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# FRANCE - EUROPE

The  
Washington  
Post

## Dreyfuss : The tragedy of Theo L. reveals France's failures on race

By Joel Dreyfuss

PARIS — This is for all those Americans who like to complain about “the race card” being played whenever there is a confrontation between members of minority groups and the police. France is a country fervently attached to the concept of “color-blindness.” Keeping racial statistics is against the law. Politicians talk about the unifying value of “republicanism” and look unfavorably on organizations based on race and ethnicity.

Then there was the violent incident with a familiar ring: A policeman in a Paris suburb was accused of sodomizing a young man with a nightstick earlier this month during a confrontation. It brings back memories of Abner Louima, the Haitian immigrant who suffered a similar fate in Brooklyn precinct cell in 1997 at the hands of New York Police Department officers using a broken broom handle. The incident quickly became an allegory of out-of-control cops in minority communities.

But because this is France, the event has been handled in a particularly Gallic way. No one in France rushed to explicitly define the incident as a racial confrontation. Almost two weeks after the Feb. 2 episode at Aulnay-sous-Bois — despite its melodic name, one of the restive Paris “banlieues,” or suburban towns where many immigrants live — the victim is still only known as Theo L., without a mention of his race, due to French privacy laws. However, television interviews with Theo L. and his parents quickly revealed that he was black. The police officers involved have not been named and no photos of them have appeared,

although three have been charged with aggravated assault and one with aggravated rape.

Politics newsletter

The big stories and commentary shaping the day.

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The brutal episode set off a flurry of protests in the banlieues around Paris, some of which have ended violently with rock-throwing and cars on fire, resulting in 245 arrests, according to the interior ministry. There have also been peaceful marches and protests around France calling for an end to police brutality and demanding justice.

With the French presidential campaign fully underway, politicians seemed remarkably restrained in response to the protests at first. Prime Minister Bernard Cazeneuve was conciliatory toward the protesters, saying that “understandable emotions” could not justify violence. Theo L. appealed for peace from his hospital bed. In a gesture hard to imagine in the United States, President François Hollande visited Theo's bedside and praised his effort to calm the waters, promising that “justice will be done.” Yet the internal police investigation resulted in a finding that Theo's injuries, which included a 2.5-inch tear in his anus, were not intentional.

When violent protests continued, the presidential candidates finally weighed in. François Fillon, the right-of-center candidate, insisted that “all the truth must come out” but condemned the violence. Left-wing candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon suggested that the violence was being encouraged, without

specifying by whom. Predictably, National Front candidate Marine Le Pen sided with the police, condemning the permissiveness of “politicians who have governed us for years.” One of her deputies in the far-right party was more blunt, blaming the violence on “racaille,” or rabble. Fillon, who is trying to draw voters from Le Pen, then one-upped his position by calling for treating as adults teens as young as 16 who are accused of attacking police.

The harsh label echoed the hard-line response of former president Nicolas Sarkozy, who as interior minister in 2005 promised to sweep the “rabble” from the streets with high-pressure hoses when riots erupted all over France after the deaths of two minority youths being chased by police.

Despite its commitment to color-blindness, France has made uneven racial progress. Interracial couples and families are common. The 2017 Miss France is from French Guiana. Yet discrimination in employment is widespread. In the banlieues, unemployment is 27 percent vs. 10 percent for the rest of the country. Outside of sports and entertainment, few members of France's growing minority population have reached significant or visible positions in French society. It was only in 2012 that Omar Sy became the first black actor to win a César, the French equivalent of an Oscar. In 2015, novelist Alain Mabanckou was the first black writer elected to France's most prestigious academic institution, the nearly 500-year-old Collège de France. Hollande's former justice minister Christiane Taubira, a native of French Guiana, was a high-profile presence but resigned last year in a disagreement

with his government over anti-terrorism measures.

The lack of highly visible minorities has also meant a paucity of influential minority spokespersons. Few blacks or Arabs have participated in the discussions of the unrest on France's multitudinous political talk shows. The long-standing tensions between the police and French minorities or the problems of these communities have largely been ignored in this year's presidential campaign — until now. Yet a 2016 study by the Defender of Rights, a government watchdog, showed that young blacks or Arabs were seven times more likely than whites to be stopped and searched by police. Promises made by Hollande during his 2012 campaign to reduce unemployment, improve schools and require the police to issue a receipt after each stop-and-frisk check have not been implemented. Instead, French legislators this week are voting to give police officers a freer hand at opening fire in self-defense.

After several days of unrest, the prime minister finally met with representatives of anti-racism organizations Monday. The results were not encouraging, according to TV reports. “We didn't feel we were heard,” said Aïssa Sago, head of a women's group in Aulnay-sous-Bois that tries to mediate conflict. The long-term consequences could be political. Blaise Cuéco, regional head of SOS Racisme, warned in a TV interview, “Each time you burn a car, it's thousands of votes for Marine Le Pen.” Chances are that the race card will be played in the election, but without having to call it what it is.

The  
New York  
Times

## Trudeau, Praising the E.U., Doesn't Mention 'Brexit' or Trump

James Kanter

And yet it nearly fell through: In October, Mr. Trudeau had to postpone a trip to Brussels until concessions were made by the Belgian government, including promises to protect farmers that put the deal back on track.

Mr. Trudeau indirectly alluded on Thursday to the anxieties that have

propelled populist movements, especially immigration, which is a major worry for the British voters who decided to leave the European Union and for the American voters who put Mr. Trump, a political outsider, into the White House.

“We live in a time when some people are worried that the current system only benefits society's narrow elite,” Mr. Trudeau said.

“And their concern is valid. This anxiety towards the economy and trade — the worry that our kids won't have access to the same jobs and opportunities that we have — can be addressed only if we ensure that trade is inclusive, and that everyone benefits.”

The Canada-European Union deal, known as the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, or

CETA, “is a terrific example of just that,” he continued.

He acknowledged that protectionist forces had placed open economies under tremendous pressure, and he stressed that trade deals must work for ordinary people and help to improve the average person's standard of living. “If we are successful, CETA will become the blueprint for all ambitious future

trade deals," he said. "If we are not, this could well be one of the last."

Mr. Trudeau's speech was a notable counterpoint to the rhetoric of Mr. Trump and, to a lesser extent, that of Britain's prime minister, Theresa May, both of whom have questioned the European Union's relevance and even its long-term future. Mr. Trudeau's message for the European Union, an alliance that is facing profound, even existential, challenges, seemed intended to bolster its morale.

"The European Union is a truly remarkable achievement and an unprecedented model for peaceful cooperation," Mr. Trudeau said. "Canada knows that an effective European voice on the global stage isn't just preferable — it's essential."

He added: "We know that the E.U. is the world's largest donor of development and humanitarian assistance, and that, together, your member states represent one of the world's largest economies. Not only that, but you are a vital, central player in addressing the challenges that we collectively face as an

international community."

Mr. Trudeau's approach stands in sharp contrast to President Trump's moves to shut out refugees, overturn trade deals and denigrate multilateral organizations, including the European Union and the United Nations. That made Mr. Trudeau a particularly welcome guest.

"We share the same vision of an open world and the need to cooperate together to provide hard and fast answers to the problems faced by our citizens, whether we are talking about fighting terrorism, the security issues, management of migration, jobs and growth or climate change," said Antonio Tajani, the president of the European Parliament.

Accompanied into the parliamentary chamber by ushers wearing white bow ties and gloves, Mr. Trudeau spoke partly in French, which is customary for a Canadian leader, but also appeared to underscore his country's affinity with Europe.

Adding that it was an honor to address the chamber, Mr. Trudeau said that Europe and Canada had

"built something — something important — especially at this moment on your continent and mine," referring to the trade agreement.

The deal still must be approved by national and regional parliaments in Europe, and it could face a number of obstacles during that process. For their part, Canadians were making "steady progress" toward ratification of the deal, François-Philippe Champagne, the Canadian minister for international trade, said at a news conference on Wednesday.

His boss, Mr. Trudeau, said at the news conference: "We're in a globalized world, and how we make sure that we are turning that into opportunities for small businesses and our citizens is the challenge of our times."

Asked about his meeting on Monday with Mr. Trump in Washington, Mr. Trudeau said that they at least had seen eye-to-eye in some areas, and that it should be possible to find "common ground." He added: "Good relations with one's neighbors is a great way of getting things done."

Earlier, a number of lawmakers took the opportunity of a close brush with Mr. Trudeau to take pictures with their cellphones. Opponents of the trade deal were mostly muted, though at least one sign condemning the pact could be seen as Mr. Trudeau spoke.

Philippe Lamberts, a Belgian member of the European Parliament, underlined the benefits of having Mr. Trudeau as an ally at a time when relations with the United States were fraying. (Mr. Lamberts, who is a leader of the Greens in the European Parliament, has previously stressed the importance of trade-deal provisions that protect the environment and consumers.)

"Justin Trudeau's government has been a positive contrast to the attitude of the Trump on CETA administration," he said in a statement. "However, in continuing the work of his predecessor, Trudeau has shown himself to be more a man of continuity than one looking to disrupt the status quo."

## THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

### U.K. Seeks to Limit Post-Brexit Trade Pain

Stephen Fidler

Feb. 16, 2017

1:26 p.m. ET

The U.K. is already putting out feelers about its future trading relations outside the European Union, which for more than 40 years has handled the country's trade arrangements with the rest of the world.

The message British officials are delivering is one of a government committed to minimizing disruption to trade. As part of that, the U.K. is testing reaction to the idea that it will replicate the EU's current schedule of tariffs to the rest of the world.

"That may facilitate things," said Roberto Azevêdo, director-general of the World Trade Organization, in a January interview.

Yet the U.K. faces enormous hurdles in avoiding disruption to its own trade. And even if everything goes well, it will almost inevitably face reduced access to foreign markets immediately after it leaves the bloc, expected in just over two years.

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That is largely because of the complexity of the task—and the interdependence of the several negotiating strands the U.K.'s new trade officials will have to pursue.

Not only will the U.K. need to work out its tariff schedule with the WTO, but it also must carve out a new trade relationship with the EU and a possible transitional deal to bridge to it. The WTO deal can't be finalized until aspects of Britain's agreement with the EU are known.

Some difficulties have been overblown. The U.K. is already a member of the WTO with all its rights and obligations. Its WTO negotiations may be complex, but they won't be blocked, as some commentators have suggested, by political considerations such as Argentina's dispute with the U.K. over the Falkland Islands or any Russian effort to thwart the process.

The WTO doesn't work like that. Objectors must sustain a claim before a disputes panel that their trade has been harmed—in which case they, and only they, may secure the right to levy their own duties against the offender to offset the damage caused. There is no national veto that would prevent the U.K. from trading with the rest of the world.

But there are devils, for sure, in the detail. Other governments may be happy to accept the U.K.'s taking over the EU's tariffs schedule, but there are other aspects to be agreed beyond tariffs. These include the levels of so-called trade-distorting subsidies Britain plans to support its own farms. There are also tariff-rate quotas, which are agreed amounts of sensitive products, such as lamb, beef and sugar, that can be imported under a lower tariff before the tariff rate jumps. These discussions, Mr. Azevêdo said, "will be trickier."

The U.K. will need first to agree with the EU how much it takes of each tariff-rate quota, or TRQ—for example, what proportion each will take of the 228,254 metric tons of sheep meat New Zealand can now export at a zero tariff into the EU. Then, having agreed that, the U.K. and EU will present their agreement to the other WTO members. There are about 30 bilateral EU agreements on TRQs; not all will be sensitive but some will be. In the talks, it may make sense to look at historical trade patterns—for example, the U.K. buys almost all the lamb New Zealand exports to the EU.

But it is quite likely other countries will object to losing any favored access to the EU-27—and it isn't even clear other WTO members will concede to the creation of new TRQs with the U.K. This question alone suggests maintaining a positive U.K. relationship with the EU will be critical to both sides: Like the U.K., the EU could find itself the target of WTO complaints.

This is just a small part of their joint trade task in coming years. To minimize trade disruption, the EU and U.K. need a deep preferential trade deal, which under WTO rules has to cover "substantially all trade" between the two sides, and a likely interim arrangement to bridge to it.

The EU hasn't yet formally conceded that trade talks can run in



parallel with divorce proceedings, and officials insist the bloc wants some thorny questions, such as the U.K.'s Brexit bill, settled before talks can move on to other matters.

Trade experts say the U.K. should also try to seek continued access to the EU's existing free-trade

agreements with more than 50 countries. That would at the least need the agreement of the EU-27 and the other parties, and some European officials don't see how that could happen once the U.K. steps out the EU's customs union.

If these officials are right, the U.K.'s tariff-free access to other markets will shrink before increasing again once it strikes new preferential trade deals with other countries.

This will be happening amid the growth of other obstacles to trade with the EU, the country's largest

trading partner. Customs procedures and bureaucratic impediments to exporting will inevitably expand as the U.K. leaves the framework of common rules and regulations of the EU single market and customs union.



## Robertson : Chaos in the White House is causing concern in Europe

Nic Robertson is CNN's International Diplomatic Editor. The opinions expressed in this article are his.

(CNN)Watching from Europe, it's hard to tell if we are playing audience to a farce, a tragedy, or both unfolding simultaneously in the White House.

Given how critical any details emanating from the White House are to assuage European worries about President Donald Trump's intended relationship with Russia, this should not be a laughing matter. But it's pretty hard not to grimace and grin.

It seems a farce because of the inexperience among Trump's inner circle. His ludicrously quick attempts to deliver on campaign promises from the moment he stepped inside the White House seems at odds with the four-year term he has been handed.

The Constitution gives him plenty of time to ease into things, get to know the ropes: walk, then run. Instead, President Trump is speed administering.

Of course, some would argue that this is a smart move: a newly-elected president holds political capital that, if he doesn't spend, will quickly disappear. An experienced, seasoned politician might calculate that moving quickly on campaign promises might get the public on his side and put pressure on Congress to approve his plans. The problem is, the President isn't an experienced politician: he is a property developer who loves the camera.

If this were a tin-pot, third-world potentate, we'd probably write the leader off as an autocrat, fast-forwarding his rule to do all the fun bits first -- like burying the last guy's proudest achievements.

The tragedy is that there is time for everything Trump is trying to do. But inexperience and rushing in where wiser men hesitate is handing the world's most powerful man little but disaster and embarrassment so far.

Undoubtedly there are Americans who voted for Trump and are happy with what he is doing. Over here in the UK too, you'll find people who agree with his actions so far -- mostly Brexiters.

On both sides of the "pond," enough people feel left behind by the elite, don't trust them to fix the system they created and want change -- any change -- that they are happy they finally have a leader of the free world who is doing what he said he would.

Whether it's executive orders stuck in the courts, U-turns on China, Israel, NATO -- and now maybe on Russia -- or the firing of his national security adviser Mike Flynn, wherever Trump has so far hit the fast-forward button, he invariably ends up in reverse.

Amidst the whiplash of his missteps, his media flacks appear to be enacting some kind of amateur hour.

On Monday, presidential counselor Kellyanne Conway said Flynn had the full confidence of the President. Within an hour, White House press secretary Sean Spicer contradicted her, saying that Flynn's situation was under review.

Far from learning from this flagrant disparity and closing the gaps on their own information circle, they repeated the same sorry play Tuesday.

In the morning, Conway insisted that Flynn had resigned and was not forced to quit. By the evening, Spicer was contradicting her once again. The President, according to Spicer, demanded Flynn's resignation.

As both have struggled to understand and value the truth, they both look pretty foolish.

Who to believe? They can't both be right. Unless, of course, one or both of them is being lied to, which then raises a more serious question: who in Trump's inner circle is lying?

If you were scripting a comedy you'd be hard pressed to make this stuff up. "Saturday Night Live" writers have never had it so good: a veritable buffet of farce to feast upon and regurgitate for viewers every week.

For the arguably more mature members of Trump's administration emerging from Washington's poorly-lit corridors of power to come under the harsh scrutiny of European allies this week, the apparent buffoonery is excess baggage they could do without.

Those unfortunate men are Vice President Mike Pence, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Defense Secretary James Mattis.

That there are such obvious divisions in the lower echelons of White House power -- witness Conway and Spicer -- will be disconcerting, but not surprising to Trump's senior European counterparts.

That Pence was apparently out of the White House loop for two weeks on an important issue of national security will worry European diplomats far more.

That the vice president was not told that Trump's then-nominee for national security adviser, Mike Flynn, had misled him into denying conversations about sanctions with the Kremlin's top diplomat in DC weeks after Pence had gone on national TV defending Flynn against precisely those accusations will cause serious minds in Europe to question what else is being kept from America's top diplomats.

And what will Russia's foreign minister make of the week's biggest tangle when he meets his opposite number in Trump's cabinet, Tillerson?

The confidence in the Kremlin a few days ago -- with Flynn in place at the White House -- that they had a finger on the President's pulse is gone. And while they know Tillerson from his days in Moscow cutting oil deals for Exxon, it's not the same as having a close confidant, whose calls over Christmas appeared to calm Kremlin nerves as Obama expelled Russian diplomats.

All round, certainty is going to be in short supply; the divisions manifesting at the White House are only part of it.

Russia seems to realize that with Flynn gone, steadier hands might be starting to take control: their bellicose reaction to demands they get out of Crimea (first made over a week ago by Nikki Haley, Trump's ambassador to the UN) only emerged after Flynn's departure.

So while Pence, Tillerson and Mattis will meet Europe's top diplomats in the coming days, it's unlikely those diplomats will head back to their capitals feeling warm and fuzzy.

Undoubtedly, they will hope for clarity, particularly with regard to the US position on Russia. They might say a silent prayer that Trump's three top diplomats' stories align.

But they won't believe anything until they hear it from Trump's lips. Following his 75-minute confusing press conference on Thursday, they must be wondering even more how much of a disconnect he has with his top executives.

At this diplomatic level, farce is a precursor to tragedy.



## The rise of Trump has led to an unexpected twist in Germany's election: A resurgent left (UNE)

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

BERLIN — The unconventional administration of President Trump may be causing consternation among American liberals. But here

in Germany, the anchor of the European Union, Trump's rise is helping fuel an unexpected surge of the left.

What is happening in Germany is the kind of Trump bump perhaps never foreseen by his supporters — a boost not for the German

nationalists viewed as Trump's natural allies but for his fiercest critics in the center left. The Social Democrats (SPD) have bounced back under the charismatic Martin Schulz, the former head of the European Parliament who took over as party chairman last month and is now staging a surprisingly strong bid to unseat Chancellor Angela Merkel.

In a country that stands as a painful example of the disastrous effects of radical nationalism, Schulz is building a campaign in part around bold attacks on Trump. He has stopped well short of direct comparisons to Adolf Hitler, but Schulz recently mentioned Trump in the same speech in which he heralded his party's resistance to the Nazis in the lead-up to World War II.

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*[German politicians demand new deportation centers, re-vetting of migrants]*

"We will never give up our values, our freedom and democracy, no matter what challenges we are facing," Schulz said in a recent speech. He added, "That a U.S. president wants to put up walls, is thinking aloud about torture and attacks women, religious communities, minorities, people with handicaps, artists and intellectuals with brazen and dangerous comments is a breach of taboo that's unbearable."

