michael Bennet and Kamala Harris. Instead, this is a period in which someone — or maybe more than one person -- whether a member of Congress, mayor, governor or state senator, is going to rise.

Maybe it will be Mayor Pete, maybe someone we don't even know yet.

We have little to lose. So why not give Pete a chance?

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Editorial : The ObamaCare Holdouts

Updated Feb. 23, 2017 7:19 p.m.

ET 59 COMMENTS

Republicans are getting battered at town halls on ObamaCare, with constituents—or least protestors—yelling about the benefits they'll lose if the entitlement is repealed. But maybe the better measure of public sentiment is the choices that the people who are subject to ObamaCare have made in practice.

Consider the remarkable persistence of health insurance plans that aren't in compliance with the Affordable Care Act's rules and mandates, which are a huge driver of higher health-care costs. These rules were meant to make U.S. health care serve progressive political goals, but Democrats also wanted to minimize opposition from people who lost coverage they liked.

Thus the Affordable Care Act "grandfathered"

plans that were in place before March 23, 2010, the date the law passed. This coverage is still legal as long as insurers haven't made major changes, such as decreasing benefits.

Then, in 2013, "grandmothered" plans in existence that year were also given a regulatory commutation. This coverage was scheduled to be cancelled as the law rolled out, but when people were about to be thrown off their old plans, the Obama Administration waved through renewals. Though the reprieve was supposed to last only one year, an extension allowed these plans to stay on the market through 2017.

Grandfathered and grandmothered insurance isn't obligated to meet ObamaCare's very high "essential benefits" floor. Nor is it required to obey price controls that limit how much premiums can differ based on pre-existing medical conditions.

These regulatory differences have thus set up an instructive market test about the need for ObamaCare's mandates. People don't have to maintain such plans, and they can switch to ObamaCare-compliant insurance if they think it's superior.

Lo, four years into ObamaCare, about 8.1 million people remain in grandfathered or grandmothered plans, and most of them work for small businesses. Estimates vary, but at least 50% of the small-group market is still grandmothered. According to 2017 Commonwealth Fund survey, only about 39% is ObamaCare-compliant, with 61% operating under the status quo ante. In the survey, 47% of employers with grandmothered plans and 44% with grandfathered plans reported being "very satisfied," versus merely 32% with ObamaCare coverage.

State insurance commissioners were also given the option of

rejecting the grandmothing rule and forcing everyone into ObamaCare. Some 35 states chose grandmother.

In other words, a substantial number of people with a chance to opt out of ObamaCare did so. The lesson is that one-size-fits-all insurance designed in Washington doesn't meet everyone's needs. If Congress deregulates, Americans will still have the right to upgrade to richer benefits, while cheaper alternatives that are now banned will also return to the market.

On Thursday the Trump Administration extended the grandmothing rule for another year, through 2018, which makes sense while Congress mulls a replacement. Republicans ought to see this—and sell this at their town halls—as an exercise in restoring choices, especially for the millions of ObamaCare holdouts.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Editorial : Waiting for Justice Gorsuch

Updated Feb. 23, 2017 7:17 p.m.
ET 166 COMMENTS

If you want to know why millions of Republicans voted for Donald Trump despite their doubts about his values or policies, look no further than Tuesday's ruling by the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals on gun rights. The 10-4 *en banc* decision shows how a liberal Supreme Court majority would eviscerate the Second Amendment.

The Fourth Circuit is one of several appellate courts that Barack Obama remade over eight years, and in *Kolbe v. Hogan* the liberal majority upheld Maryland's Firearm Safety Act. That law bans firearms such as the popular, semiautomatic AR-15 rifle that gun-control advocates call an "assault weapon."

The Supreme Court's landmark *D.C. v. Heller* decision in 2008

upheld an individual right to bear arms, explicitly for guns in "common use." But the Fourth Circuit's judicial progressives didn't let a mere precedent stand in their political way. They concocted a new "military use" legal test. Politicians can ban a firearm, they ruled, if a judge determines that it is "most useful in military service."

Give them credit for creativity if not fidelity to the law. As Judge William Traxler noted in searing dissent, the "heretofore unknown" military-use test is a purely judicial invention with no historical or legal basis. By that logic, he noted, the muskets favored by America's colonial settlers could have been banned because they were clearly the same weapons they used in war.

The Fourth Circuit majority simply ignored that hundreds of thousands of Americans own and use AR-15

rifles in lawful ways. This would seem to be a textbook example of "common use" under the *Heller* standard.

The ruling applies only to Maryland, but it has national implications if other states and judges adopt its logic. The Supreme Court has been reluctant to accept gun-rights cases since its *McDonald v. Chicago* ruling in 2010 that applied *Heller* to the states. And progressive politicians have been using that reluctance to press greater regulation of firearms. The Fourth Circuit has now invited progressives everywhere to rewrite *Heller*.

This is also how a liberal Supreme Court majority would have gone about overturning *Heller* if Hillary Clinton been able to replace the late Justice Antonin Scalia. Mr. Trump's nomination of Neil Gorsuch means that a new majority will soon be in

place to reinforce *Heller*, and a good place to start would be to take the Fourth Circuit's *Kolbe* ruling and reverse it after Mr. Gorsuch is confirmed.

The lower-court assault on gun rights also shows that the Trump White House needs to move fast to fill the 18 seats currently open on federal appellate courts. When Mr. Obama took office in 2009, 10 of 13 appellate courts had majorities appointed by GOP Presidents. Now nine of 13 have Democratic-appointed majorities. Mr. Obama appointed 55 appellate judges in eight years, about one-third of the total. Mr. Trump and Republicans need to get cracking while they still have a Senate majority.

Los Angeles Times

Editorial : Trump is setting the stage for mass deportations. If Congress has sense it will fix our immigration system instead

The Times Editorial Board

The Trump administration is about to learn the difference between rhetoric and reality, and could be setting itself up for a spectacular policy failure. SAD!

Earlier this week, Homeland Security Secretary John F. Kelly released his new guidance for immigration enforcement, effectively dismantling years of federal policy and sending a shiver of fear through millions of people living in the U.S. without permission. Even before Kelly's official directives came out, undocumented immigrants had begun moving into the shadows, thanks to President Trump's mean-spirited and misguided campaign threats and executive orders. Some families were apparently keeping children out of school to avoid encountering immigration agents. Now that process will surely continue.

White House officials tried to argue that there was nothing to panic about in the policies released this week because the administration has no plan for imminent mass deportations or detentions. That's disingenuous, though. The directives are a blueprint for both; all Homeland Security lacks are the staffing and infrastructure to carry them out. The new rules narrowed the pool of immigrants protected (by the Obama

administration) from deportation so that now, nearly everyone living in the country illegally is at risk unless they qualify for the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. The directives also say anyone deemed inadmissible at the border must be detained during deportation proceedings.