His anti-Trump platform comes as Germans are questioning American power more than at any point since the end of the Cold War, illustrating an erosion of allied faith in the new era of "America first." A recent poll found that only 22 percent of Germans see the United States led by Trump as a "reliable partner" — putting it only one percentage point above Russia.

The traditional left remains in disarray in France and Britain. But buoyed by Schulz's approach, his party last week pulled ahead of Merkel's center-right Christian Democrats in opinion polls for the first time in six years. Elections are not until September, but analysts are giving the SPD, under Schulz, its best chances to regain power since Gerhard Schröder lost to Merkel in 2005.

"There are different factors that are coming together for the SPD," said Ralf Stegner, the party's deputy chairman. "Schulz has provided a new impulse for people who were waiting to come back ... but also, the new American president, because Trump's presidency has politicized the German public, making them more active and aware."

Without naming names, Merkel, who was perhaps closer to President Barack Obama than any world leader, has taken aim at Trump — criticizing, for instance, his refugee ban. But Schulz has also accused Merkel of being too diplomatic.

*[In Germany, the language of Nazism is no longer buried in the past]*

Germany, which shoulders the history of Nazi tyranny, is an outlier in containing the current spread of far-right parties and isolationist politics gain ground elsewhere in Europe, the largest right-wing populist party here — the Alternative for Germany — has fallen slightly in the polls since Trump's election.

At the same time, left-wing parties in Germany have seen a jump in dues-paying members. There are also signs that Trump's election is making left-leaning voters in Germany more politically active.

Take, for instance, Kristina Seidler, a 28-year-old mother and Düsseldorf resident who works as a substantiality adviser for a textile company. She has voted for the SPD before. But the day after

Trump's victory, she signed up as a dues-paying member and party volunteer.

Horrified by Trump's win, she said she sees the traditional left as the only answer and is preparing to put up posters and help with campaigning as the German election season rolls into high gear.

"What kind of sign is it for the world when a man who is a racist, who treats women so badly, can become the president of the United States?" Seidler said. "I thought, 'It's time for me to do something.'"

Perhaps the biggest single driver of the SPD's new popularity, however, is Schulz.

The SPD is already part of Merkel's governing "grand coalition," with the party's senior operatives filling top cabinet posts. Yet its popularity with its left-leaning base has been hampered by that power-sharing deal. Under its former chairman, Sigmar Gabriel — Merkel's foreign minister — the SPD was struggling to distance itself from the current government.

Enter Schulz, who last month took over as the party's chairman and candidate, positioning himself as an "outsider" who could mix things up in Berlin. A 61-year-old who never finished high school, Schulz has embraced his imperfections, openly speaking about his battle with alcoholism. He started in local politics, becoming the mayor of the western German town of Würselen before being elected to the European Parliament in 1994.

He rose through the ranks as a champion of European unity, civil rights and social justice, becoming the parliament's president in 2012. He has at times been chided for his tell-it-like-it-is approach, drawing the wrath of the Hungarian and Polish governments after decrying democratic lapses in those countries.

Critics call Schulz similar to Trump in at least one regard: He is a

straight talker who argues against elites and favors the common man. He is also blunt — a trait that contrasts with Merkel, a leader famous for her meandering, parsed answers.

"The way in which he conjures up the alleged division of society in a populist manner is along the lines of the post-factual methods of the U.S. election campaign," Merkel's finance minister, Wolfgang Schäuble, charged in *Der Spiegel* last week

In the dealmaking game that is coalition governments, Schulz may have several paths to the chancellery if his party can maintain its momentum. It will be difficult, analysts say, but Schulz's rising popularity means it is no longer unthinkable that Merkel loses.

*[Germany used to be migrants' promised land. Now, it's turning them back.]*

Merkel's open-door policy for refugees brought a barrage of criticism from the conservative wing of her party. And despite Merkel's hesitance, Horst Seehofer, head of her sister party, the Christian Social Union, appears to be extending his hand to Trump, praising the new president's "consistency" and "speed" in implementing his campaign promises.

A Merkel loss could mean a greater frost in German-U. S. relations, harking back to the days of Schröder's cool relationship with President George W. Bush. Merkel, while hardly cozying up to Trump, has nevertheless avoided outright conflict. Analysts call that further evidence of her pragmatism and firm belief that Germany needs the United States, diplomatically and for collective defense.

"Going after Trump might be a smart strategy for winning elections but not for running a government," said Jürgen Falter, a political scientist at Mainz University.

**THE WALL  
STREET  
JOURNAL.**

5:33 a.m. ET

BERLIN—A battle is raging in Central Europe over the balance of power—the electrical kind.

Poland and the Czech Republic see Germany as an aggressor, overproducing electricity and dumping it across the border. Germany sees itself as a green-energy pioneer under unfair attacks from less innovative neighbors.

## In Central Europe, Germany's Renewable Revolution Causes Friction

Zeke Turner

Feb. 16, 2017

As part of Chancellor Angela Merkel's *Energiewende*, or energy revolution, Germany will shut its nuclear power plants by 2022 and replace them with its rapidly expanding wind and solar power.

But the volatile renewables don't always perform, and the Germans are also relying on coal- and gas-powered plants to keep the lights on.

That creates problems on windy and sunny days when Germany produces far more electricity than it

needs. Excess power spills over the border into Polish and Czech territory, threatening their electrical grids with collapse, companies and governments there say.

It is "collateral damage of a purely political decision of the German government," said Barbora Peterova, the spokeswoman for CEPS A.S., the Czech national grid. There has been "no consultation and no discussion about the impact."

German companies don't deny that erratic power flows are a problem, but they argue that overloads are largely due to outdated grids on both sides of the border.

"A chain is only as strong as its weakest link," said Gert Schwarzbach, the head of interconnectors at 50Hertz Transmission GmbH, a grid operator responsible for power lines that cross into Poland and the Czech Republic in northeastern Germany.

But the problem has been aggravated by Germany's decadelong struggle to build high-voltage power lines that can carry energy from windmills in its gale-battered north to its industrial power gluttons in the south. That delay has forced it to use its neighbors' grids to shuttle power southward, putting their local networks under heavy stress and at risk of blackouts.

"It has clogged all of the interconnections," said Grzegorz Wilinski, a senior official at the Polish Electricity Association and deputy director of strategy at Polska Grupa Energetyczna SA, Poland's biggest energy company.

To bear the weight of German power, Prague and Warsaw are now investing millions in higher voltage wires and installing transformers at the border to redirect the power back to German turf.

CEPS and Polish grid-operator Polskie Sieci Elektroenergetyczne SA have spent about €115 million (\$122 million) for the massive transformers, known as phase-

shifters. Poland has invested \$300 million last year to update its grid and substations, according to a spokeswoman for the country's national grid.

German grid operators aren't standing still. 50Hertz is adding its own transformers in two locations on the German side of the border to help tame the overflow. But the installation of one transformer has been delayed by three years and costs have ballooned to about €100 million because of a court case, according to 50Hertz's Mr. Schwarzbach.

"It's clear that rebuilding our energy supply is a long-term process where further steps are needed," said a spokeswoman for Germany's economics ministry.

Meanwhile, Czech and Polish customers have been left covering the costs. The fallout has become acute for Polish and Czech coal power companies. Because the grids are clogged up by German electricity, the companies' ability to trade the power they produce has

been impaired, in the same way that a congested tunnel prevents more cars from entering.

Vladimir Budinsky, head of foreign affairs at a mining subsidiary of CEZ Group, the Czech Republic's biggest power company, said the group can't trade electricity across its border to Poland, where megawatt-hours are €6 more expensive, because there is no space on the grid.

"At this moment there is no capacity," he said. "We can't do this business."

Polish power plants, according to Mr. Wilinski, are now burning four million tons less coal a year—the equivalent of closing one large power station—than they did before 2008 when Germany's wind and solar capacity began to surge.

The Polish government has sought compensation from Germany during discussions over the past seven years, but it has struggled to demonstrate that German grid activity is causing the congestion,

according to Waldemar Lagoda, head of international communication in the energy department at Poland's economics ministry.

"Portions of electricity are not marked [in the grid] so that phenomenon was not so easy to prove," he said.

And for companies, the cost of resolving grid imbalances has to be split in half between the two parties involved, under European Union rules. When it comes to the bigger damages like lost business or equipment upgrades, "that's just part of the business," said Mr. Wilinski.

Andreas Jahn, a senior researcher at the Regulatory Assistance Project in Berlin, said that until Germany can finish outfitting its own network of power lines, its neighbors have few choices but to cope with the whims of Germany's energy revolution.

"The only other option left," he said, "would be to close the border."

## The New York Times Bild Apologizes for False Article on Sexual Assaults in Frankfurt by Migrants

Melissa Eddy

BERLIN — The German mass-circulation daily Bild has "emphatically" apologized to its readers for an article that said a "mob" of Arab men had sexually assaulted women on New Year's Eve in a Frankfurt restaurant, after the police said that an investigation had failed to turn up any evidence.

The accusations carried echoes of genuine attacks on New Year's Eve a year earlier, and Nadja Niesen, a spokeswoman for prosecutors in Frankfurt, said on Thursday that the authorities had opened a preliminary investigation of two people suspected of fabricating a crime.

In its Feb. 6 report, Bild, the most widely read newspaper in Germany, quoted Jan Mai, the owner of a cafe in downtown Frankfurt, as saying that 50 "Arab-looking men" had assaulted women on Dec. 31. It also quoted a woman it identified only as Irina A., 27, who said she had been among those who were groped "everywhere" by the men.

The article mirrored a high-profile episode in Cologne a year earlier, when hundreds of women reported being robbed or sexually attacked on New Year's Eve, some by groups of migrants and newly arrived asylum seekers.

The Bild report from Frankfurt was picked up by other outlets and was

widely shared on social media. More than a week later, after the Frankfurt police and other news organizations cast doubt on the allegations, Bild conceded that the attacks described in the article "did not take place," and it removed the article from its digital platforms.

"The editorial staff of Bild emphatically apologizes for this untrue report and the allegations that it made against those concerned," the newspaper said in a note published online on Tuesday that cited the police findings and pledged an internal review. "This reporting in no way reflects the journalistic standards of Bild."

### The Data on Migrant Crime

Germany's federal police compiled migrant crime statistics for 2015 and released a report in June as part of efforts to calm a heated debate. Migrants commit a smaller share of crimes than their proportion of the overall population.

#### • All Crimes

The share of foreigners, including migrants, among Germany's roughly 81 million people is less than **10 percent**. But, proportionally, far fewer of the roughly two million people investigated for all crimes committed in 2015 were migrants: just **6 percent**.

#### • Violent Crimes

Of 2,721 crimes that ended in a death, migrants were responsible for about **9 percent**. And of 1,683 cases of sexual abuse, including rape, they were responsible for about **5 percent**.

Bild has a daily circulation of 2.5 million and often sets the tone for political discussions in Germany, and the decision by prosecutors to open an investigation reflects broader concerns in the country about the spreading of false stories and anti-immigrant or anti-European propaganda.

Chancellor Angela Merkel, under whose leadership Germany admitted 890,000 asylum seekers in 2015, is seeking a fourth term this year. Both she and her refugee policy have been the subjects of false news reports and base insults, which officials worry are aimed at whipping up fear and at shifting perceptions before the vote on Sept. 24.

Marcus Pretzell, a member of the far-right party Alternative for Germany, described the 12 victims of a truck attack on a Christmas market in Berlin as "Merkel's dead" on social media.

Separately, a report in the Russian news media claimed that a Russian-German teenager had been raped by refugees, setting off protests by Russian-speaking Germans who said they felt unsafe, and spreading

to the highest levels of diplomacy before the accusations were questioned seriously enough to dampen their spread.

Other newspapers, including the conservative Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung and the left-leaning Taz, had swiftly published articles questioning the claims in the Russian report. But they were not accepted as false until the police discovered that the teenager had been with her boyfriend at the time of the alleged assault.

The Frankfurt police initially disputed the Bild article on the New Year's Eve attack, saying that they had no reports of such events that night. On Tuesday, they said that an investigation of testimony by the owner of the cafe and by a woman who said she had been assaulted had failed to turn up any evidence.

"The questioning of the named witnesses led to considerable doubt about the events described," the Frankfurt police said in a statement on Tuesday, adding that they were examining whether those who fabricated the accusations could be asked to pay for the cost of the investigation.

Mr. Mai could not be reached on Thursday. Both his personal Facebook page and that of his cafe appear to have been taken down.



## Paul : Only Germans Love the Euro These Days

Jean-Michel Paul

French presidential candidate Marine Le Pen unsettled investors with her pledge to pull France out of the euro and re-denominate all French debt in newly minted francs. Polls suggest Le Pen won't get the chance; she is expected to lose a second-round runoff. Even if polls are correct this time, that doesn't mean the euro is safe.

In fact, political support for the single currency has been waning -- especially in Germany's two largest euro-zone trading partners.

In both France and Italy, there is now a plurality of support for candidates who advocate a withdrawal from the euro, with pro-euro candidates gathering less than 30 percent in polls. In France, anti-euro candidates -- Le Pen and Socialist Jean-Luc Melanchon -- together have nearly 40 percent support. Of course, that doesn't mean that all of Le Pen's supporters, or Melanchon's, oppose the euro. Most French voters still tell pollsters they favor the euro; but clearly that support waning, as the latest Eurobarometer poll showed. Anti-euro sentiment, once a blip on the fringes of public opinion, is now credible and has found its way onto political platforms.

Respondents are asked whether they think the euro is a good or bad thing for their country. In Italy, the euro gets even less love than in France, with 47 percent saying the

euro is a "bad" thing for their country. That is in stark contrast to Germany, where there is now a clear majority in favor of the euro. This chart shows how opinion has changed over time:

Who Still Loves the Euro?

Net results in answer to the question of whether the euro is a good or bad thing for your country.

Source: Eurobarometer

This is a dramatic reversal in opinion: A German population that was initially reluctant to give up the Deutsche mark is now firmly wedded to the euro, while support in France and Italy has declined (particularly sharply in Italy's case). But this shift is the logical result of the euro's structural deficiencies. German industry, whose productivity has been increasing more than its European counterparts, now dominates the continental economy. While German unemployment was decreasing and its economy recovering from the financial crisis, Italy was stagnant with rising unemployment. Already saddled with a very large public debt (now over 130 percent of gross domestic product), Italy could neither reflate its economy, nor bail out its banks, while whole segments of its industry, particularly in lower and medium-cost goods, have disappeared.

France also struggled with competitiveness and has coped by increasing the public debt burden

and accepting high levels of unemployment. The euro made it impossible for intra-European exchange rates to adjust to reflect the relative attractiveness of the euro zone economies. And there are no U.S.-style material federal fiscal transfers to smooth imbalances.

The result has been high unemployment, slow growth and accelerating capital flight from the periphery countries. Target 2, which measures liabilities resulting from cross-border payments between euro-zone central banks, now shows very high imbalances for Spain and Italy. If the euro were to break up, the ECB would insist that it is owed a very large debt by the southern tier, as ECB chief Mario Draghi made clear recently.

Growing Imbalance

Target 2 balances, in billions of euros

Source: European Central Bank via Bloomberg

The current recovery may help postpone the moment of truth, but an unpalatable decision is inevitable between two equally difficult options. One option is to reform the system so that the euro zone becomes a functioning monetary union with the possibility of real fiscal transfers and enforceable structural reforms. That requires treaty changes; an arduous process at best in Europe. The alternative is that the euro zone splits up and national central banks,

which have continued as part of the system of European central banks, regain control over national currencies. This is technically possible, though as economist Barry Eichengreen wrote here recently, there is no doubt that it would entail large-scale disruptions.

Politically, however, the dynamic is clear. Emboldened by the success of populist movements in Britain and the U.S., anti-establishment parties have increasingly made the euro their target. A monetary union is also a political and social contract. When local political majorities no longer accept its implications, the union is endangered.

The euro may well survive this year's wave of elections and populist calls for a return to national currencies. But without reforms the structural imbalances will only get larger and political opposition will grow. Even if Le Pen doesn't get her way, she has started a conversation that the rest of Europe will no longer be able to ignore.

(Corrects labeling in the Target 2 chart to show the light grey line indicates Germany.)

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

## INTERNATIONAL



### Editorial : The UN's step for justice in Syria

The Christian Science Monitor

February 16, 2017 —After six years of a brutal war in Syria, the United Nations took a concrete step this month to help heal Syrian society once the war ends. It set up an office for the formal investigation of war crimes in Syria to collect hard evidence for the future prosecution of perpetrators on all sides in the conflict.

The idea is to prepare for the day when Syrian victims of the war can find justice in a courtroom. Such post-conflict tribunals have become more common for countries that have experienced mass atrocities, such as the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. They reestablish a critical norm in a country -- that the rule of law must prevail over the killing of

innocent people. And they reveal the truth about war crimes, genocide, or crimes against humanity, which is necessary for a country to achieve national reconciliation.

At present, no court is set up to try suspected war criminals in the Syrian war. Most of the atrocities have been committed by forces of the Assad regime, which has been accused of conducting mass executions, using chemical weapons on civilians, and bombing hospitals and schools. The war also involves combatants from many other countries, including Russia.

Two years ago, Russia vetoed a proposal in the UN Security Council to have the International Criminal Court in The Hague begin to prosecute war crimes in Syria. Then, last December, the UN General

Assembly -- in defiance of Russia -- voted overwhelmingly to set up a special body to prepare evidence for the eventual prosecutions.

The vote reflected the power of the world humanitarian community in its effort to ensure international law prevails in Syria. The effort at the UN was led by Lichtenstein and Canada.

Several bodies, mainly private groups but also the Geneva-based Human Rights Council, have been collecting detailed information on atrocities in Syria. This new body is designed to collect and preserve information that can hold up in a court of law.

It remains unclear which court might eventually take such cases. That issue could be resolved in the

process of any peace talks that end the war. Even now, national courts that claim "universal jurisdiction" over war crimes could be handed suspected war criminals. On Thursday, a court in Sweden gave a life sentence to a Syrian man for his role in the execution-style murder of seven men in Idlib, Syria in 2012. The man had become a resident in Sweden.

More than 400,000 people have been killed in Syria since 2011, the greatest war atrocity of the 21st century. When peace, and perhaps democracy, finally come to Syria, it will need formal justice and societal healing to prevent a cycle of revenge and retaliation. As a first step, the UN's new team of investigators has begun to fulfill that purpose.



## Baghdad Car Bomb Kills Scores in Shiite Neighborhood

David Zucchino

ERBIL, Iraq — A car bomb exploded in a crowded Shiite Muslim neighborhood in Baghdad late Thursday afternoon, the latest terror attack in the capital claimed by the Islamic State, security officials reported. At least 54 people were killed and at least 63 more wounded in the bombing, making it the deadliest in Baghdad in at least a month.

The attack came as Iraqi security forces, backed by American military advisers and Special Operations forces, prepared to assault an Islamic State stronghold in Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city, about 225 miles north of Baghdad.

The country has been consumed by news from Mosul, where Iraqi forces have been mounting the country's largest military operation since the United States invasion in 2003, driving Islamic State fighters from eastern Mosul over the last month.

Security officials said the bomb in Baghdad went off in a parked pickup

truck. Ambulances responding to the scene quickly filled to capacity, so the police and civilians helped transport other victims to hospitals, according to Abu Jafar, a police commissioner.

Mr. Jafar said the morgue at Yarmouk Hospital in Baghdad was overflowing with bodies of the dead, and the hospital's emergency room was filled to capacity with seriously injured people.

The Islamic State militant group, also known as ISIS or ISIL, posted a statement online claiming responsibility for the attack, and said that it was aimed at Shiite Muslims, whom many fundamentalist Sunnis consider to be nonbelievers. Shiites are a majority in Iraq and dominate the national government.

Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi convened an emergency meeting with top military and security officials Thursday night to discuss efforts to combat terrorist attacks.

A witness to the bombing, Amir Abas, 35, said he was standing

about 150 yards from the pickup truck when it exploded. "I saw a lot of burned bodies, and injured people and burned cars everywhere," he said.

The bombing took place in the Baya neighborhood of southern Baghdad, where there are a number of parking lots in which people gather to buy and sell used cars, attracting large crowds on weekday afternoons.

Civilians in Shiite neighborhoods have often been the targets of attacks claimed by the Islamic State. Shiite militias, known as popular mobilization forces, are expected to take part in the military assault in western Mosul and particularly in the neighboring city of Tal Afar to the west.

On state-run television channels in Iraq, news reports from Mosul are shown with a standing logo that says in Arabic and English, "Nineveh, We Are Coming." Mosul, the last major city in Iraq where the Islamic State still maintains

significant control, is the capital of Nineveh Province.

Baghdad has been hit by a series of terrorist attacks recently. At least 11 people were killed Wednesday by a bombing in another used-car lot at the edge of Sadr City, a large Shiite neighborhood. A suicide bombing in January in Sadr City killed more than 30 people.

Hakim al-Zamili, a legislator who heads the security and defense committee in Parliament, criticized intelligence and security officials for failing to anticipate the attack on Thursday. Mr. Zamili has been a frequent critic of the security establishment.

"This explosion indicates the weakness of the intelligence network in Baghdad," he said in a telephone interview on Thursday night. Islamic State terrorists are able to carry out attacks "at any time and anywhere" in the capital, he said.

## Is 2-State Solution Dead? In Israel, a Debate Over What's Next (UNE)

Isabel Kershner

Shaul Arieli, an Israeli expert on political geography who prepared maps for past negotiations with the Palestinians and is a member of Commanders for Israel's Security, the group behind the billboard campaign, said "one state is impossible" for Israel. Demographically and economically, absorbing millions of comparatively poor Palestinians would destroy it, he said.

Results of a survey of Israelis and Palestinians released on Thursday, put out jointly by Tel Aviv University and Israeli and Palestinian research centers, indicated that 55 percent of Israelis still support the notion of a two-state solution, while support among the Palestinians dropped to 44 percent. But the numbers on both sides rose significantly when they were offered additional incentives like a broader regional peace between Israel and the Arab world. Among Palestinians, support rose for the ability to work freely in Israel even after the establishment of an independent state. The survey included a representative sample of 1,270 Palestinians and 1,207 Israelis.

Israelis are increasingly fearful of the prospect of a Palestinian state at their doorstep. They see other areas

of the Middle East in chaos. After Israel unilaterally left the Gaza Strip in 2005, they watched as the militant group Hamas, which rejects Israel's existence, seized full control of the territory after winning legislative elections. And they know that without the West Bank, Israel is just nine miles wide at its narrowest point.

There is also the emotional issue for those who identify the West Bank as the heart of the biblical Jewish homeland promised by God.

The Israeli idea of Palestinian statehood never included all of the attributes of full sovereignty. Israel insists on a demilitarized state, and Mr. Netanyahu says the Israeli military has to keep overall security control.

Together with other so-far-intractable issues — like the fate of Jerusalem and of Palestinian refugees — many experts have long said that the maximum Israel can offer does not meet the minimum Palestinian requirements.

Saeb Erekat, a senior Palestinian official, noted this week that the two-state solution "represents a painful and historic Palestinian compromise of recognizing Israel over 78 percent of historic Palestine."

President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority, an interim government that has held sway in parts of the West Bank since the 1990s, is weakened by internal struggles and threatened by his rivals in Hamas.

Mahmoud Zahar, a hard-line member of Hamas and one of its founders in Gaza, said of Mr. Abbas in an interview this week: "He is wasting his time. He is wasting our time and helping the Israelis expand settlements. He is a traitor. He is a spy."

When the former United States secretary of state, John Kerry, came up with a proposed framework accord defining the principles of a comprehensive two-state agreement after months of negotiations in 2014, Mr. Abbas did not respond.

Since then, Israel has approved plans for thousands of new settler homes in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and has moved to retroactively legalize settler outposts that were built throughout the territory. The measures have further entrenched the occupation, now in its 50th year since Israel captured the territory from Jordan in the 1967 war.

A growing number of right-wing Israeli ministers, including from Mr. Netanyahu's Likud Party, are

pushing to annex the settlements that Israel intends to incorporate within its borders under any future deal. Israel has also invested heavily in roads and infrastructure connecting and serving the West Bank settlements, now home to some 400,000 people.

Yet supporters of the two-state solution insist it still could be executed.

Both sides have recognized that it would require adjustments along the 1967 lines. Mr. Arieli, the political geographer, said Israel could keep 80 percent of its West Bank settlers within its borders by swapping territory equal to about 4 percent of the West Bank. Many of the remaining 20 percent of settlers — roughly 30,000 families — would most likely agree to move back into Israel for compensation, he said.

The numbers can also be deceptive, and some experts insist that much of the change on the ground in recent years can be reversed.

About 50 percent of the growth of the settler population has come in two large ultra-Orthodox settlements, Modiin Illit and Beitar Illit. Both are considered swappable, being close to the 1967 line. Jews mostly went there for cheap housing, not ideology. Together, these two settlements have about

130,000 residents — a third of the total settler population of the West Bank.

In some more outlying settlements, Mr. Arieli said, the population was decreasing as Israelis were “voting with their feet” by not moving in, or moving out. Settlement leaders attribute the drop to pressure from

the Obama administration that limited the construction of new homes.

Mr. Khatib, of Birzeit University, agreed that a two-state solution was still physically possible “with some creativity, like swapping.” But, he said, “It won’t remain so for long.”

What is lacking is political will of the leaders on both sides.

Nahum Barnea, a leading Israeli columnist, wrote in the newspaper Yedioth Ahronoth on Thursday that if Mr. Trump were “slightly more informed,” he might have realized that it was not an issue of one state or two states: “The two sides, in

practice, have chosen a third option: not to agree.”

## THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

### Israelis, Palestinians Weigh Extent of Donald Trump’s Shift

Rory Jones

Feb. 16, 2017

5:22 p.m. ET

TEL AVIV—Many Israelis and Palestinians see President Donald Trump’s decision to stop pushing for a two-state solution to the conflict as a significant change of tone—but not necessarily one of substance.

Palestinian officials said they continued to hope that Mr. Trump would work with Arab and European allies on establishing a Palestinian state. “It’s obvious that President Trump is still gathering information and knowledge,” said Husam Zomlot, a senior adviser to Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas.

Israelis, meanwhile, said Mr. Trump’s comments on Wednesday were a sign that the administration is open to alternative solutions, not favoring or rejecting any of them.

“They don’t have a clear idea. They are more open to the Israeli needs. They are not ready to force themselves. But I think it’s very premature and too early to say that they have a clear vision,” said Yaakov Amidror, a former national security adviser to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Mr. Trump, at a news conference with Mr. Netanyahu on Wednesday, said, “I’m looking at two-state and one-state and I like the one that both parties like.” His comments came as the U.S. and Israeli leaders discussed a broader plan for peace that would include Arab countries.

Right-wing Israeli lawmakers, who have been pushing Mr. Netanyahu to abandon his commitment to that goal, hailed Mr. Trump’s comments Wednesday as the end of the notion of Palestinian statehood.

Mr. Netanyahu on Wednesday didn’t commit to establishing a Palestinian state but said that to achieve peace, Palestinians must stop calling for Israel’s destruction and Israel must control security in the area.

Popular opinion in Israel backs the two-state solution, according to a survey published Thursday, which found that 55% of Israelis support it. Less than a quarter of Israelis supported a single state for both sides with equal rights for all.

The same survey found that 44% of Palestinians support the two-state solution, while 54% oppose it. But an even smaller share of Palestinian respondents, 36%, support a one-state solution, the survey found.

“It’s the only thing that is mutually acceptable,” said Khalil Shikaki, director of the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, which conducted the survey with Tel Aviv University. “All the other solutions are accepted by one side and rejected by the other.”

The December survey of more than 2,400 Israelis and Palestinians was funded by the European Union.

The survey also found that support for two states increased when both sides were offered incentives to reach a peace agreement, such as recognition of Israel by Arab countries and free movement of Palestinians in the newly created states. The EU, France and other nations have previously discussed launching peace negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians that include incentives to achieve a two-state solution.

On Thursday, Arab League head Ahmed Aboul-Gheit said the conflict should be resolved with “a comprehensive and fair settlement based on the two-state solution.” Saudi Arabia’s Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir told reporters in Germany he looked forward to working with the U.S. administration and was optimistic about overcoming

challenges in the region, but didn’t comment specifically on a two-state solution.

A regional approach could also make inroads provided both sides have incentives to compromise, some officials and analysts say.

“If in the past we proceeded on the assumption that peace in the Arab world would result from peace between Israel and the Palestinians, that process has now been reversed,” said Michael Oren, a deputy minister in Mr. Netanyahu’s office and a former Israeli ambassador to the U.S. “Peace between Israel and the Arab world may be the precursor to peace with the Palestinians.”

Mr. Amidror, who has met publicly with Saudi Arabian officials, said that covert cooperation was already happening between Israel and Arab states. The ties could become more public, but the problem is that any option other than Palestinian statehood would be hard for Arab leaders to explain to their people, he said.

## THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

### Trump’s Pick for Ambassador to Israel Recants Harsh Attacks, Slurs

Dion Nissenbaum

Feb. 16, 2017

6:01 p.m. ET

WASHINGTON—President Donald Trump’s nominee to be ambassador to Israel sought Thursday to distance himself from a series of his inflammatory comments that have hindered his quest to become a key member of the administration’s Middle East team.

Appearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, bankruptcy lawyer David Friedman repeatedly expressed regret for comparing liberal Jewish groups to Nazi collaborators, for characterizing then-President Barack Obama’s views as anti-Semitic, and for disparaging Sen. Al Franken (D., Minn.) as a “moron.”

“From my perspective, the inflammatory rhetoric that accompanied the presidential campaign is entirely over, and, if I am confirmed, you should expect my comments will be respectful and measured,” Mr. Friedman told senators during his confirmation hearing.

Mr. Friedman, a longtime friend of Mr. Trump, faced blunt questioning from lawmakers who wondered if the New York attorney was the best person to take on a central diplomatic role.

- Trump Lets Loose Against Critics

About midmorning on Thursday, President Donald Trump abruptly decided to hold his own news conference, setting into motion a freewheeling, sometimes angry, 80-minute exchange.

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The retired Navy SEAL told President Donald Trump that he couldn’t accept the job to succeed Mike Flynn, who resigned over his conflicting statements about his contacts with Russian officials before Mr. Trump’s inauguration.

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Alexander Acosta, a law school dean and former U.S. attorney, was nominated as labor secretary.

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The Justice Department told an appeals court there was no reason to reconsider a case on President Trump’s controversial executive order on immigration and refugees. A new order will be issued next week.

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U.S. intelligence officials have withheld sensitive intelligence from President Donald Trump because they are concerned it could be leaked or compromised.

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Mike Pence showed his clout with the firing of Mike Flynn, but the vice president also was kept in the dark about Mr. Flynn's deceptions for two weeks in the White House's loose-knit power structure.

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- Senate Majority Leader Takes on High-Wire Balancing Act

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, trying to manage an ambitious legislative agenda amid White House turmoil, aims to focus on shared goals with President Trump.

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#### TRUMP'S FIRST 100 DAYS

"You are here today having to recant every single strongly held belief that you've expressed, almost," said Sen. Bob Corker (R., Tenn.), the chairman of the committee. "This is fairly extraordinary."

Mr. Friedman said he was humbled

by a Holocaust survivor who took exception to his characterization of liberal Jewish activists as "far worse than Kapos," the prisoners who helped Nazis run concentration camps during World War II.

"There is no excuse," he said at one point when asked about disparaging Democratic politicians. "If you want me to rationalize it or justify it, I cannot. These were hurtful words, and I deeply regret them. They are not reflective of my nature or my character."

A number of liberal Jewish groups, Democratic lawmakers and former diplomats are urging the Senate to reject Mr. Friedman because of his personal views, his support for Israeli settlements and his skepticism about creation of a Palestinian state.

"We need a steady hand in the Middle East, not a bomb-thrower," Sen. Tom Udall (D., N.M.) said while questioning Mr. Friedman.

The opposition, which included several protesters who briefly disrupted the hearing, isn't expected to derail Mr. Friedman's nomination in the Republican-controlled Senate.

Thursday's hearing came one day after Mr. Trump upended decades of U.S. policy in saying that his administration wouldn't necessarily push for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Mr. Friedman, who has called the two-state solution an "illusory solution in search of a nonexistent problem," told senators that the elusive idea "still remains the best possibility for peace in the region."

While Mr. Friedman was testifying, Mr. Trump's United Nations ambassador, Nikki Haley, said the U.S. still supports a two-state solution but wants to consider other ideas.

"We absolutely support a two-state solution," she told reporters in New York. "We are thinking out of the box as well, which is: What does it take to bring these two sides to the table?"

Peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians have been stalled for years, and U.S. efforts to broker a deal have repeatedly been derailed.

Mr. Trump is already taking a more provocative approach than his predecessor to the conflict by vowing to move the U.S. Embassy

to Jerusalem, by rejecting the appointment of a moderate Palestinian leader to a U.N. post, and by nominating Mr. Friedman as ambassador to Israel.

On the eve of the hearing, five former U.S. ambassadors to Israel who served Democrats and Republicans called Mr. Friedman "unqualified" for the job in a letter to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Mr. Friedman, an Orthodox Jewish attorney from Long Island, has deep ties to Israel. He has raised money for an Israeli settlement in the West Bank that is widely viewed around the world as a violation of international law.

While Mr. Friedman said when he was nominated that he looked forward to working in the U.S. Embassy in Jerusalem, he told lawmakers on Thursday that he would urge Mr. Trump to consider the potential downsides of moving the embassy from Tel Aviv.



## Israelis aren't really sure what Trump just said about the future of their country

<https://www.facebook.com/anne.gearan>

JERUSALEM — Just minutes after President Trump made his first detailed remarks on the decades-long conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, Israelis began debating exactly what the new American leader meant.

Did Trump signal the end of the "two-state solution," and the Palestinian dream of an independent nation, or not so much?

Some members of Israel's right thought that's what they heard during the White House news conference on Wednesday — but weren't really sure.

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

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Because Trump also warned Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that hard choices were on the horizon. Hard choices about what? Israelis wondered.

Trump didn't say. Instead, he spoke of wanting a deal — but a deal about what? Peace.

And so, a torrent of punditry began.

Israelis were divided. In part, because Trump was touching on the deepest, most divisive, most personal matters in the region — land, religion, the future of a democratic Jewish state.

Many saw a new day. Others felt uneasy.

Some thought the president didn't seem to know what he was talking about and was just throwing out words and phrases.

*[Watch: Trump urges Israel to "hold off" on new settlements]*

"Twitter was on fire after the news conference as tweeters on both sides of the Atlantic and from both sides of the political spectrum tried in both Hebrew and English to interpret the two leaders' remarks, particularly Trump's," wrote Barak Ravid, chief diplomatic correspondent for the Haaretz newspaper.

One of Netanyahu's hard-right cabinet members, Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked, thought Trump was giving Israel a green light to make plans to annex the 60 percent of the

West Bank where 400,000 Jewish settlers live.

But in an interview, an Israel Radio reporter interjected that Trump also warned Netanyahu about the growth of Jewish settlements on the very land Shaked wants to claim for Israel.

"Everyone interprets this as they see fit," Shaked replied, which pretty much summed things up. "When Netanyahu returns he will talk to the ministers, he will explain what happened in the meeting."

"All we have is bits of rumors and guesses," Shaked said.

The Times of Israel noted, "Pundits are out in greater numbers than reporters as the Hebrew media breaks down a troubling news conference in Washington."

The reporter for the Israeli newspaper Maariv confessed, "Anyone who expected to understand how exactly the president of the United States wants to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was disappointed."

Speaking at the U.N. Security Council session on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on Thursday, U.S. Ambassador Nikki Haley said, "We support the two-state solution,

but we are thinking out of the box as well."

It's the "out of the box" part that Israelis are focused on.

Trump promised "a really great peace deal."

"I'm looking at two-state and one-state, and I like the one that both parties like," the president said.

*[Palestinians warn Trump not to abandon their dream of independent state]*

Sima Kadmon, a columnist at Israel's Yedioth Ahronoth newspaper, wrote, "There's no disputing that Netanyahu received exactly what he wanted from the American president. One state, two states — what difference does it make? That is precisely the attitude that Netanyahu would like to see the American president adopt. Someone who doesn't have the foggiest clue what he is talking about."

One state could mean many things. If the Palestinians were given full rights, the vote, passports, this could be a game-changer. But few Israelis imagine that millions of Palestinians could soon be fellow citizens.

"I can live with either one," Trump said. "I thought for a while that two-state looked like it might be the

easier of the two, but . . . if Israel and the Palestinians are happy, I'm happy with the one they like the best."

Trump didn't elaborate on what he meant by "easier." Three major U.S.-backed peace negotiations, as well as other efforts, have been framed around the goal of two states. All failed.

The president's freewheeling rhetorical style leaves a lot of room for interpretation, and he has no background in the exacting diplomatic language usually used by U.S. officials when discussing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Alon Pinkas, a former Israeli diplomat, told The Washington Post, "This is the president of the United States. He stands up and says what he says. And now it's an open

question whether two states is alive or dead? This is a major, major issue."

"That both sides can now argue with equal passion and equal validity what he meant? That's not a good thing," Pinkas said.

At the news conference, Trump said, "The United States will encourage a peace, and really a great peace deal."

"Both sides will have to make compromises. You know that, right?" he said, turning to Netanyahu.

"Both sides," the prime minister answered.

*[Trump pick for ambassador to Israel has contentious Senate audition]*

On the front page of the pro-Netanyahu newspaper Israel

Hayom, Boaz Bismuth's column was titled "Trump is Good for the Jews."

In the left-wing Haaretz newspaper, there were headlines like "American Jewish Leaders Call Trump's Comments 'Terrifying' and 'Bizarre.'"

Trump warned Netanyahu over his government's continued West Bank settlement construction, turning to the prime minister and saying, "I'd like you to hold off on settlements for a little bit."

After the news conference, Gilad Erdan, Israel's minister for strategic affairs, said it was not crystal clear whether Trump had approved more Jewish settlements or not.

Israeli education minister and leader of the pro-settlement Jewish Home party, Naftali Bennett, was celebrating. He wrote: "The flag of

Palestine was removed today from the flagpole and has been replaced with the Israeli flag."

Construction Minister Yoav Galant called Trump's remarks "a historic speech."

"We have a friend in the White House," Galant said.