Actually ramping up apprehensions and deportations will take more government workers, more detention cells and a bigger immigration court system, as well as cooperation from local law-enforcement officials — many of whom balk at the idea — and the backing of a spending-averse Congress. Trump wants to hire 5,000 more border agents and 10,000 more ICE agents for enforcement in the interior of the country, and he expects to vastly increase the number of detainees from the current 41,000 people. The detention system — particularly the part run under contract by private prison companies — has been condemned by human rights groups over living conditions, detainees' access to lawyers and lack of adequate healthcare.

Even before Trump's proposed enforcement surge, agents apprehended 415,816 people at the border last year; the immigration courts have 542,000 pending cases. And that represents just a tiny fraction of the 11 million undocumented immigrants in the country. Surely they can't all be

detained; even the entire federal prison system only holds 189,130 inmates. Trump might want to consider appointing a Secretary of Reality Check.

Adding bodies to the border patrol carries its own risks. The number of agents nearly doubled from 2002 to 2009 and, according to former Customs and Border Patrol internal affairs chief James Tomscheck, new hires were not fully vetted, leading to problems with corruption (some new hires actually turned out to be moles working for the cartels). Independent reports found an internal Border Patrol culture that downplayed corruption and the use of excessive force. Conditions had been improving over the past year or so, and the Obama administration in October hired Mark Morgan, a former assistant director of the FBI, as the first Border Patrol director to come from outside the organization. But Morgan, unpopular with the border agents' union (which had strongly endorsed Trump), was fired in January, raising doubts about whether the reforms will continue as the department seeks to increase staffing by 25%.

It's simply not believable that the government is going to round up and deport even a majority of the people living in the U.S. without permission — many of whom who are guilty of nothing more than violating the civil immigration laws. And beyond the inherent

coldheartedness of uprooting and, in many cases, dividing families that have spent decades in this country, it's manifestly bad policy. The center-right American Action Forum has estimated that deporting all undocumented immigrants would cost the government between \$400 billion and \$600 billion, shave \$1 trillion from GDP, cause labor shortages and damage families — including the 4.5 million American citizens under age 18 with at least one parent living in the country illegally. Even a "lite" version of Trump's deportation policy would deliver unjustifiable agony to an unacceptably large number of people.

If the Republicans in Congress had any sense, they'd refuse to allocate money to pay for Trump's counterproductive proposals and instead insist the administration work with them on the only rational solution to this problem: A humane and comprehensive overhaul of the system that would create a path to citizenship for people who already have roots in the country while also setting reasonable immigration quotas and allowing the U.S. to regain control over its border. Otherwise, Congress will become complicit in Trump's odious, ill-conceived plan.

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Strassel : Mattis's Pyrrhic Personnel War

Kimberley A. Strassel

Updated Feb. 23, 2017 7:20 p.m. ET

Every military tactician fears the Pyrrhic victory—winning a battle but losing the war. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis might want to brush up on his Plutarch, as he continues to fight a one-man personnel skirmish.

President Trump promised to rebuild our hollowed-out military, a cause as urgent as any domestic priority. Years of Obama budget cuts and neglect slashed force sizes and provoked a readiness crisis. Over half the Navy's aircraft are grounded. Of 58 Army brigade combat teams, only three are ready to immediately join a fight. The Air Force is short pilots and aircraft maintenance workers.

Mr. Trump chose a man singularly gifted to take on such a huge challenge. "Mad Dog" Mattis is a highly intelligent and revered Marine, whose time on the battlefield has made him intimately familiar with the needs of a fighting force. He's a steely-eyed warrior who'll fight for the rebuild mission, and who is willing to speak truth to his boss and Congress about what it will require. That is, if he will stand down long enough to get the project started.

Because right now, Mr. Mattis is fighting alone in the Pentagon, a situation of his own design. He was confirmed on Inauguration Day, yet as March

approaches the White House hasn't nominated a single subcabinet position in the Defense Department. No deputy secretary. No undersecretaries. No assistant secretaries. This is because Mr. Mattis is battling with the White House over who gets the jobs.

A soldier first—a politician only by presidential request—Mr. Mattis hews to the honest belief that defense should always be a bipartisan cause. He wants to choose his own team based on the strength of their views, political affiliations be damned. He wanted, for instance, former Obama undersecretary Michèle Flournoy for a top post. He's looked to recruit from Ms. Flournoy's liberal-hawk think tank, the Center for New American Security. And he's pushed for some names who hail from Never Trump backgrounds, including Mary Beth Long, an official in George W. Bush's Pentagon.

Perhaps only to make a point, Mr. Mattis is blocking some rock-star conservative talent. One is Mira Ricardel, a former Boeing executive and Bush Pentagon alum who helped with the Trump transition. Mr. Mattis continues to nix a long list of names offered by the White House team.

This defense secretary has one of the biggest jobs in the administration, and he's right to want to be consulted and to have a

team he trusts. There's also nothing wrong with looking outside the partisan box.

At the same time, Mr. Mattis surely understands the chain of command. This isn't just a question of choosing random "staff." These are presidential appointments for consequential positions, with authority over budgets, personnel and operations. The Trump White House has a right to want people it trusts as much as it trusts Mr. Mattis. The former Marine is accorded influence. The president is accorded the call.

The bigger point is the damage this standoff is inflicting—short and long term. The Pentagon today remains in the hands of Obama holdovers who have spent years thwarting congressional requests, minimizing readiness problems, and generally covering for Obama failures. Those holdovers include Deputy Secretary Robert Work, an opponent of reform, and Assistant Secretary for Legislative Affairs Stephen Hedger.

Mr. Hedger helped write an infamous 2016 Pentagon memo outlining how the Obama administration could use a presidential veto of greater defense spending as a "weapon" to get other Obama priorities. Civil servants are also place-warming other key positions. As well-intentioned as many are, it's unrealistic to expect this crew to march in a new

direction after eight years under President Obama.

Congressional reformers such as House Armed Services Chairman Mac Thornberry are warning that the obstruction continues. The frustrated Texas congressman was recently driven to tweet that while Mr. Trump's commitment to rebuilding was "100% right" and that he couldn't have a "better leader" than Mr. Mattis, the Trump promise "is facing Obama holdovers @DOD who have been fighting against rebuilding & are still undermining agenda."

Here's the bigger problem: Mr. Mattis's own standing. The former general is about to go into the policy fight of his life, and he'll need all the political capital he can muster. Getting crosswise with the White House over personnel, and leaching credibility now on controversial nominees the White House clearly doesn't want and who aren't integral to victory, makes no sense.

Mr. Mattis may not come out of his personnel fight "utterly ruined" (to quote King Pyrrhus), but he'll likely be weaker than necessary. And right now the country, and the military Mr. Mattis has promised to restore, needs a defense secretary operating at full and unquestioned strength.

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The New York Times Williamson : Big Tent or Circus Tent? A Conservative Identity Crisis in the Trump Era

Elizabeth Williamson

Steve Bannon, left, after speaking at the Conservative Political Action Conference. Alex Wong/Getty Images

Stephen Bannon, President Trump's brain, was the biggest draw of opening day at the Conservative Political Action Conference, Washington's annual gathering of the Republican right. After his standing ovation on Thursday, the White House chief strategist couldn't resist reminding assembled conservatives that until he helped them win the presidency, he and his fellow alt-right believers weren't welcome.