The leader of the Israeli opposition in the parliament, Labor leader Isaac Herzog, called the exchange between Trump and Netanyahu "sad and embarrassing."

Herzog worried that a "one-state solution" — from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea — with equal numbers of Jews and Muslims, would mean the end of the Jewish state.

Gearan reported from Washington.

## THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Updated Feb. 16, 2017 3:11 p.m. ET

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan—Islamic State claimed responsibility for a deadly bombing at a Sufi Muslim shrine in southern Pakistan on Thursday that killed at least 70 people and wounded hundreds, the second such attack the group has claimed in three months.

A suicide bomber detonated himself just after sunset, when hundreds of people were present at the shrine of 13th century Sufi saint Lal Shahbaz Qalandar, officials said. Footage of the blast aired by Pakistani news channel ARY News showed devotees chanting and dancing before a loud explosion, after which screams could be heard and people were seen fleeing.

Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack, according to the SITE Intelligence Group, which monitors communications by jihadists. The group claimed a deadly attack in November at another Sufi shrine in Pakistan that killed 52.

Thursday's attack "represents an attack on the progressive, inclusive future of Pakistan," Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said in a statement.

"We can't let these events divide us, or scare us. We must stand united in this struggle for the Pakistani identity, and universal humanity."

Sufi Islam is considered more inclusive and tolerant compared with the hard-line beliefs of militant groups, and is followed by millions of Muslims across South Asia. Thousands of worshippers visit shrines across Pakistan to pray, with many using dance to show their devotion. Hard-line groups like Islamic State and the Pakistani Taliban consider Sufi Muslims to be heretics, and have often carried out bloody attacks at shrines in recent years.

Islamabad says Islamic State doesn't have an organized presence in Pakistan, but officials have expressed concern about the presence of sympathizers in the country.

Footage of the aftermath aired on Pakistani news channels showed people crying and screaming in the main courtyard of the shrine complex. Some were seen carrying the injured to ambulances, with debris strewn across the floor. "I was just there to pray, and there was an explosion. I collapsed and now I can't find my family," one man said in comments broadcast on

Pakistani TV channels, his face covered with dust as he sat on a hospital bench.

Over 250 people were injured in the bombing, according to Moeen Siddiqui, the medical superintendent at the main hospital in Sehwan, where the shrine is located. Dr. Siddiqui said around 100 of the 250 wounded were discharged after being treated, while 50 were seriously injured.

Sehwan is in a relatively poorly developed area of Pakistan, and local officials said the health and emergency infrastructure in the area was overwhelmed as doctors and rescue workers tried to assist the victims. Pakistan's military and government said they were mobilizing all available resources to help, including transport aircraft.

Thursday's bombing is the latest in a series of terrorist attacks across Pakistani this week. On Monday, a suicide bomber detonated himself in a crowd in the eastern city of Lahore, killing 13, including two senior police officials. On Wednesday, suicide bombers struck in two separate attacks on military and government personnel in the northwest of the country, killing six.

The three attacks earlier in the week were claimed by a faction of the Pakistani Taliban called Jamaat-ul-Ahrar. The group vowed more attacks.

Pakistani officials say leaders of the Pakistani Taliban and factions like Jamaat-ul-Ahrar plan and execute terrorist attacks in the country from their sanctuaries in neighboring Afghanistan, backed by elements in Afghanistan's security establishment, a claim Kabul denies.

Hours after the shrine bombing Thursday, Pakistan closed its border with Afghanistan indefinitely, citing "security reasons."

Pakistan's military vowed revenge, saying "each drop of the nation's blood" will be avenged. "No more restraint for anyone," army chief Gen. Qamar Javed Bajwa said in a statement. Security operations over the last three years have dramatically brought down the number of casualties from terrorist attacks. Officials, however, insist that the offensive against militants will continue, given their ability to carry out less frequent but bloody attacks like the bombing on Thursday.

## The Washington Post

[https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100011342442800&ref=br\\_rs](https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100011342442800&ref=br_rs)

More than 70 people have been killed and dozens more wounded in one of the deadliest bombings to rock Pakistan in recent years. At

## Blast claimed by Islamic State at famed Sufi shrine in Pakistan kills at least 73

least 73 dead in suicide bombing at Pakistani shrine (Reuters)

(Reuters)

ISLAMABAD, Pakistan — At least 73 people were reported killed and up to several hundred injured

Thursday when a suicide bomber struck inside a famous Sufi shrine in Pakistan while devotees were gathered for a weekly ritual of music and dance, police and medical officials said.

The Islamic State militant group, based in the Middle East with allied outfits in Pakistan and Afghanistan, asserted responsibility for the blast through an affiliated news site. The Islamic State and similar extremist



Sunni groups view Sufism, a mystical strain of Islam, as heretical.

The attack in the isolated town of Sehwan in southeastern Sindh province was one of the country's deadliest bombings in a decade of terrorism that the government has struggled to combat. Officials at one hospital said they had received 60 bodies and 250 injured patients, including 40 in critical condition.

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The bombing at Lal Shahbaz Qalandar shrine followed three successive days of violence that claimed 25 lives in all four provinces of Pakistan and two tribal areas. On Monday, a suicide blast in the eastern city of Lahore killed 13 people and injured scores. An affiliate of the Islamic State, Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, said in an email to journalists that the bombing was the start of an operation targeting government agencies and sites.

On Wednesday, Pakistan lodged a formal complaint with next-door Afghanistan, alleging that the Islamic State-linked militants were operating from sanctuaries across the border. Late Thursday, army officials announced that all border crossings would

be closed until further notice for security reasons.

It was not possible to confirm, however, whether the Islamic State — also known as ISIS or ISIL — or a local affiliate had carried out the shrine attack. In August, when a bomb killed more than 70 people in the southwestern city of Quetta, the Islamic State and an allied group based in the border region both claimed to have been behind it.

*[An ISIS attack in Pakistan strikes at the beating heart of Sufism]*

Government troops were sent to the shrine and the surrounding areas Thursday, and all naval hospitals in the region were placed on alert to receive victims. Pakistan's army chief, Gen. Qamar Javed Bajwa, issued a statement appealing to the nation to remain calm.

"Your security forces shall not allow hostile powers to succeed," he said. "Each drop of the nation's blood will be avenged, and avenged immediately. No more restraint for anyone."

The army chief's tough declaration echoed a statement made Wednesday by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif after a meeting with senior civilian and military officials. Sharif vowed to eliminate all terrorism, whether domestic or foreign in origin, and said that all those who threaten Pakistan's

peace and security will be "liquidated by the might of the state."

Pakistan has often been accused of coddling some violent Islamist groups that serve as its proxies in India and at home while cracking down on others that oppose the Pakistani state and unleash attacks on domestic targets. Recently, though, officials placed an extremist anti-India cleric under house arrest, calling it a policy decision reached by civilian and military leaders.

Islamist militants, including the Pakistani Taliban, have attacked numerous Sufi shrines in recent years. In November, a shrine in Balochistan province was bombed, killing 45 people. The shrines are open to all, offering poetry and musical events, as well as quiet spaces to meditate, and free food for the poor.

Officials said Thursday night that security had been increased at Sufi shrines across the country and that some had been temporarily closed, according to reports on Pakistani news channels.

In addition to targeting Sufis, violent Sunni groups have attacked Christians, Shiites and Ahmadiyyas, a faith group that sees itself as a branch of Islam but is reviled by many Muslims. Political leaders in Punjab province — where the

Lahore attack occurred — have been accused of appeasing some sectarian groups there.

In Sindh, some political leaders have reportedly resisted pressure from security agencies and provincial officials to ban or better control Islamist extremist groups and seminaries that train and recruit them. Over the past decade, terrorists have targeted shrines, mosques and other sites across the province.

As groups affiliated with the Islamic State, including Jamaat-ul-Ahrar, have become more active in Pakistan in the past year, they have created controversy among many local Islamist factions. Followers of some groups have defected to the foreign-linked outfits, while others have distanced themselves from ISIS connections.

When Jamaat-ul-Ahrar asserted responsibility for the recent Lahore bombing, it named its planned terror operation for the late leader of Islamabad's famed Red Mosque, the scene of a dramatic army siege in 2007. But this week, leaders of the mosque denounced the ISIS affiliate as an "enemy of Islam" and said its actions were un-Islamic.

## THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

### Russia, Iran Need Each Other, Despite Disagreements

Yaroslav  
Trofimov

BEIRUT—Iran and Russia aren't often on the same page in the Middle East. But if President Donald Trump's administration attempts to drive a wedge between the two, there is precious little incentive it can offer Moscow to abandon its crucial partner.

Confronting Iran while also improving relations with Russia and turning it into an ally against "radical Islam" have emerged as two early foreign-policy priorities for the new U.S. administration.

Those goals are difficult to reconcile for the simple reason that Russia and Iran increasingly need each other. Over the past year and a half, Moscow and Tehran have put their strategic differences aside as they took advantage of the shrinking American influence in the Middle East.

Their joint effort reversed the tide of the Syrian conflict, shoring up President Bashar al-Assad's regime, and gave Moscow new sway across the region, from Libya to Iraq.

U.S. officials have recently spoken of their desire to woo Russia away from Iran. Yet, viewed from the Middle East—or for that matter from Russia—it appears highly unlikely that such a "great bargain," in which President Vladimir Putin cuts the Islamic Republic adrift, is achievable.

Unlike Iran, Russia considers itself as a global superpower, with the Middle East as only one part of its interests. For Moscow, the issue of Ukraine—in particular gaining international recognition for Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea and ending Western sanctions imposed that year—is an overwhelming priority.

On this matter, however, any deal that would make it worthwhile for Mr. Putin to upend Moscow's deepening ties with Iran would be exceedingly hard for President Trump to deliver. That has become particularly so amid the congressional investigations into Russia's role in the U.S. presidential election and the fallout from former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn's contacts with the Russian ambassador.

"This kind of trade-off is impossible," said Dmitri Trenin, director of the Carnegie Moscow Center and a former Russian military officer. "Russia has its own relationship with Iran—a neighbor, a partner, an occasional ally and adversary. Also, there is nothing that the U.S. can give to Russia in Ukraine: Russia has taken Crimea on its own, and the recognition of that will take decades."

The events of the past year in Syria, meanwhile, have shown the value of collaboration between Iran and Russia.

Russia's air power was indispensable for the success of Syrian regime advances, especially in recapturing the entire city of Aleppo after a four-year battle. So were the Iranian proxy ground forces participating in the conflict, such as Lebanon's Hezbollah and Shiite militias from Iraq and Afghanistan. They provided the manpower that the depleted Syrian army was unable to muster.

This common fight has by and large eclipsed the disagreements between Moscow and Tehran on the final political settlement in Syria.

"There are areas of great friction between Russia and Iran on the course of the war in Syria, but there is also a recognition on both sides that they need to work together," said Ellie Geranmayeh, senior fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations.

That isn't to say that Russian and Iranian interests won't diverge once the fighting subsides and the warring parties move toward a political deal. Russia doesn't want to be drawn even further into the regional sectarian conflict between the Iranian-led Shiite forces and the Sunni powers such as Saudi Arabia.

In Syria, this means that the Russians are more interested in a political compromise that would satisfy at least a part of the country's Sunni majority and its patrons, such as Turkey. Iran, meanwhile, is focused on empowering Mr. Assad's Alawite community, an offshoot of Shiite Islam.

"There is a general understanding in the region that Russia's policy in Syria is not about Syria itself but about increasing Russia's role in the region," said Aniseh Bassiri Tabrizi, an Iran expert at the Royal United

Services Institute, a think tank in London. "The fear and concern in Iran is that Russia is very much ready to leave Iran out of the picture."

Unlike Cold War-era Soviet Union, Russia has also developed an intense relationship with Israel—a relationship that appears to include allowing Israel to strike Hezbollah and Iranian targets in Syria.

"We all know that Russia has the security of Israel as a priority," said Lebanese lawmaker Ali Bazzi, from the Shiite Amal bloc allied with Hezbollah.

This distance between Moscow's and Iran's positions, however, could also be an asset: It allowed Russia to draw Turkey, a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization military alliance, into recent

negotiations on Syria's future that marginalized America's role.

In any case, unless the Trump administration dramatically increases its commitment to the region both politically and militarily, it won't be able to exploit these potential disagreements and drive Russia and Iran apart, cautioned Imad Salamey, a political scientist at the Lebanese American University.

"Now, Iran and Russia have a strong united front," Mr. Salamey said. "It is Russia and Iran that have split the U.S. from its allies, brought about a rift between the U.S., Turkey and Saudi Arabia over Iraq and Syria, and managed to divide the West."



## Editorial : Reagan's Russian Roadmap for Trump

The Editors

U.S. Secretary of Defense James Mattis and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg have taken a tough line against Russia's many recent provocations. Other than calling for all members of the alliance to pay their fair share of the military bill, however, they have offered no real plan of action.

Russia's aggressions call for a stronger response. While Mattis is right to tweak the Europeans for slipping on defense spending, the metric that is repeatedly cited -- committing 2 percent of GDP to the military -- is arbitrary. After all, Greece, which uses the army as a jobs program, makes the cutoff, while France, which has arguably the continent's most capable force, spends only 1.8 percent. Members should be judged not just on what they spend but how they spend it, in

terms of readiness, force projection and equipment.

The alliance could also make an adjustment to its chain of command that would get the Russians' attention: giving the supreme military commander authority to act independently of the bureaucratic structure in an emergency.

While NATO and the U.S. have increased their presence in the Baltics and Poland, these forces only rotate in and out of the region. The Pentagon should draw up plans for keeping at least two armored combat brigades and their heavy artillery in the region permanently, and to rotate in more aircraft to bases there and in Bulgaria and Romania. Granted, these troops would be little more than a speed bump in the event of a full-scale Russian invasion, but they would be a barrier to the more stealthy sorts

of quasi-military aggressions the Kremlin used to destabilize Ukraine, and would ease anxiety in the Baltics.

Looking further ahead, the U.S. should look deeper into the past. One of former president Ronald Reagan's great successes was the so-called dual-track approach to the Soviet Union's nuclear threat. While increasing the West's military capability against the Soviets -- notably, getting permission from European allies to place nuclear-tipped Pershing missiles on their soil -- this strategy also coaxed mutually favorable nonproliferation agreements out of the Communist leadership.

President Donald Trump could do worse than following Reagan's lead. This would involve renegotiating treaties to further cut weapons levels, extend expiration dates, and

clear up the ambiguity over systems like Russia's new cruise missile, which it reportedly deployed last week. Meanwhile, the U.S. could start discussions with Eastern European allies on a new conventional missile system along Russia's Western flank.

Of course, it may be worth asking if Trump, given his kind words for Russian President Vladimir Putin, would be willing to take this more assertive approach. This is why NATO needs to carry more of the load -- and why Trump needs to reaffirm his commitment to an alliance that is as vital now as it was during the Cold War.

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## Trump: Putin put off by administration controversies

By Karen DeYoung

Military, defense and security at home and abroad.

Recent Russian military provocations are probably motivated by President Vladimir Putin's belief that President Trump has been politically weakened by controversies surrounding his administration, Trump said Thursday.

"Probably Putin assumes that he's not going to be able to make a deal with me because it's politically not popular for me to make a deal," he said. Trump spoke at a news conference in which he blamed "fake news" and "leaked" information for a flurry of media reports about questionable contacts between his campaign and transition and Russian officials.

"The false, horrible, fake reporting makes it much harder to make a deal with Russia," he said. Putin was "sitting behind his desk and he's saying ... 'It's going to be impossible for President Trump to ever get along with Russia because of all the pressure he's got with this fake story.'"

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Trump suggested that he was unlikely to respond to Russian actions over the past few days -- including the buzzing by Russian warplanes of a U.S. naval vessel in the Black Sea, the appearance of a Russian spy ship 30 miles off the Connecticut coast, and the reported deployment of ground-based cruise missiles in violation of a major arms-control treaty.

Those actions were "not good," Trump said. "But hopefully, I won't have to do anything. But I'm not going to tell you."

Trump spoke as his top national security officials made their first formal forays into U.S.-Russian relations. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson met in Germany with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, while Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, in Brussels, spoke of Russia with his NATO counterparts.

Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr., chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff,

was also in Azerbaijan for a Thursday meeting with Valeri Gerasimov, the chief of the general staff of Russia's armed forces.

Tillerson, a former chief executive for Exxon with no previous experience in public office, attended nearly a dozen meetings with his diplomatic counterparts at a meeting in Bonn of the Group of 20 conference of major world economies.

In his first public statement since taking office, he told reporters he had discussed a "range of issues" during an hour-long session with Lavrov, although the only one he specifically mentioned was the ongoing violence in eastern Ukraine.

That conflict began when Russia invaded and annexed Crimea in 2014, then backed separatists in eastern Ukraine in what has become a grinding war, despite a deal to end it, called the Minsk agreement, negotiated with Putin by the leaders of France and Germany.

"As I made clear in my Senate confirmation hearing," Tillerson said, "the United States will consider working with Russia when we can

find areas of practical cooperation that will benefit the American people." He said he expected Russia to "honor its commitment to the Minsk agreement."

Lavrov said after the meeting that Tillerson had confirmed the administration's "readiness to overcome this period," in which relations were "seriously undermined by the Obama administration," according to the Russian news agency Tass.

"The issue of sanctions was not discussed" with Tillerson, Lavrov said. President Barack Obama imposed sanctions and all but broke all military contact with Russia in 2014 for its activities in Ukraine.

Last December, additional sanctions were levied for what U.S. intelligence agencies said was interference in the American presidential election on Trump's behalf.

At his news conference, Trump said getting along with Russia would be "a positive thing."

Before Tillerson's departure for Europe, Trump said "I told him ... 'I

Checkpoint newsletter

know politically it's probably not good for me.' The greatest thing I could do is shoot that ship that's 30 miles offshore right out of the water," he said of the Russian ship traveling far beyond the 12-mile U.S. territorial limit. "Everyone in this country's going to say, 'Oh, it's so great.'"

"That's not great. I would love to be able to get along with Russia," Trump said, but "fake reporting makes it much harder to make a deal with Russia."

Trump spoke highly of Putin as a "strong leader" throughout his campaign and said repeatedly that Russia and the United States should

cooperate in counterterrorism operations against the Islamic State, especially in Syria, where they are on opposite sides of a civil war.

But his repeated desire to "make a deal" with Russia has increased concern in Europe, where allies worry that would mean playing down a strong response to what they see as Russian military aggression, including on NATO's eastern border.

Mattis, who has called Russia the No. 1 threat to U.S. security, said in Brussels that Russia will need to "prove itself first" before the alliance or the United States were willing to let their armed forces collaborate.

Speaking at NATO headquarters, he told reporters that the conditions are not currently right for U.S. and Russian forces to work together.

"We are not in a position right now to collaborate on a military level, but our political leaders will engage and try to find common ground or a way forward so that Russia, living up to its commitment, can return to a partnership of sorts here with NATO," Mattis said.

Without explicitly naming the United States, he said there was "very little doubt" that the Russians have "either interfered, or attempted to interfere, in a number of elections in the democracies."

Mattis also called for NATO members to increase their defense spending, citing threats posed by Russia.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu later responded that he expected the Pentagon's position would be clarified when Dunford met with Gerasimov. Attempts to build a diplomatic dialogue with Russia from a position of strength were "fruitless," Shoigu said, according to Tass.