With a smirk, he told Matt Schlapp, chairman of the American Conservative Union, "I want to thank you for finally inviting me to CPAC," and Mr. Schlapp hastened to assure him that "we decided to say that everybody's a part of our conservative family."

If that's true, then what does it mean to be part of this

"conservative family"? Traditional conservative leaders face questions that can't be solved — and may be compounded — by saluting the previously "uninvited" at their signature conference. Do they embrace Mr. Trump, who created the best opportunity in a generation for passing a conservative agenda by wooing bigots, bomb-throwers and reactionaries? Or reject them, and risk irrelevancy?

At its founding four decades ago, CPAC was a sleepy, libertarian-leaning gathering, heavy on college Republicans, professors and policy. Conservative intellectuals led by William F. Buckley Jr. long ago rejected having fringe elements like the John Birch Society in the fold. Today, the Trumpian uninvited are ascendant, and their power and celebrity seem irresistible to the next wave of Republicans. Breitbart is now a conference sponsor; the booths of alt-right radio conspiracy outlets line the hallway.

The hot tickets this year are Mr. Trump's Friday speech and Thursday's "conversation" with Mr.

Bannon and Reince Priebus, the White House chief of staff. Kellyanne Conway, pollster turned presidential counselor and "Saturday Night Live" character, appeared before a full house Thursday, calling Mr. Trump a kind and generous family man. By the time Mr. Trump speaks, she observed, CPAC will have been fully transformed into "TPAC," for Trump Political Action Conference.

That transformation began even before the event opened, when Mr. Schlapp asked Milo Yiannopoulos, Breitbart's most incendiary attention-seeker, to take a prime speaking slot. Mr. Schlapp reversed himself, but only after a conservative group opposed to the invitation circulated a video in which Mr. Yiannopoulos appeared to condone pedophilia. Mr. Yiannopoulos was also forced out of Breitbart.

On Thursday came another telling clash. In a cavernous ballroom, as Dan Schneider, the A.C.U.'s executive director, took the stage to deliver a speech titled "The Alt-

Right Ain't Right at All," scores of young attendees filed out. Though Mr. Bannon has called Breitbart a platform for the alt-right, Mr. Schneider condemned the alt-right as "a sinister organization that is trying to worm its way into our ranks, and we must not be duped." The alt-right, he asserted to a silent, half-empty room, is a "hate-filled left-wing fascist group" that "hijacked the very term."

Outside the ballroom, Richard Spencer, director of the white supremacist National Policy Institute, who celebrated after Mr. Trump's victory with his own conference at which he offered a "hail Trump" salute, was regaling two dozen reporters with the story of how he coined the term alt-right. (Organizers reportedly ousted him.)

After Mr. Spencer's appearance, one critic labeled the conference "Hollywood for Nazi People." But most attendees brushed such negativity aside. "We got a Republican president! Maybe we should quit acting like victims, and be tickled pink it's not Hillary

Clinton," said DeAnn Irby, a Never Trump voter from Texas. Ms. Irby's friend Lauren Harger of Manhattan Beach, Calif., agreed, adding that conservatives repelled by Mr. Trump should ask themselves, "Why are you content to be losers?"

**The
Washington
Post**

Desai and Kleinbard : A win-win path to getting the Trump tax information that really matters

By Mihir Desai and Edward Kleinbard

Mihir Desai is a professor at Harvard Business School and Harvard Law School. Edward Kleinbard, a former chief of staff of the congressional Joint Committee on Taxation, is a professor at the University of Southern California Gould School of Law.

President Trump's spokespeople have made it perfectly obvious that he will not release his federal income tax returns during his presidency. Appeals to the tradition of presidents publishing their returns will not change this president's resolve. Nor is a more forceful approach likely to pry the returns into public view.

As others have explained, Congress's Joint Committee on Taxation, composed of the senior tax writers from the two political parties in both the House and the Senate, has the authority to examine the president's tax returns in closed session. The committee can then report its findings or release those returns to the Congress as a whole (and thereby the public). The tax code is clear on this.

Democrats on the committee might leap at the chance, but Republican leadership plainly is not ready to confront the president here through unilateral demands. And yet the day may come soon enough that those leaders find it in their strategic interest to embrace this authority, if it can be asserted adroitly.

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As the event with Mr. Bannon and Mr. Priebus ended, Mr. Schlapp acknowledged reports that the two men weren't getting along. Smiling, he coaxed Mr. Priebus, the former Republican National Committee chairman, and Mr. Bannon, the Grand Old Party's marquee

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In the meantime, the public interest demands more than accepting the current stalemate. The path forward requires sensitivity to the president's presumptive reasons for his tax disclosure reticence — in other words, compromise.

What substantive concerns might Trump have regarding his tax returns?

[Congress has the power to obtain and release Trump's tax returns]

First, his returns are extraordinarily complex and his wealth large; individual items might be misunderstood or misconstrued by those looking for scandal. Second, he would prefer not to unleash an army of amateur auditors eager to help the IRS. And third, his returns could reveal confidential commercial information and relationships, such as the terms of joint ventures or the prices at which properties were bought and sold.

These arguments don't outweigh the public interest. Ensuring that the president has fulfilled his civic responsibility is critical to the integrity of the tax system.

Trump is no longer a private citizen; he is the "taxpayer in chief." The U.S. income-tax system is a self-assessment regime — when you prepare and sign your return, you act in effect as the front-line assessor of tax against your own personal interests. This system depends entirely on the good faith and honesty of taxpayers, and it is incumbent on this, or any, president to lead by example, by assessing tax against himself fully and fairly,

antagonist, to say something nice about each other — to do a "group hug."

Mr. Bannon managed something about Mr. Priebus making the trains run on time. Mr. Priebus, a standard-bearer of what was once

and letting the world see that he has done so.

The president wears another hat relevant to this issue: He is boss of the IRS. We think it obvious that any IRS auditor in his or her right mind would be terrified of proposing a large tax bill against this president. Yet this is an entirely plausible outcome of an audit of a billionaire real estate developer and lifestyle-brand entrepreneur. A way must be found whereby the audits of the president's returns, which he himself has said are ongoing and essentially continuous, are not compromised by virtue of the extraordinary power he now wields over the agency charged with reviewing his affairs.

There is a possible compromise, rooted in precedent, that would address the president's concerns and satisfy the public's interest. In 1973, when President Richard Nixon faced his own tax controversy, he released his tax returns to the public, invited the Joint Committee on Taxation to review those returns, and committed to following its judgment on any deficiencies. A similar model can work here, even without the public disclosure of the current president's returns.

Trump could invite the committee to review — confidentially — his tax returns, report its findings in detail to the IRS (so that the IRS could rely on them in reaching any audit determinations) and publish a public summary report, redacted of any proprietary business information. In doing so, the committee would rely on its existing highly professional nonpartisan staff of tax lawyers,

willing to learn building skills, but they're not having much luck.

Construction is hard, many families demean physical labor and construction is highly cyclical. Hundreds of thousands of people lost construction jobs during the financial crisis and don't want to come back. They want steadier work even at a lower salary.

the Republican establishment, called Mr. Bannon "very loyal," "very consistent" and "a very dear friend. ... I cherish his friendship." It could not have been clearer who was hugging whom.

economists and accountants to support its work.

The division of the committee's findings into a large confidential report and a redacted public one would follow the model used for the Senate investigation into CIA interrogation techniques. The scope of the redacted public report would be negotiated in advance in a bipartisan process and might, for example, contain a summary explanation of any compliance issues raised by the review and a tally of taxes paid over particular periods.

[Trump can help Americans trust him by releasing his taxes]

The bipartisan and bicameral nature of the Joint Committee on Taxation, combined with its deep expertise, would legitimize this process. Indeed, the founding of the committee can be traced to a partisan dispute involving the tax matters of then-Treasury Secretary Andrew Mellon — the third-highest income-tax-payer during the 1920s, after John D. Rockefeller and Henry Ford. Trump might like the idea of engaging a mechanism created by the needs of Mellon.

By following this procedure, Trump would get a fair review, conducted by highly trained professionals, under the guidance of the (Republican-majority) members of the committee, without allowing direct public access to his returns. And American citizens would gain renewed confidence that the highest elected office in the land is occupied by an individual who has fulfilled his civic responsibilities.

As distasteful compromises go, it is a win-win proposition.

**The
New York
Times**

Brooks : The National Death Wish

Let's illustrate the point by looking at one portion of the labor market. Right now construction is booming in many cities. This has created high demand for workers and pervasive labor shortages.

Senators Tom Cotton, left, and David Perdue unveiled legislation this month to cut immigration in half. Mark Wilson/Getty Images

Nationwide, there are now about 200,000 unfilled construction jobs, according to the National Association of Home Builders. If America were as simple as a lake, builders would just raise wages, incomes would rise and the problem would be over.

But that hasn't happened. Builders have gone recruiting in high schools and elsewhere, looking for people

In other words, the labor shortage hasn't led to higher wages; it's reduced and distorted the flow of the economic river. There's less home buying, less furniture buying, less economic activity. People devote a larger share of their income to housing and less to everything else. When builders do have workers, they focus on high-end luxury homes, leaving affordable housing high and dry.

The essential point is that immigrants don't take native jobs on any sort of one-to-one basis. They drive economic activity all the way down the river, creating new jobs in some areas and then pushing native workers into more complicated jobs in others. A comprehensive study of non-European Union immigrants into Denmark between 1991 and 2008

found that immigrants did not push down wages, but rather freed natives to do more pleasant work.

An exhaustive U.S. study by the National Academy of Sciences found that immigration didn't drive down most wages, but it had a "very small" and temporary effect on native-born workers without a high school degree.

The way to help working families is not to cut immigration. It's to help everybody flow to the job he or she wants to take.

The last time we cut immigration, in the 1920s, we were in the middle of a baby boom. Today, fertility rates have plummeted. If the Cotton-Perdue bill became law, the working-age population would

shrink, the nation would age and America would decline.

For the life of me, I can't figure out why so many Republicans prefer a dying white America to a place like, say, Houston.

Houston has very light zoning regulations, and as a result it has affordable housing and a culture that welcomes immigrants. This has made it incredibly diverse, with 145 languages spoken in the city's homes, and incredibly dynamic — the fastest-growing big city in America recently. (Personally, I wish it would do a bit more zoning — it's pretty ugly.)

The large immigrant population has paradoxically given the city a very strong, very patriotic and cohesive culture, built around being

welcoming to newcomers and embracing the future. As the Houston urban analyst Tory Gattis points out, the Houston Rodeo has so many volunteers it has recently limited their special privileges. In 2015 it had the healthiest philanthropic sector in the nation. The city is coming together to solve its pension problems better than just about any other big place.

Cotton and Perdue are the second coming of those static mind-set/slow-growth/zero-sum liberals one used to meet in the 1970s. They'll dry up the river. I wish they had a little more faith in freedom, dynamism and human ingenuity.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Ackerman

Updated Feb. 23, 2017 5:10 p.m. ET

WASHINGTON—The Trump administration has broadened its search for a key regulatory job at the Federal Reserve, according to people familiar with the matter, meeting in recent weeks with at least two people about the post of Fed vice chair in charge of bank oversight.

President Donald Trump hasn't announced who he will nominate to the currently vacant post, and his decision won't be final until that happens. He also has at least two other seats on the Fed's seven-member board to fill. One of those is currently vacant, and the other will be open once Fed governor Daniel Tarullo, currently the de facto chief of bank oversight, resigns in early April.

The administration is still said to be considering

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

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Corporate leaders are looking beyond the chaotic opening month of President Donald Trump's tenure, hopeful his administration will deliver on promises for an overhaul of taxes and regulations that could boost their fortunes and those of their workers.

Executives from major manufacturers including General Electric Co., Dow Chemical Co.,

Trump Team Broadens Search for Fed Regulatory Post

Ryan Tracy and Andrew

David Nason, a former Treasury Department official in the administration of President George W. Bush and currently an executive in the financing arm of General Electric Co. Mr. Nason had emerged as the front-runner for the job weeks ago, people familiar with the matter said at the time.

President Trump's team also recently met with Richard Davis, the chief executive of U.S. Bancorp, and Hal Scott, a professor at Harvard Law School, according to people familiar with the matter.

A spokesman for Mr. Davis, responding to an inquiry on Thursday, said "Richard is not a candidate for the Fed position. He is focused on a successful CEO transition in April." U.S. Bank said in January Mr. Davis will be stepping down from the CEO role in April, while remaining on as executive chairman.

Mr. Scott declined to comment. The White House had no immediate

comment. A GE spokeswoman had no comment.

The meetings provide more evidence the administration is looking at candidates who will take a less aggressive regulatory posture than the Fed did under the Obama administration, in line with the desire of Mr. Trump and his advisers to pare back regulations spurred by the 2010 Dodd-Frank financial law.

Mr. Scott has publicly criticized some of the Fed's regulatory moves, for instance by suggesting capital requirements are too strict and calling on the central bank to disclose more about its annual "stress tests" of banks' resilience and "living wills" that outline how they would fail without taxpayer support. He is director of the Committee on Capital Markets Regulation, a group of financial industry representatives and academics that comments on regulatory policy, often in ways critical of the Fed.

Mr. Davis has been chief executive of Minneapolis-based U.S. Bank since 2006. His bank, one of the country's largest, has dealt with many of the new rules and stricter enforcement under the Obama administration, though he hasn't railed against them in public as strongly as some other bankers.

Mr. Nason, for his part, appears to be getting a push from people with access to the highest levels of the administration.

On Thursday, Mr. Trump was meeting with manufacturing CEOs at the White House. As the group was waiting for the president within earshot of reporters, Jeffrey Immelt, chief executive of GE, greeted Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and said, "Secretary, just wanted to tell you Dave Nason is a great guy."