Dan Lamothe in Brussels and Carol Morello in Bonn contributed to this report.



## Editorial : A Russian deal? 'Not good'

Russia's meddling in the recent U.S. presidential election, by hacking Democratic Party emails, is already a huge scandal. And if President Trump or his top campaign aides were somehow complicit in that meddling, or compromised by the Kremlin, the scandal meter jumps to Watergate-scale levels.

Multiple investigations are starting to dig into those questions. For now, though, let's take Trump's bewildering reluctance to criticize Russian President Vladimir Putin at its most benign, face-value interpretation — that he simply wants to reduce tensions between two nuclear-armed powers.

"It would be great if we could get along with Russia," Trump said at his rambling news conference on Thursday, adding that "the false reporting by the media ... makes it much harder to make a deal with Russia."

And what would such a deal look like? Trump has suggested that he'd like the United States and Russia to team up to defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS.

That would be a good deal, right? Actually, not really, particularly if Putin's conditions included the relaxation of sanctions imposed for Russian aggression in Ukraine and interference in U.S. politics. Putin has shown himself to be an

autocratic thug determined to expand Russian influence and undermine the West. Easing sanctions would threaten Ukrainian independence, agitate NATO allies fearful of Russian hegemony, and leave empty rhetoric as the only penalty for trying to subvert American democracy.

Any alliance with Russia to fight ISIS would be a Faustian arrangement where the U.S. would be drawn into an association with Russia's murderous partner, Syrian President Bashar Assad, whose regime hanged up to 13,000 people in a military prison over the past six years, according to a recent findings by Amnesty International.

Nor would a "deal" with Russia do anything to curb Iranian aggression in the Middle East, something for which the Trump administration put Iran "on notice" earlier this month. Russia has no incentive to minimize Iranian influence. It relies on Iranian-sponsored proxies such as Hezbollah for ground troops in Syria. In any event, Russia and Iran share a border and billions of dollars in energy, construction and trade deals.

Trump appears convinced that Russian assistance would speed up the defeat of ISIS, which he has described as his top foreign-policy priority. Crushing the terrorist organization is vital. But the reality

on the ground suggests that a U.S.-Russian military alliance would be a strategic blunder.

Putin entered the Syrian civil war in 2015 as the Assad regime was ready to collapse, threatening to take with it Russia's base of influence in the Middle East: Putin maintains a Mediterranean naval station on the Syrian coast, and his goal has always been less to defeat ISIS than to keep Assad in power.

Russian air support in Syria flew 85% to 90% of attack missions against moderate rebels supported by America, resorting to carpet bombing that devastated civilian populations. It was a Syrian or Russian airstrike that generated the heartbreaking photo of a bloodied, 5-year-old boy waiting for care in an ambulance in Aleppo last August.

Trump's ex-national security adviser Michael Flynn, forced to resign this week after lying about discussions with the Russians, was a strong advocate within Trump's inner circle for closer ties with Putin, urging the sharing of intelligence and operations to fight terrorism. But the U.S. military and intelligence communities have balked at sharing classified information, suspecting that the Russians would use it to attack U.S.-backed rebel forces.

The only military gains ISIS has made in recent months have been

against Russian-backed Syrian forces in the city of Palmyra. Everywhere else, the terror group is losing ground to U.S.-supported Kurdish and Syrian rebel forces.

Despite Trump disparaging current efforts to defeat ISIS, the supposed caliphate established in 2014 is starting to crumble, losing well over half its territory in Iraq and more than a quarter of it in Syria. The commander of the U.S.-led coalition in Iraq, Lt. Gen. Sean MacFarland, estimated last August that 45,000 ISIS fighters had been "taken off the battlefield."

With ISIS slowly being driven out of the large Iraqi city of Mosul, its last major stronghold is its de facto capital of Raqqa in north-central Syria. Syrian Democratic Forces assisted by the United States have begun a drive to liberate Raqqa, and it's unclear how useful Russian air support operating in the western party of the country might be.

Putin is already testing Trump by deploying cruise missiles in an apparent violation of an arms-control treaty, running a spy ship close to the East Coast, and allowing his fighter aircraft to buzz a U.S. warship. Trump described these actions on Thursday as "not good." The same words can be applied to the idea of a "deal" between America and Russia.



## Fake News, Fake Ukrainians: How a Group of Russians Tilted a Dutch Vote (UNE)

Andrew Higgins

It is unclear whether the Ukrainian team was directed by Russia or if it was acting out of shared sympathies, and Mr. Van Bommel said he never checked their identities. But Europe's political establishment, already rattled by

Britain's vote to leave the European Union and the election of President Trump in the United States, is worried that the Netherlands referendum could foreshadow what is to come.

With elections slated for France, Germany and possibly Italy this

year, officials across Europe are warning that the Russians are actively interfering, echoing the Central Intelligence Agency's assertions that Moscow meddled in the United States presidential election.

Norway announced this month that Russia-linked hackers had attacked government ministries and a political party. Britain's defense minister has accused Moscow of "weaponizing disinformation." German, French and Italian officials have also accused Russia-linked partisans of meddling.



The Netherlands is holding its own national elections on March 15, and domestic intelligence officials say that foreign countries, notably Russia, have tried hundreds of times in recent months to penetrate the computers of government agencies and businesses. Volkskrant, a Dutch newspaper, reported last week that the same two Russian hacking groups that pilfered emails from the Democratic National Committee were among those targeting the Netherlands.

The Dutch interior minister announced that all vote tallies in the March election would be done by hand so as to remove computers from the electoral process and calm fears of hacking by unidentified "state actors."

"Those in power are very worried — there is more than ample reason for alarm over interference in elections," said Sijbren de Jong of the Hague Center for Strategic Studies, a research group in The Hague, the seat of the Dutch government. "But the real risk are populists who run, knowingly or unwittingly, with Russia's agenda because they know it is damaging to the status quo in Europe that they want to destroy. All Russia really needs to do is sit back and let populists do their bidding."

No one has yet come up with concrete evidence that the Russian state, rather than individual Russians, is working to skew the election, and many wonder why Moscow would even bother trying to do so in a small country with none of the geopolitical heft of the United States or Germany. But Mr. de Jong said the referendum last year showed that "a little effort goes a long way" and could help "destroy the European Union from inside."

The Netherlands should be difficult terrain for Russia. Last year, the Dutch Safety Board linked Russia to the death of 298 people — including nearly 200 Dutch nationals — in a passenger plane flying from Amsterdam that was shot down in July 2014 over territory held by Russian-armed rebels in eastern Ukraine.

The finding was a public relations disaster for Moscow, and Russian hackers have attacked computers at the Dutch agency, while Russian sympathizers in the Netherlands, including members of Mr. Van Bommel's Ukrainian team, have labored tirelessly to promote implausible alternative theories for the downing of the Boeing jet carrying Malaysia Airlines Flight 17.

Even Geert Wilders, the country's anti-Europe, anti-immigrant, anti-establishment firebrand, has kept a distance from Moscow, unlike populist leaders in France and Italy. Yet if Mr. Wilders, whose party is leading in opinion polls, is not an ally, his Euroskeptic agenda dovetails perfectly with the Kremlin's broader agenda to weaken the European Union and shatter European unity against Russia.

Sico van der Meer, a research fellow at the Netherlands Institute of International Relations, said Russia viewed the West as an adversary and had a clear interest in seeing the election of anti-establishment populists who, no matter what their personal take on Russia, all want to undermine the European Union and, in some cases, NATO.

Russians, he added, "believe that making your enemy weaker makes yourself stronger."

The Dutch intelligence agency, the AIVD, in a publicly released assessment of Russian activities, agreed that measuring the scale of any state-sponsored Russian interference was extremely difficult, as Moscow's effort to shape public opinion "takes place in a twilight zone between diplomacy and intelligence."

But the report also noted that the Netherlands had been targeted as part of a "global campaign to influence policy and perceptions on Russia" and, as part of this effort, Moscow had made use of a "network of contacts built up over the years."

One such contact is Vladimir Kornilov, a Russian-born historian and political analyst who grew up in eastern Ukraine and now lives in The Hague, where he runs a one-man research outfit called the Center for Eurasian Studies. Emails stolen by a pro-Ukrainian hacking group show how Mr. Kornilov offered information and advice to politicians and others in Moscow during his previous work at a Russian-funded research institute in Kiev.

Before the Dutch referendum last year, Mr. Kornilov campaigned against the Ukraine trade deal, describing himself benignly as "a Ukrainian expat in The Hague" who was "stunned by the seemingly endless stream of lies and propaganda" about Russia and felt obliged to respond.

"After the referendum here, everybody thought this was just a Dutch problem, but now we see it was just the beginning," Mr. Kornilov

said in an interview, denying any financial or other links to the Russian state. "There is a huge crisis in the European Union."

Nor did he agitate alone. He contacted Mr. Van Bommel as well as Thierry Baudet, the head of a conservative research group, Forum for Democracy, which he has since converted into a political party that takes Russia's side on a host of issues and is competing for seats in the March election on a platform of hostility to the European Union.

During the referendum campaign, Mr. Baudet posted a Twitter message saying that Ukraine "is not a nation state" and retweeted a false report that Ukrainian soldiers had crucified a 3-year-old Russian-speaking boy in eastern Ukraine. The crucifixion story began with an invented report by Russia's main state-controlled television channel, which interviewed a supposed Ukrainian witness to the crucifixion who was later identified as a Russian actress.

The bogus crucifixion story circulated through social media and was followed by an even more blatant exercise in fake news, when a video appeared on YouTube that purported to show members of the Azov Battalion, a group of Ukrainian militants, burning the Dutch flag and threatening terrorist attacks if Dutch voters did not support Ukraine.

The video was quickly dismissed as a fraud and was later linked by Bellingcat, a British-based investigative website, to a so-called troll factory in St. Petersburg, a Russian institute that churns out fake news and abuses Russia's critics online, using social media as a distribution system.

"All the Kremlin has to do is click like or retweet and then sit back and say 'thank you,'" said Mr. de Jong, the researcher.

The anonymity of the internet, he added, makes it difficult to distinguish between ordinary people voicing their genuine opinions and state-sponsored trolls. "There is no smoking gun, only lots of smoke," Mr. de Jong acknowledged.

Mr. Baudet, in an interview in Amsterdam, denied spouting Russia propaganda and said he was merely trying to counter what he called "Europe's remarkable Russophobia" and to make sure that Russia's side of the story did not get drowned out.

Ukraine did send officials and activists to the Netherlands to lobby support for a "yes" vote, presenting Ukraine as a victim of Russian

aggression. But, unlike some activists on the other side, they openly declared their identities and affiliation.

Michiel Servaes, a Labor Party member of Parliament, campaigned in favor of the pact with Ukraine and said people like Mr. Baudet promoted a narrative that was "word for word what would be used by a spokesman from the Kremlin." He recalled facing a barrage of criticism at one public meeting from a member of the audience who introduced herself as a Ukrainian but who turned out to be Russian.

"It was really quite shocking," Mr. Servaes said. "People presented themselves as Ukrainians but were in reality Russians."

For his part, Mr. Van Bommel acknowledged that some of his "Ukrainian" helpers were perhaps Russian but said it was not his job to verify their identities.

"I never ask people to see their passports," he said during an interview in The Hague. "If they support our political platform they are welcome."

A particularly active member of the Ukrainian team was Nikita Ananjev, a 26-year-old student born in Moscow who moved with his mother to the Netherlands, where he is now chairman of the Russian Student Association.

He said he had attended 15 or more public meetings across the Netherlands during the referendum campaign, speaking out against the Ukrainian pact and what he described as the European Union's "rusty and corrupted nomenklatura" and its unfairly negative views of Russia.

Mr. Ananjev, now a university student in the eastern Dutch region of Twente, went to Moscow in 2013 for a "youth leaders school," a program sponsored by Rossotrudnichestvo, a state-funded organization that promotes cultural exchanges and works to promote Moscow's take on the world. In December, he visited Brussels for the European Russian Forum, an annual gathering of Moscow-friendly politicians and experts supported by the Russian Foreign Ministry.

Complaining that Russians who defend their country and criticize its adversaries often get labeled unfairly as intelligence operatives, he said in an interview: "I am not a spy. Not yet."



## Kim Jong Un is a top suspect in his half brother's death. But questions abound.

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(Reuters)

North Korean state-run television released video Feb. 16 of leader Kim Jong Un visiting the mausoleum of his father Kim Jong Il and a massive outdoor rally celebrating the former leader. North Korean state-run television released video Feb. 16 of a massive outdoor rally celebrating late leader Kim Jong Il. (Reuters)

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia — Feb. 16 is always a glorious day on the North Korean calendar. Known as the "Day of the Shining Star," it marks the anniversary of the birth of Kim Jong Il, the country's second-generation leader.

This year, as usual, wreaths were laid Thursday at statues of Kim Jong Il and his father, North Korea's "Eternal President," Kim Il Sung. There were also parades and figure skating and synchronized swimming and displays of the flowers known to the rest of us as begonias but to North Koreans as Kimjongilia.

The North's third-generation leader, Kim Jong Un, cut a solemn figure as he bowed at his father's tomb and presided over a meeting of Communist Party apparatchiks.

Today's WorldView

What's most important from where the world meets Washington

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But was that look of gravity a mark of respect for his deceased father? A sign of shock at the sudden death this week of his estranged older half brother? Or the steely face of a man who will stop at nothing to hold on to power?

For South Korea's often-unreliable intelligence service and some analysts in China, Kim Jong Un is suspect No. 1 in the apparent assassination this week of Kim Jong Nam, who was the oldest son of Kim Jong Il and had been living in a kind of exile for the past 15 years.

North Korea has a history of state-ordered assassinations, including an attempt — involving a poison needle disguised as a pen — to kill a defector-turned-activist in South Korea as recently as 2011.

Malaysian police have arrested two people accused of direct involvement in the brazen attack on Kim Jong Nam at Kuala Lumpur airport Monday — the women alleged to have carried out the poisoning, one apparently from Vietnam and the other from Indonesia — and have detained the Indonesian woman's Malaysian boyfriend to help them with their inquiries.

[ Police arrest third suspect in Kim Jong Nam assassination ]

But so many questions remain. Why would Kim Jong Un want to kill a half brother who, apart from one statement in 2010 questioning North Korea's hereditary succession system, had shown no political ambitions?

Why would he have him killed just days before an auspicious anniversary? And why would North Korea deviate from its practice of using elite agents for such tasks, instead allegedly sending foreign women so ill equipped for the task that they didn't even know to flee?

One theory: Kim Jong Un, who was only 27 when he became leader and had little government or military experience, is still getting rid of potential rivals.

Like other dictators before him, he has overseen the dispatch, temporarily or permanently, of people who could challenge him for the leadership of his country. He most notably had his uncle — and Kim Jong Nam's mentor — executed in late 2013 for amassing too much power.

An image from closed-circuit television shows a woman, left, at Kuala Lumpur International Airport who was later arrested by police investigating the death of Kim Jong Nam, the half-brother of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. South Korea's spy agency suspects two female North Korean agents assassinated Kim. South Korea intelligence suspects two female North Korean agents killed Kim Jong Nam (Reuters)

(Reuters)

He has also overseen the purging or execution of a whole raft of senior officials, including his defense minister, his deputy education and construction ministers and, just this

month, his apparently demoted minister of state security.

A report by the South Korean intelligence service's think tank at the end of last year estimated that Kim ordered the executions of 340 people, including 140 senior officials, in his first five years in power.

Kim Jong Un showed from the get-go that he would sort out the loyal from the wavering, said Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, a political scientist at New York University and co-author of "The Dictator's Handbook."

"The execution of his uncle sent a message: 'I'm sorting out my allies and clearing out the rest,'" Bueno de Mesquita said. "He has been well trained, and he has good intuition about what a person running a place like North Korea needs to do."

[ Malaysian airport assassination focuses new attention on N. Korean leader ]

But Christopher Green, a North Korea scholar at the Netherlands' Leiden University, said Kim Jong Nam was not a threat to his younger brother's legitimacy.

"He lived in quiet exile abroad, whereas Kim Jong Un was Kim Jong Il's anointed heir," Green said. "Kim Jong Nam was never going to be an alternative power center, and power doesn't get consolidated, per se. The process has no start or end. It is a constant battle to stay on top."

Kim Jong Un has defied predictions of his imminent demise, in December marking five years at the helm, a period characterized by relatively strong growth and tangible advances in the North's nuclear and missile programs.

Meanwhile, his older half brother appeared to be living the good life. He had been based in Macau and Beijing for well over a decade — apparently having wives and families in both places — liked visiting casinos and was said to have playboy tendencies.

Some analysts, urging skepticism, say it is more likely that Kim Jong Nam ran afoul of the underworld in Southeast Asia than that Kim Jong Un ordered the hit. But in the absence of clear evidence either way, opinion is coalescing around that second idea.

[ N. Korean leader's half brother killed in Malaysia in possible poison attack ]

Because even if Kim Jong Nam didn't have grand designs for his future, China did.

Relations between Beijing and Pyongyang have worsened dramatically in the past five years, with Kim Jong Un showing obvious disdain for Chinese President Xi Jinping and the Chinese appearing to view the young leader as erratic. This has led to speculation that Beijing has been keeping Kim Jong Nam on standby in case it needs to install another, more China-friendly Kim in Pyongyang.

Wang Weimin, an international-relations specialist at Fudan University in Shanghai, said China had security measures in place to protect Kim Jong Nam from North Korean agents, even though it had long recognized he was not leadership material.

"China did not have huge expectations for him but provided protection for him and his family," Wang said, "because China had political sympathy" for him.

Wang estimated the likelihood that Kim Jong Un had ordered his older brother's assassination at 80 percent. "It is not surprising that he wants to clean out anybody threatening to his reign," he said.

Officials in China also seem to be leaning toward the theory that Kim Jong Un ordered the killing.

An editorial in the state-run Global Times said that Beijing would join in expressions of international condemnation if Malaysian authorities conclude that Kim Jong Nam was assassinated. "Human civilization is now in the 21st century, and such a savage and outdated political device should be cast into the museums of history," it read.

Noting that the investigation was still underway, it said speculation was nevertheless "sharply pointed" at Pyongyang.

"Such speculation is severely damaging to North Korea's reputation on the international stage," the editorial said.

Congcong Zhang in Beijing contributed to this report.

One of the world's superpowers is in trouble — economically, politically, socially. Its manufacturing industry is hurting. Businesses are reluctant to make investment decisions, thanks to arbitrary and capricious regulators. Corruption scandals abound. The country is drowning in debt. Social unrest is brewing, as is a pernicious fear of foreigners. Some argue the country's very sovereignty is being threatened.

Fortunately, President Trump and his Republican congressional allies are working hard to turn things around.

That's right: They're doing their best to Make China Great Again

What, you thought I was talking about the United States?

Nope. China has faced some challenges over the past several years. But on multiple fronts, unified Republican leadership in Washington is making life easier for Beijing.

Take, for example, the Trump administration's decision to pull out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the 12-country trade pact that excludes China.

The treaty, the centerpiece of President Barack Obama's "pivot to Asia," set new standards for environmental and labor laws. It also was an explicit attempt to prevent China from writing "the rules of the

road" for international economic policy, given that China has been simultaneously shaping a separate 16-country Pacific trade deal that the United States isn't party to.