—Nick Timiraos and Ted Mann contributed to this article.

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CEOs and Donald Trump Trade Policy Proposals

Ted Mann and Nick Timiraos

and Lockheed Martin Corp., gathered for 2½ hours on Thursday to trade policy proposals with senior administration officials at the White House. More than half that time was spent in an audience with Mr. Trump, who said he was making good on a campaign pledge to restore prosperity in struggling sectors of the U.S. economy.

In private sessions beforehand, the executives compared concrete steps they thought the administration could take to help their business interests, identifying

specific regulations they want eased.

Mr. Trump and his advisers are "very, very keen on putting meat on the bones," said Andrew Liveris, chief executive of Dow Chemical Co., and the leader of Mr. Trump's advisory panel of manufacturing bosses. "They really do want specifics from industrial leaders."

The manufacturing leaders plan to meet again in two months, and an early imperative is to distinguish steps that can be taken immediately and actions that could take longer to

filter into the economy, Mr. Liveris said.

"Bringing manufacturing back to America, bringing high-wage jobs, was one of our campaign promises and themes and it resonated with everybody," Mr. Trump said in an open session surrounded by senior advisers and two dozen corporate executives. "I'm delivering on everything we've said."

The gathering reinforced an image Mr. Trump has worked to project: The White House is a forum for leading figures in business to make

proposals that failed to gain traction in former President Barack Obama's administration. The setting, the White House State Dining Room beneath a massive portrait of Lincoln, served as evidence that the leaders of some of the country's most important companies are willing to work with Mr. Trump and appear by his side.

Seated at the president's right hand was Jared Kushner, his son-in-law and an adviser. Mr. Trump has delegated business outreach to Mr. Kushner, who is pushing manufacturing executives to deliver specific action items where the government can make U.S. firms more competitive, said Mr. Liveris.

Mr. Trump focused on a favorite theme: He said other countries have got the better of the U.S. in free-trade deals because the U.S. runs high deficits with its largest trade partners.

"I said to my people, 'Find a country where we actually do well,'" he said during the meeting. "So far we haven't found a country."

Mr. Trump struck a jocular tone with the executives in the room, boasting about his electoral victory and declaring that he would bring back faded sectors of the U.S. industrial base. He teased Gregory Hayes,

chief executive officer of United Technologies Corp., which agreed to hold back 800 jobs out of more than 2,000 it had planned to send to Mexico, after Mr. Trump's criticism and a corporate tax break from the state of Indiana. And he joked with Marilyn Hewson, chief executive of Lockheed Martin Corp., that Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton wouldn't have pushed to cut \$700 million from the cost of the company's F-35 fighter, as Mr. Trump has.

Ms. Hewson, like the other executives, thanked Mr. Trump for the meeting.

Before the corporate executives met with Mr. Trump, they split into four working groups for focused discussion on taxes and trade, regulation, infrastructure, and improved training for the U.S. manufacturing workforce.

The executives and Mr. Trump's advisers disclosed little about the substance of their discussions, especially on key questions like whether to adopt a border-adjusted tax. Under a border-adjustment plan, companies wouldn't be able to deduct the cost of imports from their revenue but exports and other foreign sales would be tax-free. The issue has divided companies that

stand to lose or benefit from the proposal.

In one discussion open to the media, executives and administration officials talked about cutting regulation. One executive said 20% of the price of military products covers the cost of regulation. In another session, the group talked about raising the gas tax by indexing it to inflation, a move that could create more revenue for infrastructure improvements.

An executive who was present at the White House meetings said Mr. Trump left open the door for a border tax, indicating the administration might consider several variations.

Mr. Trump has made rolling back regulations a priority and has already directed the Treasury Department to undertake a broad review of financial rules. Business executives and top administration leaders have said rolling back and modifying regulations will boost economic growth. The Trump administration has provided "not just an open door, but real encouragement" in acknowledging concerns raised by business leaders over regulatory issues, said Joshua Bolten, president of the

Business Roundtable, a trade group representing large U.S. companies.

"We like what we're seeing so far," said Mark Costa, chief executive of Eastman Chemical Co., who drafted a letter the Business Roundtable delivered to the White House on Wednesday outlining regulations executives say are their top targets for repeal or modification in the Trump administration.

While businesses remain optimistic the Trump administration will curb regulations, they are much warier about the White House's push to curb immigration and trade. In the Business Roundtable's letter, Mr. Costa said the group stands ready to prevent "unintended consequences" from such curbs, which "would inhibit the ability for U.S. companies to drive economic growth and be globally competitive."

Mr. Liveris said immigration issues didn't come up at Thursday's meeting. On trade, "what we're doing is making sure everyone understands what the barriers are," he said.

—Peter Nicholas contributed to this article.

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Lane : Confessions of a Free-Trade Lobbyist

Bill Lane

Updated Feb. 23, 2017 7:21 p.m. ET

Time to come clean. During my 40-year career at Caterpillar, I don't recall ever being in a management meeting where the sole objective was creating American jobs. No boss ever said, "Your annual review will only measure the number of U.S. workers added."

Mind you, I've been in countless meetings where the objective was increasing sales, reducing costs, improving quality, promoting safety or encouraging diversity. There were meetings that focused on embracing innovation or attracting and retaining the best employees. Some meetings were on hiring veterans. Others were about opening foreign markets while trying to keep the U.S. market open. And many were about customers and how our success was linked to theirs.

Given the new "America First" doctrine, it may be foolish to admit now that much attention was on global opportunities and concerns, rather than solely those in the U.S. We found that success required treating all global employees, customers and stakeholders with respect.

I don't think my experience was unique, but I'm starting to wonder. For the past month there has been a steady stream of business leaders from some of the most successful U.S.-based multinational companies visiting the White House. Even though many have more employees and customers outside the U.S. than inside, few admit it. There has been nary a word about global markets, international supply chains or the value of all employees including those in Mexico, China, Brazil, India and Africa. Nor has there been thoughtful discussion about the difference between short-term narrow interests versus long-term enlightened ones.

After a lecture about President Trump's "Build It Here, Sell It Here, Buy It Here" doctrine, business leaders seem either to avoid eye contact or nod in agreement by highlighting previously announced U.S. hiring plans. Some go further by volunteering to abandon workers at one of their low-cost foreign factories. To be fair, some do try to redirect the conversation by low-talking about how tax cuts, better infrastructure and fewer regulations would improve U.S. competitiveness for all. But those comments rarely get amplified by the press.

Why the charade? Why so little push-back? Is it to curry favor from the president, or is it being polite? Didn't these business executives attend the same kinds of management meetings I did? Perhaps it is because they fear their stock taking a plunge after a one-way Twitter war emanates from the president? Surely they recognize the dangers associated with Mr. Trump's "Fortress America" economic plan.

Or is it something else, namely that they have seen this movie before? Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela, much of Africa, and even China have all at times embraced import-substitution policies. Many still do.

While not preferable, executives know they can still make money in such a protectionist environment, at least for a while. To make it work, one needs to secure big subsidies, keep investments at a minimum, and above all get the government to reduce or—better yet—eliminate competition. That's because the key to import substitution for business is higher prices. Much higher prices! Mr. Trump clearly knows this because he wants whopping 35% to 45% import duties. The fear is that if consumers aren't willing to pay the premium that protectionism provides, the whole system

collapses. People fix up used cars instead of buying new ones. The same goes for other durable goods.

While some Americans say they are willing to pay more for the benefits of protectionism—more jobs sewing clothes and assembling machinery and electronics—their enthusiasm may wane when the negatives on the export side of the ledger kick in. First to be hit would be American farmers and ranchers, who often export a third of their harvest and herds. Then it cascades down. Smaller crops mean fewer tractors, which mean less steel and so on. Then the folks who make big-ticket export items like jets and bulldozers are targeted for retaliation.

Surprisingly, even though business executives know how this movie ends—and it's badly—they remain in the balcony if not center stage. The question is when are they going to jeer? Mr. Trump ceded much of the Asia-Pacific export market by pulling out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, and the reaction from business was muted. Now the target is America's two largest export markets, Canada and Mexico. That puts a third of all U.S. exports at risk, and the president still receives polite golf claps. What's next, jerry-rigging trade statistics to exaggerate the trade

imbalance, or maybe giving China unfettered access to Africa by terminating the Africa Growth And Opportunity Act? Or exiting from the multilateral institutions—the United Nations, World Trade Organization, World Bank and International Monetary Fund? Even then I'm not sure the business community would yell fire.

Recently some CEOs publicly opposed the travel ban from seven Muslim countries

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Photographs by Mark Bonifacio for The Wall Street Journal

By Byron Tau and Natalie Andrews | Photographs by Mark Bonifacio for The Wall Street Journal

WATCHUNG, N.J.—A civic group, formed by a dozen friends after the election, prepared questions for a town-hall meeting hosted this week by U.S. Rep. Leonard Lance, a Republican who has served five terms in this affluent stretch of New Jersey.

Over strawberries and pretzels, members of the Voters of WatchungHills—one of dozens of similar groups that have sprouted in the state—debated how best to challenge Mr. Lance over GOP plans to dismantle the health-care law, and Russia's alleged interference in the presidential election.

The White House and prominent Republicans have largely dismissed the noisy eruption of civic activism at town-hall meetings across the U.S. as the work of professional organizers and paid activists, partly because MoveOn and other liberal groups have offered help.

Interviews by The Wall Street Journal at Mr. Lance's town hall and similar events across the U.S. suggest otherwise. Many participants were first-timers who echo in passion, though not in politics, the people who emerged early in the tea-party movement in 2009, when unhappy voters banded together against what they saw as government overreach by the Obama administration.

Of about 40 voters interviewed Wednesday at Mr. Lance's town hall, most said they had never participated in a town hall or any political activism and had only recently joined or started local groups. They shared an opposition to Trump administration positions, including on the health-care law, the environment and the stalled travel ban, and offer a warning sign for the Republican Party.

because it affected employees and customers. That's a start. Recent pro-trade, pro-immigration comments from Cargill CEO David MacLennan and the courageous 84 Lumber Super Bowl ad are good next steps.

Now it's time for corporate America collectively to speak out. Remember, it is OK to support those of President Trump's economic policies that make sense and could significantly improve U.S.

America's Rowdy Town Halls: More Organic Than Organized (UNE)

Byron Tau and Natalie Andrews |

Paid organizers? "I wouldn't even know how to find them," said Margaret Illis, 55 years old, who was among the town-hall rookies. She said her 23-year-old son taught her how to use Twitter so she could follow Mr. Trump's tweets.

A mother of four from Berkeley Heights, N.J., Ms. Illis had discussed the presidential election online through Facebook groups such as Pantsuit Nation, which supported Hillary Clinton. Mr. Trump's election prompted her to launch her own group, NJ7 Forward, she said, with about 20 people from Mr. Lance's congressional district. It exists largely as a Facebook group of about 800 that encourages people to call lawmakers and attend rallies.

"I'm just so not political. I've never been political," said Ms. Illis, who has voted for Mr. Lance. "I taught my kids values, and I vote every time, but that was it."

Hours before Mr. Lance's town hall, about a dozen people gathered to practice their questions at the home of Stuart Homer, a physician who described himself as a Democrat who has voted Republican. He is co-founder of Voters of WatchungHills, which grew from a conversation at a local synagogue to a dozen members at its first meeting to more than 60 now.

Wendy Robinson, another co-founder, is a registered Republican.

"We need to set an example for Congress: 'This is how you guys should be working it out,'" she said. "If we can get together and we can talk together and help solve policy issues, you should be able to as well."

Similar grass-roots efforts have emerged in Democratic strongholds on the coasts, as well as less likely spots in Utah, South Carolina and Watchung, a leafy, upscale community in New Jersey that has been long been a Republican stronghold.

Several state and national groups are working to connect these new activists online. They publicize

competitiveness while opposing others that would do lasting damage by jettisoning America's allies, friends and trading partners.

It's not an all-or-nothing proposition. But it is time for business to stop cowering and start publicly defending its international presence by forcefully speaking out against protectionism and isolationism.

If it doesn't, the topic of future business meetings will be about

meetings and events, and host online seminars on ways to influence members of Congress.

Some are new, such as Indivisibles, which was formed late last year by former congressional Democratic staff members in the wake of Mr. Trump's election. Others include such established liberal groups as MoveOn, Organizing for Action and Planned Parenthood, which seek to preserve the health-care law and derail Mr. Trump's legislative agenda.

White House spokesman Sean Spicer said Wednesday some of the new voter energy was driven by the "professional protester manufactured base." He acknowledged that many Americans were upset.

Democrats also looked skeptically at protests early in the first term of President Barack Obama. "This initiative is funded by the high-end. We call it AstroTurf—it's not really a grass-roots movement," said then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. "It's AstroTurf by some of the wealthiest people in America to keep the focus on tax cuts for the rich."

Robert Gibbs, the White House spokesman at the time, said one group "bragged about organizing and manufacturing" the anger by constituents at congressional town hall meetings.

Democrats were late to recognizing voter anger at Mr. Obama, and the electoral wave that later seized the House from their control in 2010.

Jason Pye, the director of public policy and legislative affairs at FreedomWorks, a conservative advocacy group that grew out of the 2009 protests, said the current movement is "an extension of the Clinton campaign more than anything else." The tea-party movement, by contrast, evolved into party activists challenging Republicans deemed insufficiently conservative, he said.

Nonetheless, Republicans see the danger of a newly energized political opposition and are urging their party to step up to the

how to game protectionism, manage decline, and blame others for lower standards of living—particularly since those meetings will certainly not be about job creation.