In killing our participation in the TPP (not to mention picking an unnecessary fight with Australia, one of our most important allies in the Pacific), Trump boosted China's effort to set the global economic agenda.

Not content to cede only economic influence to China, the White House has also signaled its intention to take a more *laissez faire* approach on international moral leadership.

Both Trump's insular "America First" rhetoric and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's confirmation hearing testimony indicate a reduced interest in promoting human rights abroad. This is excellent news for China. It has an abysmal record of jailing, torturing and denying medical care to dissidents — and telling the United States to butt out whenever we suggest it treat its people better (or that it stop doing business with perpetrators of genocide).

Trump could always change his mind and decide to be more vocal about China's (and other countries') human rights abuses. Even if that happens, though, he'll have little moral high ground to stand on, given his public backing of torture and other war crimes.

Sure, Trump has otherwise pledged to be "tough" on China. His chosen strategy early on was to threaten the long-standing U.S. commitment to a one-China policy, the diplomatic recognition of only one country called China, headquartered in Beijing.

Trump first signaled his willingness to chuck this precedent when he took a congratulatory call from the Taiwanese president in December, the first known contact between leadership in Taiwan and a U.S. president or president-elect in some 40 years. In subsequent days, he suggested that he, a world-class negotiator, would use the one-China policy as a bargaining chip to extract painful concessions from Beijing.

"I fully understand the one-China policy, but I don't know why we have to be bound by a one-China policy unless we make a deal with China having to do with other things, including trade," he told Fox News.

Less than two months later, Trump backed down, unequivocally pledging his commitment to one-China after all.

What did our great dealmaker get in return? Nothing — or nothing public, anyway. Beijing must be pleased as punch.

The last way in which U.S. politicians are doing China a solid is the least well-known, because it's somewhat technical. But it's

potentially the most valuable of all these giveaways.

It has to do with a proposed change in tax policy called a "border adjustment tax." U.S. companies no longer would have to pay taxes on money they earned from exports, though in return, they would no longer get to deduct spending on imports.

Republicans and many economists have argued that the tax wouldn't hurt importers (or help exporters) because foreign exchange rates would quickly adjust. That is, the value of the dollar would increase by about 25 percent, making imports cheaper and exports more expensive, and thereby offsetting the changes in the tax code.

An increase in the value of the dollar by 25 percent, however, would have another, underappreciated effect: It also would make dollar-denominated U.S. debt held by foreigners 25 percent more valuable. And China holds \$1 trillion in U.S. debt. That means that if exchange rates adjusted as predicted, a border adjustment tax would hand China a multi-hundred-billion-dollar windfall. All for free!

Think of how that money could be used to help all the forgotten, hard-working people of the Chinese heartland.



## A Mexican populist rises to face Trump's America

<https://www.facebook.com/josh.partlow1>

LOS ANGELES — Abel Flores, a 45-year-old day laborer, left central Mexico three decades ago and has not voted regularly in its elections. And yet, as the sun was setting on a recent evening, he was jammed with hundreds of Mexican Americans into a tree-shaded Los Angeles plaza to cheer on a rabble-rousing politician who could take Mexico in a very different direction.

"I don't normally do this kind of thing," Flores said, referring to the rally for Andrés Manuel López Obrador, widely known as AMLO. But the day laborer felt that Mexico was threatened by President Trump, who has vowed to build a border wall and renegotiate the historic free-trade agreement with the United States.

"AMLO is the only person who can do anything to protect Mexico," Flores declared.

Politics newsletter

The big stories and commentary shaping the day.

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The outrage in Mexico over Trump's proposals has elevated a longtime politician who has unnerved the country's business community with his nationalist views and leftist rhetoric. Political opponents have compared López Obrador with the late Hugo Chávez, a strongman who steered Venezuela toward socialism. While that may be an exaggeration, López Obrador, 63, can bring thousands into the streets on command. His critics worry that his penchant for stubborn resistance could provoke confrontation with the United States, while his fans see him as a defender of the common man.

Although he has not yet officially declared his candidacy for next year's presidential race, López Obrador has become the clear front-runner: A recent poll by *El Financiero* newspaper had him capturing 33 percent of voter support, six points ahead of Margarita Zavala of the conservative

National Action Party (PAN). López Obrador is already in campaign mode, barnstorming the country and traveling to the United States to drum up support from Mexican Americans.

*[Trump meets with Carlos Slim as Mexican leaders seek better relations]*

As he spoke to the crowd in Plaza Olvera in Los Angeles on Sunday, López Obrador hit some fiery notes, comparing Trump's America to Hitler's Germany, but he ultimately called for calm.

"We should counter the strategy of Trump and his advisers not with shouts and insults ... but with intelligence, wisdom and dignity," he said. "This is a battle that we should wage on the terrain of ideas."

Trump will probably be a major campaign issue when Mexicans go to the polls next year. López Obrador has criticized the U.S. president's policies but showed restraint, casting himself as the mature elder statesman. On the night Trump won the election, López Obrador posted a short video telling

Mexicans that they had "no reason to worry" and that they belonged to a sovereign nation that "doesn't depend on any foreign government." During the current standoff with Trump over who will pay for the border wall, López Obrador has refrained from bashing President Enrique Peña Nieto, who is accused by some Mexicans of being too accommodating.

A fixture on Mexico's left for decades, López Obrador comes from the gulf coast state of Tabasco, where he ran unsuccessfully for governor. He gained prominence as the mayor of Mexico City from 2000 to 2005, cutting an unusual figure by avoiding many of the trappings of high office and driving around in a Nissan Sentra. He gave subsidies to the poor and elderly but also balanced the budget, built elevated roadways to relieve the city's notorious traffic, and raised tax collection. He left office with an approval rating of more than 80 percent.

But in 2006, after narrowly losing the presidential election, López Obrador provoked a political crisis by

refusing to accept the victory of Felipe Calderón, a conservative, and instead declaring himself the nation's "legitimate president." The leftist showed his mastery at mobilizing crowds, leading a six-week blockade of one of Mexico's main boulevards.

After he again lost the presidential election in 2012, López Obrador left Mexico's main leftist party — the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) — and formed an offshoot called MORENA, or the National Regeneration Movement.

*[White House says Mexico border wall might be funded by tax on imports]*

Peña Nieto and his traditionally dominant Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) have become deeply unpopular because of a sluggish economy, corruption scandals and the perception that the president has not stood up to Trump. Peña Nieto and his team have been careful not to antagonize Trump, for fear of damaging the relationship with Mexico's No. 1 trade partner.

"Andrés Manuel is well positioned in this situation to create an alternative

path, and he has benefited a lot because Peña Nieto's team has been clumsy," said Alberto Aziz Nassif, a political analyst in Mexico City. "He is reading these new winds, these new times."

López Obrador has been a front-runner before only to fade as the election gets closer. His critics see him as an arrogant, power-hungry figure. Much of the business and political elite consider him a particular threat. He has been skeptical of Mexico's embrace of free trade and opposed Peña Nieto's moves to open the country's crucial oil industry to foreign investment.

"He is authoritarian, intolerant, he has a vision of the world where those who are with him are good and the others are bad," said Francisco Gil Villegas, a political analyst in Mexico City. "He's not very democratic, and he is willing to operate above the Constitution."

Despite his long political history, López Obrador sees himself as an outsider. In a speech on Sunday at a cultural center in Tijuana, south of the border from San Diego, he

warned that the electoral system was rigged, and he predicted fraud in next year's vote.

His new book, "2018 The Exit: Decline and Rebirth in Mexico," opens with the line: "Corruption is the principal problem in Mexico," a theme he has emphasized since his first presidential run a decade ago.

In his Tijuana speech, López Obrador estimated that hundreds of millions of dollars in government funds are siphoned away each year in corruption and promised that he would recover this money — he did not specify how — and spend it on scholarships for students. He vowed to sell all the presidential airplanes and helicopters and travel in a more humble fashion. These types of promises resonate with many Mexicans who are fed up with rampant corruption.

The crowd that greeted López Obrador in Los Angeles later that day included documented and undocumented immigrants, migrant advocates and Dodgers first baseman Adrián González, who is Mexican American. Trump's threats to deport illegal immigrants and the

recent wave of immigration raids in several U.S. cities have alarmed many in the Mexican diaspora.

Los Angeles was the first of seven U.S. cities that López Obrador plans to visit in coming weeks as he casts himself as a defender of immigrant rights. At the end of his Tijuana speech, he led a chant that immigrants "are not alone."

In his remarks, López Obrador was deeply critical of Trump, describing him as a "neo-fascist" who won the presidency through a "discourse of hate." But he called for opposing the U.S. president through legal and democratic means. He urged bilingual lawyers to help migrants and suggested that media outlets document the migrant experience.

"I confess that I am optimistic," he said. "The wall and demagoguery can't compete with the talent and dignity of the United States."

He concluded, "Viva the state of California!"

Gabriela Martinez in Mexico City contributed to this report.

## ETATS-UNIS

### POLITICO

## Trump flees Washington as he seeks a reset

By Josh Dawsey

Since Donald Trump became president last month, Robert Rabon says his company selling mobile homes in Conway, South Carolina, is booming — and he credits Trump. "I've sold 50 mobile homes since the beginning of the year because the people feel good about the country, they feel excited about it again."

He expects to pay less for insurance when the Affordable Care Act is repealed and says his friends are hurting because of high fees and deductibles; the owner of a local barbecue restaurant is paying \$3,200 per month because he has diabetes, Rabon said. He thinks taxes will drop because he won't have to "pay for all these other people who have never worked and sit on their butts for their whole lives," even though Trump has resisted some calls to rein in entitlement spending.

Story Continued Below

"If Hillary Clinton had won, I was going to shut down my business. I

really was," Rabon said. "We just had to have a change after the last eight years. We have a president who's pro-America, not anti-America. I just thought Barack Obama hated America. He wanted to do everything he could do to destroy America."

Trump travels to South Carolina Friday, ostensibly for the rollout of Boeing's new 787-10 Dreamliner jet, but it will probably be just as much an ego boost for a president pummeled by Washington.

Not only will Trump likely face rapturous applause as he crows about American-made products, but it will also give him a chance to revel in his victory — one of his favorite topics. He won 55 percent of South Carolina's vote to Hillary Clinton's 41 percent in the general election, and about 32 percent of the primary tally, besting his nearest rival by 10 points.

It will be a welcome respite for Trump, who has largely been holed up in the White House, careening from one controversy to the next during his first month in office. In a stunning sign of his frustration,

Trump unloaded on the "dishonest media" during an hour-plus-long news conference on Thursday for not giving him the credit his administration deserves. And while Trump cited a recent Rasmussen poll during the news conference that shows his approval rating at 55 percent, the average has hovered more around 46 percent — a historic low for a new president.

But in South Carolina, he's getting rave reviews.

Interviews with lawmakers, activists and political observers in the state indicate they aren't nearly as concerned about his erratic phone calls with foreign leaders, his Twitter attacks on senators, celebrities and others, his shifting and sometimes uninformed opinions on issues, his campaign's questionable ties to Russia, and his administration's struggles to fill the government and effectively implement his policy ideas.

The biggest problem, Republicans here say, is the Charleston event is private and they all can't get in. "The people who supported him support him more than ever," said

Joel Sawyer, a Columbia consultant with deep ties across the state.

Trump has told allies it is important to be among "my people" and that the "dishonest" news media needed to see his support. After South Carolina, he will head to Florida for a campaign rally, even though his re-election bid is four years away.

That workers at the Boeing plant Trump is visiting overwhelmingly rejected an attempt this week to unionize has further energized Trump's supporters, say Cindy Costa, a Lowcountry Republican and national committeewoman. "Unions have served their purpose and are no longer needed," she said. "They protect lazy people and keep them hired when they need to be fired. You have these union bosses and criminal elements that run unions, and I think the president would agree with me." Trump recently met with unions in the Oval Office and often dealt with them as a New York billionaire.

During the campaign, religious conservatives, which dominate the state, were skeptical about Trump, a thrice-married, philandering

billionaire. Now, they believe he will stand up against abortion and for the rights of churches.

South Carolina Republicans have also learned to love the unilateral power of the presidency. Republicans, Sawyer said, hated President Obama's executive orders and called them "overreach" but now embrace Trump's orders. Consistency, he joked recently on Twitter, is so 2012. While Trump's executive orders were widely derided in Washington for being vague, symbolic and ill-crafted, supporters saw them as proof he would get to work immediately.

While South Carolina Republicans derided Obama for playing golf, Trump's trips to the course don't seem to bother them. "He is working his butt off," Rabon, a lifelong Republican who had never attended an inauguration before Trump's, said. "He will figure it out but he is getting battered at every turn."

Supporters also say they liked his Cabinet choices, which they deemed conservative. Asked about various allegations that have swirled around nominees, from not paying taxes to domestic abuse allegations, supporters shrugged and in some cases, blamed the media. "These are people who know the world, not the academics that Obama appointed. None of these people were based on identity politics. They were just the best people for the jobs," said Larry Kobrovsky, chairman of the Charleston County Republican Party. "In the media, you have this relentless over-the-top hysteria. No matter what he does, the media says he's terrible. Every time he opens his mouth, he's the worst in the world. You just learn to discount it."

Allegations about Russia are largely overblown, too, his fans say, and are an attempt to

de-legitimize his victory. They largely agree with Trump over the executive order travel ban that has since been frozen by the courts. "He was smacked down by an activist judge," Sawyer said, of how Trump's supporters see it.

And whereas many inside the Beltway are cringing at Trump's rhetoric, his impolitic or unpolished remarks are expected in South Carolina. "You hear people saying they wish he wouldn't tweet, but I think 98 percent of the people here think he's doing great," Costa said. "I wish some of his tweets were better crafted and had a better message, but I'm in politics. They're not being written for me."

Streets remain lined with Trump signs in Horry County, a conservative bastion on the coast. Billboards have kept his face along the interstate. While some in Washington joke about his impeachment, many here say they are looking forward to Trump's second term.

"They basically say, we sent him to shake things up in Washington, is he doing that?" said Rep. Mark Sanford, a Charleston Republican who has criticized the president. "And they basically think yes. A lot of the things that are causing grave concern among some in Washington are not noticed by supporters at home. They don't care about the ins and outs."

He is not without his opponents or problems here. In some of the state's bigger cities — like Charleston and Greenville — an influx of Fortune 500 companies have brought an influx of Democrats who want to mount protests against Trump in South Carolina, said Jaime Harrison, the chairman of the Democratic state party. He says Trump is alienating every Democrat in the state and even some who voted for him, and he is heartened by polls in other states that show

Trump's popularity declining. "He's in the 30s in Michigan now," Harrison said.

Harrison also said that Republicans would be howling if accusations swirled that Hillary Clinton's campaign worked covertly with Russian officials during the election. The double standard is infuriating, he said, and watching Republicans defend Trump amid chaos is difficult to swallow. "I have never seen anything like this," he said.

Trump could have other issues, Sanford and some critics say. Sanford expects protests at his town hall this weekend. They worry about Trump's anti-free trade policies hurting the state, particularly the large port in Charleston near where Trump is appearing. If the economy doesn't turn around, and he can't bring jobs back to the faded mill towns that dot the interstate between booming cities, people could tire of him. "The anti-trade talk could be a real double-edge sword -- if some of that stuff took hold and trade barriers begin to go up around the world and it hurts companies like Boeing, that will have a consequence," Sanford said. "People are really expecting the economy to boom."

And if it was ever substantiated that Russians were paid to help him win the presidency, Sanford said that would hurt Trump. Still, Harrison seemed unsure of how many people would actually show up to the protests — in a nearby parking lot — given that South Carolina ain't Michigan. "I think there will be a number of people," he said.

Protests may bother Trump, who has grown privately upset when detractors greet him. But they won't bother many of his supporters, who universally say the protests make them like him more. Kobrovsky, the Charleston Republican, said watching the protests against Betsy DeVos, the new education

secretary, and the "crazies in Wisconsin and Michigan" made him glad Trump was in office and "those people were not." Rabon said the protesters were paid by George Soros — an unsubstantiated claim.

"Republicans work and raise families. They aren't going to be out in the streets or at rallies during the day," Kobrovsky said. "If you see people on the other side, they don't. They've never had so much fun in their life doing these protests."

Costa said Democrats are acting wildly inappropriate when it comes to Trump. "He's being obstructed by the Democrats. They are hateful. They are mean-spirited. They are just made that way. I don't even understand how their brains work. I don't see how they can't understand the obvious. Their minds are much different than ours," she said.

Sawyer and other longtime political observers in South Carolina say the partisan division worries them, because Trump's supporters and detractors don't seem to care about the facts. Both Democrats and Republicans should keep an open mind to Trump, he said, and be willing to change positions from he is "the greatest president ever" to the "end of western civilization as we know it."

"Regardless what you think of Donald Trump, we should as human beings hold open the possibility that our minds could be changed," he said. "If we're determined as an electorate to think what we think, facts be damned, our country is screwed."

Costa said there is a way Trump could lose support in South Carolina. "If he goes out and mass murders people, I think he'd lose support. But that's not going to happen," she said.

## POLITICO Donald Trump: 28 Days Later

By Matthew Nussbaum and Henry C. Jackson

Donald Trump will hit the four-week-mark Friday on a presidency that has begun like no other — full of big promises, constant controversy, the ever-present encroaching of major scandal, and zero regard for the previous norms of American politics.

Beneath the noise, however, there has been a march, however halting and disorganized, toward Trump's promised radical remaking of American policy, foreign and domestic. The border wall his critics said he'd never build has been ordered, his promised rollback of

regulations is in full swing, his Supreme Court pick that will likely sit on the bench for decades, and even the "Muslim ban" he promised during the Republican primary was put in place, however briefly, in altered form.

Story Continued Below

The dual track is familiar to those who watched his campaign, during which a series of controversies and scandals garnered mass attention while few foresaw Trump's success in building a winning coalition. But a presidency is a longer race than even the campaign, and it remains to be seen whether Trump can

outpace his missteps the way he did last fall.

So far, Trump has signed at least 23 executive actions, signed five bills into law, seen 12 members of his Cabinet confirmed, nominated one justice to the Supreme Court, sent 168 (undeleeted) tweets, fired one acting attorney general and demanded one resignation: that of his own national security adviser.

It has been 28 days. Here they are.

**Inauguration Day: Jan. 20**  
**Where things went according to plan:**

**The speech:** In a short address, Trump stuck to the themes that won

him the election, painting a scene of current "American carnage" — claims of economic decay and rising crime that are contradicted by a considerable volume of statistical evidence — as well as his own promise to usher in a new American glory.

**First executive actions:** Trump signed an executive order that allowed for the delay or waiver of certain Affordable Care Act provisions, and another that froze pending regulations until they won approval from the White House or a newly appointed agency head — early moves toward core promises of his campaign.  
**Cabinet confirmations kick off:**



Two of Trump's best-received Cabinet picks, retired Marine Gens. James Mattis for Defense Secretary and John Kelly for Homeland Security, both won easy confirmation in the Senate. Vice President Mike Pence swore them in that evening.

**Where things went off the rails:** The crowds for the inauguration and ensuing parade were bested by the audience that attended former President Barack Obama's first inauguration, a disparity unveiled both by Metro rail ridership numbers and, more immediately, by aerial photographs.

**Day 2: Jan. 21**  
**According to plan:** First foreign leader visit is announced: Press secretary Sean Spicer announced the first visit from a foreign leader, with the Prime Minister Theresa May of the United Kingdom scheduled to visit Trump at the White House during his first week in office.

**Off the rails:** The Women's March: Hundreds of thousands of protesters descended on Washington and cities around the nation (as well as internationally) in massive numbers to demonstrate against the new president, opening questions about whether his election would galvanize progressives into a more politically effective resistance.

**The CIA speech:** Trump visited the CIA headquarters to show his support for their work, but while standing before the Agency's wall honoring the 117 CIA officers who died in service, he delivered a campaign-style address that stepped on his message.

**Sean Spicer:** The new press secretary called a news conference, but instead of taking questions, he offered a searing critique of the news media's accuracy while delivering no fewer than five demonstrably (at times even obviously) false statements in five minutes. The appearance won Spicer widespread mockery as his inaccuracy became the subject of a short-lived but widely shared meme.

**Day 3: Jan. 22**  
**According to plan:** Conversation with Netanyahu: Trump spoke by phone with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, extending the invitation for him to visit the United States in February and taking an early step toward a promise of warmer U.S.-Israeli relations.

**Trump's second response to the Women's March:** After initially complaining about the protests (see below), Trump took a more measured tone in a follow-up tweet: "Peaceful protests are a hallmark of our democracy. Even if I don't always agree, I recognize the rights

of people to express their views."

**Off the Rails:** "Alternative facts": White House counselor Kellyanne Conway defended Spicer's Saturday night falsehoods by telling NBC's Chuck Todd that Spicer was simply presenting "alternative facts." The phrase was widely mocked and cast further doubt on White House credibility just days into the administration.

**The beginning of the end of Flynn:** Sunday night, The Wall Street Journal published an article with an eyebrow-raising lede: "U.S. counterintelligence agents have investigated communications that President Donald Trump's national security adviser had with Russian officials, according to people familiar with the matter." The problem would not go away quietly.

**Day 4: Jan. 23**  
**According to plan:** More executive actions: Trump signed three more executive actions aimed at fulfilling campaign promises on what the White House billed as the first work day of the administration. The orders officially withdrew the U.S. from negotiations over the Trans-Pacific Partnership, froze federal hiring (except for the military and in certain security situations) and barred federal funds from going to international groups that provide abortions. The move on trade was the final nail in the coffin for U.S. participation in TPP, which had been slowly careening toward doom during the presidential campaign in which Trump and Clinton both voiced opposition to it. The hiring and abortion orders represented two more boxes checked on the conservative wish list.

**Spicer, take 2:** Spicer's much-anticipated Monday briefing was mostly drama-free, and the press secretary pledged the administration's "intention is never to lie to you."

**Tillerson on the move:** Rex Tillerson won a party line vote in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to advance his nomination for secretary of state. His prospects were uncertain after a rocky confirmation hearing and doubts voiced by Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.), who ended up supporting the former ExxonMobil CEO nonetheless.

**Off the Rails:** Trump's meeting with lawmakers: In a meeting with bipartisan congressional leadership at the White House, Trump repeated his false claim that widespread voter fraud cost him the popular vote in the general election.

**Conway on tax returns:** Conway walked back a claim she made Sunday — in which she seemed to indicate Trump never had any

intention of releasing his tax returns — and returned to the line repeated throughout the campaign, that his returns would be released after the completion of an audit.

**Day 5: Jan. 24**  
**According to plan:** More executive orders: Trump signed five more executive actions: Two encouraged the construction of pipelines, one sought to expedite the approval of infrastructure projects, one called for material used to build pipelines to be made in America "to the maximum extent possible," and another called for swifter permitting for domestic manufacturers.

**Nikki Haley:** Trump's pick for ambassador to the United Nations, former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley, was confirmed by the Senate 96-4.

**Off the Rails:** Spicer on voter fraud: Spicer defended Trump's voter fraud claims by incorrectly citing a widely debunked study. He did not say whether he agreed with Trump's claim, though he claimed that Trump had based his belief on "studies and evidence."

**Day 6: Jan. 25**  
**According to plan:** Immigration orders, Part 1: Trump signed two orders on immigration. One included a call for the beginning of planning and construction of the border wall and the hiring of 5,000 more border patrol agents, another pushed for the hiring of 10,000 additional Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers and aimed to cut off federal funding to "sanctuary cities."

**Paul Ryan's Philly speech:** In a speech at congressional Republicans' retreat in Philadelphia, House Speaker Paul Ryan said the Republican-led Congress would replace Obamacare, cut taxes and fund Trump's border wall by August. It's usually the White House making grand predictions and Congress coming in with the cold water, but Ryan's statements represented a show of unity.

**Off the Rails:** Voter fraud tweet: While his administration worked to steer the conversation toward Trump's policy, the president himself — possibly still upset over focus on his loss in the popular vote — couldn't resist relitigating the election. "I will be asking for a major investigation into VOTER FRAUD, including those registered to vote in two states, those who are illegal and... even, those registered to vote who are dead (and many for a long time). Depending on results, we will strengthen up voting procedures!"

**Day 7: Jan. 26**  
**According to plan:**

**Bannon bashes the press:** From the campaign trail into the White House, Trump and his team have grown fond of attacking the news media — a move that seems always to rile up their base. Trump's chief strategist Steve Bannon added his voice to the chorus, telling The New York Times that the media is "the opposition party" and that the press should "keep its mouth shut and just listen for awhile." Trump would later repeat the "opposition party" phrase to describe the press.

**Off the Rails:** Spicer, again: On a flight back from Philadelphia, where Trump addressed the Republican congressional retreat, Spicer suggested a 20 percent tax on imports from countries "like Mexico" could be used to pay for the border wall. But Spicer quickly walked back the proposal, saying it was not a policy proposal but rather "one idea" for how the wall could be paid for. The idea was out there long enough to get panned by some Republicans, including Sens. Ben Sasse and Lindsey Graham.

**Mexico responds:** Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto canceled a planned visit to the U.S. in response to Trump's Jan. 25 executive actions.

**Day 8: Jan. 27**  
**According to plan:** March for Life: The March for Life came to Washington with anti-abortion activists feeling a sense of renewed vigor now that Trump has been elected. Pence, in particular, won plaudits by being the first sitting vice president to address the annual event — a hometown crowd for him if there ever was one.

**First presidential presser:** Donald Trump welcomed British Prime Minister Theresa May, an event that went smoothly and showcased a tight partnership between the two nations. Trump answered his first questions from reporters as president.

**Off the Rails:** Refugee executive order stumbles out of the gate: Trump signed a far-reaching executive order that temporarily halted the admission of new refugees into the United States, imposed an indefinite ban on the entry of refugees from Syria, and suspended the entry of citizens of seven Muslim-majority countries. The executive order, signed late on a Friday afternoon, prompted immediate confusion about its enforcement, including chaos at points of U.S. entry. And, within hours, it met resistance in court, including legal challenges that would eventually succeed in putting the order on ice.

**Holocaust Remembrance Day statement:** The White House released a statement to honor International Holocaust

Remembrance Day, but made no explicit mention Jewish people. Later in the weekend, two Republican groups joined in criticism of the statement. The White House later called criticism of its statement "pathetic."  
**Senate pushback:** Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell felt compelled to warn Donald Trump not to lift sanctions on Russia, ahead of a scheduled Saturday morning call between Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin.

**Day 9, Jan. 28**  
**According to plan:**  
**Executive orders:** Trump signed three executive actions — a reorganization of the National Security Council; a five-year ban on lobbying for administration appointees and a lifetime ban on lobbying the government for other countries; and an order tasking the Department of Defense with coming up with a plan to defeat the Islamic State within 30 days. The NSC order proved the most significant, as it moved Trump's chief strategist, Steve Bannon, onto the principals committee of the National Security Council.

**Putin on the line:** Trump's first phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin was "positive," the White House said, and involved discussions of how the nations could cooperate to combat terrorism. The White House made no announcement regarding election interference-related sanctions after the call, assuaging the fears of some who worried Trump would roll back the sanctions.

**Off the Rails:**  
**Travel ban fallout rulings:** A series of rulings from federal courts Saturday night significantly curtailed Trump's order. A judge in Brooklyn suspended deportations, a Boston judge issued a temporary restraining order on the action and a Virginia judge blocked the deportation of green-card holders.  
**Travel ban fallout optics:** As some travelers from the seven affected countries found themselves detained at American airports — even if they had valid visas — and government officials scrambled to make sense of the order, civil liberties lawyers, protesters and Democratic politicians descended on airports. The backlash marked a spontaneous rebuke to Trump's order and raised questions about how much planning went into the sweeping action.

**Australia calling:** Trump's phone call with Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull went off the rails after Trump bragged about his election win, expressed anger over a deal to take refugees from

Australia and told Turnbull it was his "worst call by far" of the day. Details of the contentious conversation emerged in a Washington Post report a few days later.

**Day 10, Jan. 29**  
**According to plan:**  
**Order rewrite:** The Department of Homeland Security attempted to modify the travel order by saying it no longer applied to green-card holders from the seven targeted countries. That portion of the ban had been especially troubling to the courts.

**Clarification:** Trump posted a statement on Facebook defending his travel ban, saying the order was "not a Muslim ban," and stressing the temporary nature of it.  
**Off the Rails:**

**Yemen raid:** A special operations raid ordered by Trump in Yemen resulted in the death of a U.S. service member, Chief Petty Officer William "Ryan" Owens, the wounding of three others and significant civilian casualties. The White House argued that the raid, which targeted fighters from a branch of Al Qaeda, was successful because 14 militants were killed and intelligence was gathered.

**Continued protests:** Protesters continued to rally against the travel ban with protests in cities and at airports around the country, and at a large, impromptu march from the White House to the Capitol.

**ACLU money haul:** The American Civil Liberties Union, a nonprofit spearheading legal challenges to Trump's immigration ban, raised more than \$24 million in online donations over the weekend — about six times what they typically receive annually in online donations.

**Day 11, Jan. 30**  
**According to plan:**

**One in, two out:** Rolling ahead with executive orders to fulfill campaign promises, Trump signed an order decreeing that for every new federal regulation, two existing regulations must be repealed. Conservative groups cheered the move.

**You're fired:** Trump took authoritative action Monday night in defense of his travel ban, firing acting Attorney General Sally Yates for refusing to defend it. Trump also swiftly replaced Yates, an Obama administration appointee, with Dana Boente, the U.S. attorney in Alexandria, Virginia, ensuring essential functions of the Justice Department remained intact.

**Off the Rails:**  
**'Betrayal' attack:** The White House statement on Yates' firing was infected with personal attacks and sounded less like a presidential statement than a piece of campaign rhetoric. "The acting Attorney General, Sally Yates, has betrayed

the Department of Justice by refusing to enforce a legal order designed to protect the citizens of the United States. This order was approved as to form and legality by the Department of Justice Office of Legal Counsel. Ms. Yates is an Obama Administration appointee who is weak on borders and very weak on illegal immigration."

**Spicer vs. State:** As State Department employees registered dissent with the travel ban, Spicer announced from the White House that career employees who disagree with the new administration "can go."

**Behind the scenes:** A Monday night report revealed Hill staffers had aided the drafting of the controversial immigration order — but without informing party leadership, explaining some of the initial confusion and crossed wires after the order dropped.

**Day 12, Jan. 31**  
**According to plan:**

**LGBT order:** Making good on another campaign theme, Trump pledged to keep in place an Obama order barring federal contractors from discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation. Trump ran as the most outspoken supporter of LGBT rights to win the Republican nomination.

**Gorsuch for SCOTUS:** In a crowning moment for Trump and the conservative movement — not to mention Sen. Mitch McConnell, who made it possible — the president announced Neil Gorsuch as his pick for the Supreme Court in a prime-time unveiling from the White House. For many Republicans who disliked Trump but voted for him anyway with the Supreme Court in mind, this was a moment of vindication. The announcement went off without a hitch, and Gorsuch was quickly the recipient of praise, at least some of it bipartisan.

**Off the Rails:**  
**A ban, or not a ban?:** Spicer told the press that the travel ban — which both he and the president had referred to previously as a "ban" — was not, in fact, a ban. His attempted explanation would later be mocked on "Saturday Night Live."

**Wisconsin trip nixed:** Trump's planned trip to the Harley-Davidson factory in Milwaukee was canceled in part over concerns about protests, CNN reported. Trump ended up hosting Harley-Davidson executives at the White House later, instead.

**Day 13, Feb. 1**  
**According to plan:**

**Tillerson gets in:** Rex Tillerson, among the more controversial of Trump's Cabinet picks due to allegations of excessive coziness

with the Putin regime, was confirmed as secretary of state by the Senate in a 56-43 vote.  
**Saber rattling:** Trump ran on taking a tougher stance against Iran, and his White House made good on the pledge. National security adviser Michael Flynn announced the White House was officially putting Iran "on notice" for recent provocative behavior, and senior officials later would not rule out military action in response.

**Getting to know you:** Paul Ryan and Trump's son-in-law/senior adviser Jared Kushner dined together at the Capitol Hill Club.  
**Off the Rails:**

**DeVos by a thread:** Two Republican senators, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Susan Collins of Maine, announced they would oppose Trump's pick to lead the Education Department, Betsy DeVos. With Democrats unanimously opposed to the Michigan billionaire, that left DeVos headed for a 50-50 vote if the status quo held. The White House voiced confidence that she would be confirmed, which she later was with Pence casting the tie-breaking vote.

**Day 14, Feb. 2**  
**According to plan:**

**On message:** Trump told the National Prayer Breakfast that he would "totally destroy" the Johnson Amendment, which restricts political activity by religious groups. The message was one he and Pence trumpeted often on the campaign trail, and it went over well with the Prayer Breakfast crowd.

**Off the Rails:**  
**Bowling Green outrage:** Trump counselor Kellyanne Conway cites a fictitious "Bowling Green massacre" in an interview on on MSNBC's "Hardball" as she presses the case for Trump's immigration ban, an attack she said "most people" weren't aware of "because it didn't get covered." The next day, after the Internet had a lot to say about it, Conway apologized saying she got her facts scrambled.

**Talking Arnold:** In a move that struck some as tone deaf, Trump used a speech at the National Prayer Breakfast to mock the ratings of *The Celebrity Apprentice* with its new host, Arnold Schwarzenegger.

**Uber out:** Uber CEO Travis Kalanick quit Trump's business council after some questioned whether his presence with the group represented an endorsement of Trump's policies.

**Day 15, Feb. 3**  
**According to plan:**

**Dodd-Frank pull back:** Trump signed an executive order that backed sweeping changes to U.S. financial regulations, in what was viewed as a first step toward

undoing Obama's signature financial regulatory reforms. Trump also moved to revamp a controversial conflict-of-interest rule for financial advisers.

**Court victory:** Trump's travel ban won a legal battle — albeit a fleeting one. A 21-page decision from U.S. District Court Judge Nathaniel Gorton offered preliminary backup for the ban, concluding that Trump's executive order was legally sound.

**Off the Rails: Judge halts ban:** Late Friday, U.S. District Judge James Robart, a George W. Bush appointee, granted a temporary restraining order that halted Trump's travel ban and restrictions on a nationwide basis, setting up a protracted legal fight. Robart rejected arguments from Justice Department attorneys who said the ban was within the president's national-security powers.

**Viola drops out:** Vincent Viola, Trump's pick serve as Army secretary abruptly quit, saying he was concerned he couldn't disentangle extensive financial ties. Viola, who had been nominated in mid-December, said he concluded he couldn't clear all of his conflicts. He is the founder of trading firm Virtu Financial and owner of the National Hockey League's Florida Panthers.

**Day 16, Feb. 4**  
**According to plan:**

**Ukraine promise:** In a call with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, Trump promised that the U.S. would work to restore peace on the border between the Ukraine and Russia, according to a readout released by the White House. "We will work with Ukraine, Russia, and all other parties involved to help them restore peace along the border," Trump said during the 5 p.m. call, which was described by the White House as "a very good call."

**Off the Rails:**

**Judge assault:** Reacting to a court ruling late on Friday night, Trump assailed a federal judge who issued a broad block on his executive order restricting immigration from seven Muslim-majority countries. In a series of tweets, Trump called the ruling from Robart "ridiculous" and lashed out at him. "The opinion of this so-called judge, which essentially takes law-enforcement away from our country, is ridiculous and will be overturned!" Trump tweeted.

**'Saturday Night Live' hits:** A pair of skits that focused on the Trump White House quickly went viral with their scathing portrayals of Trump's relationship with world leaders (and top aide Steve Bannon) and White House press secretary Sean Spicer. Spicer, played by Melissa McCarthy, is lampooned as a

combative, inarticulate press basher. In another skit, Trump, portrayed by Alec Baldwin, calls world leaders as Steve Bannon, dressed as the Grim Reaper, coaches him — before relegating Trump to a child's desk.

**Day 17, Feb. 5**  
**Off the Rails:**

**Putin problem:** Trump shook up an otherwise quiet day when, in an interview with Fox News' Bill O'Reilly, he seemed to equate Russian President Vladimir Putin with American leadership. O'Reilly said to Trump: "Putin's a killer." And Trump responded, "A lot of killers. We got a lot of killers. What, you think our country's so innocent?" Critics, including GOP Sen. Marco Rubio, pounced on Trump's apparent moral equivalence. **More judge attacks:** Trump took to Twitter on Sunday afternoon to rip a federal judge and warn that he would be at fault if the U.S. was attacked. "Just cannot believe a judge would put our country in such peril. If something happens blame him and court system. People pouring in. Bad!"

**Day 18, Feb. 6**  
**According to plan:**

**Hearing set:** The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals gave the Trump administration hope — ultimately short-lived — that the travel ban could resume. The court agreed to hear arguments for and against a stay on Trump's executive action that temporarily halted entry by refugees, including those from Syria, and banned travel from seven Muslim-majority nations.

**Off the Rails:**

**Media cover-up speech:** Speaking to U.S. troops at Central Command in Tampa, Florida, Trump delivered an overtly political address that accused the news media of covering up terrorist attacks. Later, Spicer told reporters on a flight back to Washington that Trump was merely suggesting some attacks don't receive the coverage they deserve, and that things like protests receive too much coverage.

**Terror pushback:** The White House released a list of 78 terrorist attacks later that night that it said had been underreported by the U.S. media. The list was riddled with misspellings and typos, and included dozens of attacks that received significant, in some cases, blanket U.S. media coverage. Among the "under covered" attacks cited: A shooting at an Orlando, Florida, nightclub that left dozens dead; an attack in San Bernardino, California, and large-scale attacks in Paris and Brussels.

**Bowling Green continued:** White House counselor Kellyanne Conway came under fire after news emerged

she cited the fictitious "Bowling Green massacre" in at least two previous interviews. In interviews with Cosmopolitan and "TMZ" Conway made reference to fictitious events in Bowling Green.

**Melania lawsuit:** A lawyer for first lady Melania Trump argued in a lawsuit filed Monday that an article falsely alleging she once worked for an escort service hurt her chance to establish "multimillion dollar business relationships" during the years in which she would be "one of the most photographed women in the world."