Mr. Lane recently retired as director of global government affairs at Caterpillar Inc. and was a registered lobbyist.

challenge. "You've got to match the energy on the left with the energy from the right," said Republican Gov. Sam Brownback of Kansas on Thursday at the annual meeting of the Conservative Political Action Conference, known as CPAC.

If the new liberal activism has a lasting political effect, it will probably be seen in districts such as Mr. Lance's. He won re-election last year by 9 percentage points, but Mr. Trump lost by a single point to Mrs. Clinton here. That makes his district a target for Democrats in the 2018 congressional races.

Mr. Lance brushed off suggestions of political peril. "I don't boast regarding these matters," he said, "but I believe my views are the views of the majority of the residents of this congressional district."

His 7th congressional district in New Jersey, like many others eyed by Democrats, is largely suburban with high incomes and high levels of education.

"A year ago I didn't even know I lived in District 7," said Beth Smith, a 59-year-old psychologist from Bedminster, N.J. "I'd go to vote, but I wouldn't vote in small elections. But now I'm trying to learn about local government more, because I'm finding out that that's more and more important."

She wore a pink knitted hat, a symbol of the Women's March in Washington last month, to Mr. Lance's town hall on Wednesday.

Voters at other town halls told similar stories. On Virginia's eastern shore, Lenore Hart Poyer formed a group with other women that they call their own version of Pantsuit Nation. Before a town hall hosted Wednesday by freshman Rep. Scott Taylor (R., Va.), the women studied videos of recent meetings.

"We noticed that what they had started doing was raising the colored signs—green for 'We support,' red for 'Hell, no,'" said Ms. Poyer, a 63-year-old novelist. "We decided to adopt that."

About 170 people showed up Wednesday to hear Mr. Taylor speak in Melfa, Va. Red signs flashed around the room like warning lights. The women's group estimated that 35 of its members were there.

"The makeup of our town halls for the most part,"

**The
Washington
Post**

Republicans distance themselves from Trump's agenda at rowdy town halls

<https://www.facebook.com/daveweigel?fref=ts>

GARNER, Iowa — When a voter here asked whether Sen. Charles E. Grassley supports a probe of President Trump's tax returns, the Republican gave a qualified "yes." In Virginia, asked about Russian interference in the presidential election, Rep. David Brat said an investigator should "follow the rule of law wherever it leads." And in Arkansas, Sen. Tom Cotton told 1,400 people sardined into a high school auditorium that the Affordable Care Act "has helped Arkansas."

This week's congressional town halls have repeatedly found Republicans hedging their support for the new president's agenda — and in many cases contradicting their past statements. Hostile questions put them on record criticizing some of the fights Trump has picked or pledging to protect policies such as the more popular elements of Obamacare. And voters got it all on tape, promising to keep hounding their lawmakers if they falter.

"There's more of a consensus among Republicans now that you've got to be more cautious with what you're going to do," Grassley said after an event here, referring to efforts to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act. "That didn't mean much to me in November and December. But it means a lot now."

No Republican could say that the raucous town halls surprised them. Since December, a growing number of liberal organizations and activists have shared strategies for getting public answers from members of Congress. More than a thousand local groups have been founded to organize around the Indivisible Guide, an organizational how-to manual drafted by former Democratic staffers. And thousands of Trump detractors — whether inspired by organized social-media efforts or there of their own volition — have shown up at town halls in their districts.

At the town halls, some activists have followed Indivisible advice, spreading themselves around the

Mr. Taylor said, "are people who don't support me."

In New Jersey, more than 900 people showed up at a local community college auditorium Wednesday for Mr. Lance's town hall. In the past, he would typically speak to fewer than 100. He fielded

rooms to avoid looking like a clique, holding up signs with simple messages such as "Disagree" and synchronizing their chants.

Americans are flocking to Republican legislators' town hall meetings with questions about health care, immigration and more. Americans are flocking to Republican legislators' town hall meetings with questions about health care, immigration and more. (Sarah Parnass/The Washington Post)

(Sarah Parnass/The Washington Post)

The efficiency of the protests has led some of their targets, including Trump, to question their legitimacy.

"The so-called angry crowds in home districts of some Republicans are actually, in numerous cases, planned out by liberal activists," Trump tweeted Tuesday.

[In N.J., record crowd at town hall presses Republican to get tough on Trump]

Coverage of the town halls in conservative media has largely focused on the role of liberal groups in organizing the protests, or the role of the Barack Obama-founded Organizing for America in promoting the Indivisible Guide.

"Obama told them to get in our faces," Rush Limbaugh told listeners of his radio show on Wednesday. "Well, they're in our faces now, and how's it working out? People are starting to get tired of it."

A number of Republicans have refused to hold town halls — and courted ridicule. In California, Colorado, Florida, North Carolina, Ohio and Pennsylvania, local Indivisible groups held "empty-chair town halls" where activists could meet — and note the absence of their legislators.

In Pennsylvania, activists propped up an empty suit to symbolize Sen. Patrick J. Toomey; in other states, following the guide, they posted dummy "Have You Seen Me?" ads. In New York, they derided Rep. Elise Stefanik for canceling town

more than a dozen questions, along with a few boos and jeers.

Mr. Lance required audience members to verify that they were his constituents before they were given a ticket—another change from 2009. That left many people outside demonstrating.

halls just a week after publishing a report, titled "Millennials & the GOP," urging more members of Congress to hold them.

"It is unfortunate and counterproductive that a small number of activists believe the best way to address the very serious issues facing our country is to hijack and ambush community events for the sole purpose of political theater," Stefanik wrote on Facebook.

[Republicans are facing the ire of the anti-Trump movement. Will it last?]

It's true that organization has boosted attendance at town halls.

"If you've got a personal connection to what this member of Congress is trying to do, you've got a great story to tell and a lot of legitimacy to ask that question," Indivisible Guide co-author Ezra Levin said Sunday night on a conference call that more than 30,000 people dialed in to hear. "It's really important to be polite, but don't be scared of being firm."

One lawmaker, Rep. Louie Gohmert (R-Tex.), issued a statement this week blaming his decision not to hold a town hall in person on "the threat of violence at town hall meetings." He pointed to a specific violent event to bolster his case, invoking the 2011 shooting that severely injured then-Rep. Gabrielle Giffords, an Arizona Democrat, and killed six others.

The former congresswoman responded Thursday, and she made clear that she does not agree with lawmakers shying away from meeting with members of the public. "To the politicians who have abandoned their civic obligations, I say this: Have some courage," Giffords said in a statement. "Face your constituents. Hold town halls."

Other Republicans who held public events this week have pushed back against Trump's characterization of protests and his attack on the media as an "enemy" of Americans.

"No American is another American's enemy," Cotton said Wednesday night. He also said: "I don't care if

"I don't think they were paid," the congressman said. "I think they came here in a manner of public spiritedness."

—Kate King, Siobhan Hughes and Rebecca Ballhaus contributed to this article.

anybody here is paid or not. You're all Arkansans."

Rep. Justin Amash (R-Mich.) tweeted Tuesday, referring to the protesters: "They are our fellow Americans with legitimate concerns. We need to stop acting so fragile."

[At a town hall in Trump country, an America that's pleading to be heard]

Although the National Republican Congressional Committee warned of possible violence at town halls, this week's events have been peaceful. The harshest treatment has been loud heckling at answers attendees have not liked, for instance when lawmakers struggled to defend the new secretary of education, Betsy DeVos, or to provide details on how the Affordable Care Act could be replaced.

In Iowa, Grassley was booed over his vote for DeVos, and he defended it only by saying that a president deserved to pick his Cabinet. In Louisiana, Sen. Bill Cassidy was laughed at for saying he had not stayed for the entire DeVos hearing.

Cassidy, a doctor, is the author of an ACA replacement bill that Republicans such as Grassley have tentatively endorsed. It would allow states to keep the structure of the ACA, including its Medicaid expansion, even if other states opted out.

Rep. Mark Meadows (R-N.C.), chairman of the House Freedom Caucus, has derided that solution. "If you like your Obamacare, you can keep your Obamacare," is how Meadows described it — a wry reference to an Obama pledge about individual plans that was belied when the ACA went into effect.

[Dave Brat: 'I thought it was going to be worse']

The Republicans who've emerged from town halls with fewer bruises had already promised to save major portions of the law. Rep. Leonard Lance (N.J.), one of 23 Republicans whose districts voted for Hillary Clinton over Trump, told an audience Wednesday night that he

would go for a replacement plan only if it saved popular parts of the ACA.

"I do not favor repeal without there being a replacement in place," he said. Instead, he explained to a patient crowd that he wants to protect coverage for people with preexisting conditions, allow people under 26 to remain on their parents' plans and ensure no lifetime caps on coverage. "I want to assure the public that the majority in each house of the present Congress, I believe, will make sure these provisions continue," he said.

Rep. Marsha Blackburn (R-Tenn.), a staunch Trump supporter from a deep red district, told constituents Wednesday that "preexisting

conditions and 26-year-olds were the two Republican provisions that made it into the bill" and would obviously be part of a replacement.

But in 2009, it was Democrats, not Republicans, who introduced those provisions of the ACA. The replacement framework from Republican leadership promises "continuous coverage" for people with preexisting conditions and also current health-care plans; only the Cassidy plan, co-sponsored by moderate Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine) and derided by conservatives, goes further.

Republicans have also struggled to answer constituents who took advantage of the ACA provision that allowed states to expand Medicaid

to some people over the poverty line. In Cotton's state, where a Republican-run government has maintained a version of the expansion called "Arkansas Works," more than 300,000 people are estimated to have received coverage since the ACA went into effect.

Those results, and the stakes of repeal, were less clear when Cotton won his seat. The ACA, he said during a town hall meeting in 2014, was "nothing but a churn operation designed to grow the power of the federal government." That year, he defeated an incumbent Democrat by 17 points.

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Kim Kavin in Branchburg, N.J., and Mark Berman in Washington contributed to this report.

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Correction: In an earlier version of this article, a quote from Rep. Leonard Lance on repealing the Affordable Care Act appeared in two places, potentially making it seem the statement was from Rep. Mark Meadows. Also, Sen. Patrick J. Toomey was misidentified as a member of the House. This version has been corrected.

**THE WALL
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JOURNAL.**

Van Dyk : Fellow Democrats, Your Effort to Destroy the President Is Abnormal

Ted Van Dyk

Feb. 23, 2017 7:00 p.m. ET

Donald Trump has been in office barely a month, and already Capitol Hill Democrats and liberal commentators are plotting his removal from office. A typical headline asked: "How Can We Get Rid of Trump?"

You can't. Mr. Trump was fairly elected to a four-year term, which he will serve unless legitimate grounds emerge for impeachment. It's time to move from 24-hour rage to serious consideration of the president's policy proposals and, where appropriate, offering alternatives.

Critics could begin by recognizing that Mr. Trump's agenda is not unlike the one John F. Kennedy put forth in 1960. JFK proposed tax cuts "to get America moving again" and a defense buildup to blunt Soviet and Chinese territorial ambitions.

Democrats could then offer constructive ideas of their own for dealing with the nation's problems. Had Hillary Clinton been elected, she would be busy today trying to fix the cost and coverage problems of ObamaCare, as Mr. Trump and the Republicans are. Before the new administration has even introduced its proposal, Democrats are pretending that ObamaCare

repeal would be followed by nothing and that Mr. Trump is trying to "make America sick again."

Likewise on immigration, any country must control its borders. Mr. Trump has taken a pragmatic position that illegal aliens who commit crimes should be deported but suggested that so-called Dreamers, who were children when their parents brought them here illegally, should be treated more generously. He also proposes a short-term hold on immigration from seven countries where terrorists are active, during which new rules may be established for immigration from those countries. Rather than denouncing Mr. Trump as anti-Latino, anti-Muslim or xenophobic, let us await his administration's longer-term proposals and engage with them in a serious way.

I did not support Mr. Trump's election. My own Democratic primary vote went to Sen. Bernie Sanders—not because of his Brooklyn 1930s agenda but because he is an honest and authentic man who offered an alternative to the big-money, poll-driven politics that had taken over my party.

I resented mainstream media's unfair tilt toward Mr. Trump in the GOP contest. CBS's chairman, Les Moonves, said a year ago that Mr.

Trump's candidacy "may not be good for America, but it's damn good for CBS," because he produced such good ratings.

It apparently never occurred to Trump-promoting media that their disproportionate coverage of his campaign was moving toward the presidency a candidate without experience in public service or much apparent knowledge of past and present public policy. Having helped him to the GOP nomination, the same media now are scandalized because he is doing what he promised.

My own political involvement dates to 1948, when I canvassed door to door for President Truman. I subsequently was active in civil-rights, anti-Vietnam War and antipoverty causes and served in two Democratic administrations. In all that time I have never seen such a concerted effort to discredit and destroy a new administration.

Before 2017 not only the opposition party but media gave the incoming president leeway. Nearly every modern president has had to withdraw one or more cabinet nominations. Nearly all have had cabinet or White House staff shake-ups. Presidents Carter, Clinton and Obama all made embarrassing early stumbles, which were forgiven. The media overlooked "R-

rated" personal conduct by Kennedy and Mr. Clinton and properly focused instead on their public duties.

You need not be a Trump supporter to conclude that the present anti-Trump media tirades are something new and disturbing. Free and independent media are vital to our democracy. But freedom must be accompanied by responsibility. President Trump came to office with the complicity of now-critical media, and riding a populist wave that also carried Mr. Sanders far into the Democratic nominating process.

Mr. Trump is demonstrating in office what was apparent from the day he announced his candidacy: He lacks experience, knowledge and governing temperament. But he deserves the same chance to govern that his predecessors were afforded. The manufactured rage in the media and political opposition is taking us to even angrier polarization in the country, and it will last longer than four years.

Mr. Van Dyk was active over 40 years in Democratic national policy and politics. He is author of "Heroes, Hacks and Fools" (University of Washington Press, 2007).