**Day 19, Feb. 7**  
**According to plan:**

**DeVos confirmed:** Education Secretary Betsy DeVos won Senate confirmation by the narrowest possible margin, with Vice President Mike Pence casting the deciding vote. Two Republican senators, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Susan Collins of Maine voted against DeVos, who faced criticism for past comments and lack of background in public education, and had a rocky confirmation hearing. Pence's vote was the first time a vice president was called upon to help confirm a member of the Cabinet.

**Off the Rails:**

**Teleconference in court:** The Trump administration was able to argue the merits of the travel ban on a teleconference with the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals. A Justice Department lawyer argued that presidents have broad authority when it comes to decisions involving national security.

**Murder claims:** Trump held two listening sessions at the White House to kick off the day, one with county sheriffs and one with veterans' advocates. But the message was stepped on by Trump's false claim that the U.S. murder rate is at its highest level in more than four decades and by his offer to help "destroy" the career of a Texas state lawmaker who opposes asset forfeiture.

**Kelly regrets:** Testifying on Capitol Hill, Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly said he should have delayed the implementation of the travel ban.

**Yemen fallout:** Yemen withdrew permission for American special operations forces to conduct ground operations in the country, The New York Times reported. The move came in the aftermath of a U.S. raid — the first commando raid ordered by Trump — that resulted in the death of one U.S. service member and significant civilian casualties.

**Faux pas avec la France:** Word leaked of a rocky phone call between Trump and French President Francois Hollande, with Trump veering into rants about the

U.S. getting shaken down by other countries.

**Day 20, Feb. 8**

**According to plan:**

**Sessions in:** Trump's pick for attorney general, Jeff Sessions, won confirmation by a 52-47 vote.

**Off the Rails:**

**Nevertheless, she persisted:** In another galvanizing event for Democratic critics of Trump and Republicans, Sen. Elizabeth Warren was reprimanded and told to sit down and be quiet during debate on Sessions after reading a letter critical of sessions written by Coretta Scott King. Mitch McConnell said that Warren was warned but "nevertheless, she persisted," a phrase that spawned thousands of Facebook posts and tweets, T-shirts and more.

**Supreme discontent:** In a meeting with Sen. Richard Blumenthal, Supreme Court nominee Neil Gorsuch lambasted the president's pointed criticisms of a federal judge who put a stay on his travel ban. Gorsuch said Trump's remarks were "disheartening" and "demoralizing." The comments marked an extraordinary break between a top White House nominee and the president.

**Nordstrom attack:** President Trump used Twitter to blast luxury retail store Nordstrom for dropping the clothing line of his daughter Ivanka Trump from its stores. Ethics experts and others immediately criticized Trump for using his Twitter account (and the bully pulpit) to attack an individual business. Nordstrom had previously announced it was dropping Ivanka Trump's clothing line due to poor sales numbers.

**Day 21, Feb. 9**  
**Off the Rails:**

**Flynn in free fall:** The Washington Post published a report citing nine sources stating Flynn had discussed U.S. sanctions in a phone call with the Russian ambassador, contrary to Flynn's and the administration's statements about the call.

**Ban on ban upheld:** A federal appeals court unanimously rejected the Trump administration's request to reinstate a travel ban that blocked refugees from entering the U.S. as well as citizens of seven Muslim-majority countries. Trump responded to the ruling by tweeting, in all caps, "SEE YOU IN COURT, THE SECURITY OF OUR NATION IS AT STAKE!"

**Nordstrom problems:** House adviser Kellyanne Conway came under fire for encouraging people to buy Ivanka Trump's clothing line, a likely violation of ethics rules that bar such advocacy from White House officials.

**Day 22, Feb. 10**  
**According to plan:** Trump held a joint news conference and met with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

**Keeping options open:** After legal setbacks for his travel and refugee ban, Trump alluded to future action on the issue: Twice during the day, Trump suggested that the White House would try to redraft the order in order to strengthen it against legal challenges.

**Off the Rails:**  
**Flynn fallout:** Vice President Mike Pence became entangled in reports that national security adviser Mike Flynn discussed sanctions with Russia before President Trump was sworn in. Pence had denied on national television that sanctions had been discussed. The Pence camp insists Pence was speaking based on what Flynn told him — raising the possibility that Flynn had lied to the vice president.

**Abrams tanked:** President Trump blocked Elliott Abrams' appointment to a top post at the State Department because of his criticisms of Trump during the campaign. Newly sworn-in Secretary of State Rex Tillerson had favored Abrams, a veteran Republican foreign policy hand, for the role because of his breadth of knowledge.

**Conspiracy theorist:** Reports emerged that Trump once again espoused conspiracy theories about illegal voters — with no evidence. In a closed-door meeting with congressional leaders, Trump asserted that he, and former Sen. Kelly Ayotte, would have won in New Hampshire without illegal votes.

**Day 23, Feb. 11**  
**According to plan:** Trump continued a diplomatic visit with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe by hitting the links with him in Palm Beach, Florida.

**Diplomatic partnership:** Trump and Abe showcased a tight, on-message partnership in the face of an apparent missile test by North Korea. The two worked closely together to craft a denunciation of the launch. Appearing with Trump at a hastily called news conference at in Florida, Abe called the attack "intolerable."

**Off the Rails:**  
**North Korea problem:** North Korea's decision to test the missile is another implicit challenge to Trump — and seemed designed to rattle Trump and Abe's otherwise

feel-good meeting.  
**Public diplomacy:** Trump and Abe came under fire for apparently reacting to the launch in public view at Mar-a-Lago. Members took pictures of the two world leaders, huddled over documents lit by cellphone flashlights, in plain view of diners at the Trump-owned property. Rep. Jason Chaffetz, chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, called for a review of the security protocols at Mar-a-Lago after images popped up on Facebook and elsewhere.

**Day 24, Feb. 12**  
**According to plan:**  
**Quiet-ish day:** After a day of golf and a night of diplomatic crisis the night before, Trump avoided much spectacle. He met with his Treasury nominee, Steve Mnuchin, and casino magnate Steve Wynn at Mar-a-Lago before flying back to Washington.

**Miller impresses the boss:** White House senior policy adviser Stephen Miller did a round of Sunday shows — which Trump cheered on, via Twitter.

**Off the Rails:**  
**But Miller fails with others:** Miller was ripped as shaky and dissembling on Twitter and faced sharp questions from his Sunday-morning show inquisitors, including this back-and-forth with NBC's Chuck Todd about national security adviser Michael Flynn: **TODD:** "Let me ask you this, if you were caught misleading the vice president of the United States, would that be considered a fireable offense in the Trump White House?" **MILLER:** "It's not for me to answer hypothetical. It wouldn't be responsible. It's a sensitive matter." But Trump was satisfied with the performance.

**Tweeting the morning away:** Trump started his Sunday with a rapid-fire string of tweets targeting critics and got into a back and forth with fellow billionaire Mark Cuban. "I know Mark Cuban well," Trump tweeted. "He backed me big-time but I wasn't interested in taking all of his calls. He's not smart enough to run for president!" Notably, Cuban campaigned for former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and aided her campaign.

**Day 25, Feb. 13**  
**According to plan:**  
**Welcome, neighbor:** Trump and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau had a productive meeting, reaffirming the warm relations between the U.S. and Canada. Trudeau talked about the two nations' common ground and

avoided talk of Trump's controversial travel ban. Trump said that U.S. trade issues with Canada are less egregious than those with Mexico.

**Growing Cabinet:** Trump's pick for Veterans Affairs secretary, David Shulkin, was unanimously confirmed by the Senate. His pick to lead the Treasury Department, Steven Mnuchin, was confirmed in a 53-47 vote.

**Off the Rails:**  
**Out like Flynn:** As night fell in Washington, so did the ax on Flynn, who resigned over reports he misled Pence about his discussions of sanctions with the Russian ambassador to the United States.  
**Lingering questions:** Flynn's ouster didn't end the story. There were an array of questions: Who knew what, and when? Why did Trump wait weeks after he learned about his calls with the Russian ambassador to relieve him of his post? And will Flynn eventually be asked to testify to Congress about his tenure?

**Pudzer problems:** Problems continued to emerge for Trump's embattled Labor nominee, Andy Pudzer. Talk show host Oprah Winfrey gave the Senate committee considering his nomination a 1990 tape of a show in which Pudzer's wife, in disguise, discussing allegations of domestic violence.

**Day 26, Feb. 14**  
**According to plan:**  
**Regulatory blow:** In a tangible strike at regulations, Trump signed a bill that killed SEC regulations requiring companies to disclose payments made to foreign governments.

**Off the Rails:**  
**Bombshells:** The New York Times reported that members of Trump's campaign staff had regular contacts with Russian security officials. About an hour later, CNN largely matches the development. The stories come hours after Spicer denied that Trump's campaign had any contact with Russians.  
**Conway conflict:** The Office of Government Ethics said it wanted White House lawyers to investigate Conway after she called on people to buy Ivanka Trump's clothing line during a television appearance.

**Day 27, Feb. 15**  
**According to plan:**  
**Netanyahu's visit:** Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had an amiable meeting and a joint news conference. Trump also seemed to affirm his commitment to the Jewish State's conservative governing coalition by

abandoning the U.S. commitment to the two-state solution.

**Shifting the conversation:** Trump took to Twitter in response to allegations his associates had been in contact with the Russians during the campaign, writing: "The real scandal here is that classified information is illegally given out by 'intelligence' like candy. Very un-American!" Conservative media outlets added their voice to the argument, slamming leakers within the government.

**Off the Rails:**  
**Puzder pulls out:** Andy Puzder, Trump's pick for Labor secretary, withdrew from consideration after POLITICO published a tape of his ex-wife discussing abuse allegations on "Oprah" and a number of Senate Republicans urged his withdrawal.

**Day 28, Feb. 16**  
**According to plan:**  
**The accomplishment-touting part of the presser:** At his first solo news conference as president, Trump ticked through his accomplishments so far, touting his first four weeks in the White House as the most productive of any presidency.

**The media-bashing part of the presser:** Trump's base loves when he attacks the media, and he served up the red meat at his news conference, deploying his favorite insults for the press: "fake news" and "dishonest people."

**Signing a bill into law:** Trump signed into law a bill nullifying a Department of Interior rule, much loathed by Republicans, aimed at protecting streams.

**Off the Rails:**  
**The rest of the presser:** Trump warned about the dangers of "nuclear holocaust." He asked a black reporter if she was "friends" with the Congressional Black Caucus, and if she could set up a meeting with its members. He bragged, falsely, about the historic margin of his election win, only to be corrected on the spot — then blamed his staff for giving him bad information. And he said never instructed Flynn to talk about sanctions with the Russian ambassador but said that he would have.

At one point in the presser, Trump said he didn't think "there's ever been a president who in a short period of time has done what we've done."



Let's say you are a Trump voter, the kind we often hear about — an honest, hard-working American who put up with Donald Trump's unusual behavior because you wanted a president who would stop playing Washington's political games, bring a businessman's obsession with action and results, and focus on the economy. How is that working out for you?

The first few weeks of President Trump's administration have been an illustration of writer Alfred Montapert's adage, "Do not confuse motion and progress. A rocking horse keeps moving but does not make any progress." We are witnessing a rocking-horse presidency in which everyone is jerking back and forth furiously, yet there is no forward movement.

Since winning the election, Trump has dominated the news nearly every day. He has picked fights with the media, making a series of bizarre, mostly false claims — about the magnitude of his victory, the size of his inauguration crowd, the weather that day, the numbers of illegally cast ballots, among many others. He has had photo ops with everyone from Kanye West and Jack Ma to Shinzo Abe and Justin Trudeau. Now he is embroiled in a controversy about ties to Russia. But in the midst of it all, what has he actually done? Hardly anything.

Act Four newsletter

The intersection of culture and politics.

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On Thursday, Trump said at a news conference, "There has never been a presidency that's done so much in such a short period of time." Matthew Yglesias of Vox observes that at this point in his presidency, Barack Obama had signed into law an almost-trillion-dollar stimulus bill to revive the economy, extended health insurance to 4 million children and made it easier to challenge discriminatory labor practices. In their respective first 100 days in office, FiveThirtyEight calculates that Bill Clinton had passed 24 bills; John Kennedy, 26; Harry Truman, 55; and FDR, 76.

Despite having a Republican House and Senate, Trump does not seem likely to crack 10. Yglesias notes that the Trump White House has not even begun serious discussions with Congress on major legislation. According to The Post, of 696 key positions that require Senate confirmation, the president has yet to nominate 661 of them.

Trump has issued a series of executive orders with great fanfare (though fewer than Obama at this point). But they are mostly hot air — lofty proclamations that direct some agency to "review" a law, "report" back to him, "consider" some action or reaffirm some long-standing

practice. His one order that did something, the temporary travel ban, was so poorly conceived and phrased that it got stuck in the court system and will have to be rewritten or abandoned. For a recent piece in Politico Magazine, Zachary Karabell carefully analyzed all the executive orders and presidential proclamations and concluded, "So far, Trump has behaved exactly like he has throughout his previous career: He has generated intense attention and sold himself as a man of action while doing little other than promote an image of himself as someone who gets things done."

Historian Douglas Brinkley recently observed that Trump is a creature of reality television, for which the two cardinal rules are: Always keep the cameras focused on you, and always stay interesting. The president has certainly fulfilled those mandates. But what about the ones he promised his voters? What about the plans to reindustrialize the Midwest, bring back jobs, and revive the coal and steel industries? What, for that matter, of his explicit commitments that "on Day One" he would begin "removing criminal illegal immigrants" and would "label China a currency manipulator," "push for a constitutional amendment to impose term limits on all members of Congress" and "get rid of gun-free zones in schools, and . . . military bases"? All were promised. Almost nothing has been done.

There are two aspects to the Trump presidency. There is the freak show — the tweets, the wild claims, the fake facts, the fights with anyone who refuses to bow down to him (the media, judges), the ceaseless self-promotion. But then there is Trump the savvy businessman, who named intelligent heavyweights such as Gary Cohn, Rex Tillerson and Jim Mattis to key positions, and who has at times articulated a serious reform agenda. For many people, the bargain of the Trump presidency was that they would put up with the freak show in order to get tax reform, infrastructure projects and deregulation. That may still happen, but for now at least, reality TV is in overdrive, and not much is happening in the realm of serious policy.

That voter in Ohio or Michigan might well wonder how picking fights with the media will bring jobs back to his region or how assaulting the judiciary will help create retraining programs for laid-off workers. But maybe Donald Trump, who freely admits to getting most of his information from television, has a television view of the presidency. The point is to be seen doing things. The Romans said that the way to keep people happy was to give them "bread and circus." So far, all we have gotten is the circus.

## THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

### Editorial : The Bully Trumpet

Updated Feb. 16, 2017 7:39 p.m.

ET 324 COMMENTS

President Trump held a nearly 80-minute press conference on Thursday defending his Administration, assailing the media and along the way making some good news. Political reporters are bewildered by his unconventional style, but the spectacle was Mr. Trump at his Trumpiest.

"We have made incredible progress. I don't think there's ever been a President elected who in this short period of time has done what we've done," as the President characterized his "fine-tuned machine" and "one of the great cabinets ever assembled in American history." He said he was "making this presentation directly to the American people, with the media present, which is an honor to have you"—before he went on to call the media "dishonest," "false,

horrible, fake" and filled with "such hatred" for him.

One reporter went as far as to accuse Mr. Trump of "undermining confidence in our news media," and, duh, his goal was to use an East Roomful of journalists as his foil. They seemed to recoil aesthetically from how he communicates—with his exaggerations, unrehearsed digressions and streams-of-consciousness, or unconsciousness as the case may be.

But Mr. Trump's larger message is reasonably clear and coherent. He exposed himself to press scrutiny and answered multiple pointed questions on Russia and other controversies. President Obama tended to filibuster at his press events, and he'd have reached perhaps the third question by the 60-minute mark.

Mr. Trump categorically denied any personal or campaign involvement with the Russians, which means he's laid down a marker if his

position is later contradicted by the evidence. He also had a point when he explained that "the real problem" with the Michael Flynn imbroglio is the "classified information that was given illegally."

On immigration, Mr. Trump said that the Administration is withdrawing the travel ban executive order, whose rollout was far from "perfect" as he claimed. But he says he'll issue a new version, presumably with better legal arguments, more security analysis and competent logistical preparation.

Mr. Trump also expressed sympathy for the "dreamers" who immigrated to the U.S. illegally as children with their parents. Some of his hard-line advisers favor deportation, but the President seemed to demure, noting the involvement of "some absolutely incredible kids, I would say mostly. They were brought here in such a way—it's a very, it's a very, very tough subject" and "I love these

kids, I love kids, I have kids and grandkids."

Mr. Trump was also right to argue that "I think we're setting a record or close to a record" in the time the Senate is taking to confirm his cabinet. This time that's not an exaggeration. He added: "I'm going forever and I still have a lot of people that we're waiting for. And that's all they're doing, is delaying. And you look at [Senate Minority Leader Chuck] Schumer and the mess that he's got over there and they have nothing going. The only thing they can do is delay."

Oh, and by the way, Mr. Trump announced a new nominee for Labor Secretary, which was the nominal reason for scheduling the impromptu Q&A. (See nearby editorial on Alex Acosta.) If we were Mr. Trump we'd call it the greatest afternoon's work in all of human history, but then it wasn't the worst either.

## **'I Inherited a Mess,' Trump Says, Defending His Performance (UNE)**

Peter Baker

For a president who has already lost a court battle, fired an acting attorney general and a national security adviser, and lost a cabinet nomination fight, Mr. Trump was eager to demonstrate that he was still in command. He attacked judges for blocking his original travel order and Democrats for obstructing his nominations. He denied being anti-Semitic even when no one accused him of it. With the latest Pew Research Center poll showing that just 39 percent of Americans approve of the job he is doing, Mr. Trump at one point plaintively pleaded for understanding.

"The tone is such hatred," he said, referring to the commentary about him on cable television. "I'm really not a bad person."

Mr. Trump disputed any contention that the White House was out of control or not fully functional, and boasted of a flurry of actions intended to create jobs, curb regulations and crack down on illegal immigration.

### **Trump Says 'Russia Is Fake News'**

President Trump responded to questions about his administration's dealings with Russia in a news conference on Thursday.

By THE NEW YORK TIMES on February 16, 2017. Photo by Stephen Crowley/The New York Times. Watch in Times Video »

"There has never been a presidency that has done so much in such a short period of time," he said. "And we haven't even started the big work yet. That starts early next week."

The enactment of a temporary ban on refugees and all visitors from seven predominantly Muslim countries, he maintained, was "perfect," despite widespread confusion and subsequent court rulings blocking it. "We had a very smooth rollout of the travel ban," he said. "But we had a bad court."

Mr. Trump offered his first account of his decision to fire Michael T. Flynn, his national security adviser, for misleading

Vice President Mike Pence and others in the White House about the contents of a conversation with Russia's ambassador in December.

He said he was not bothered that Mr. Flynn had talked with the ambassador about American sanctions on Russia before arriving at the White House. "I didn't direct him," he said, "but I would have directed him, because that's his job."

The problem, he said, was that Mr. Flynn had told Mr. Pence that sanctions did not come up during the conversation, an assertion belied by a transcript of the call, which had been monitored by American intelligence agencies.

"The thing is he didn't tell our vice president properly, and then he said he didn't remember," Mr. Trump said. "So either way, it wasn't very satisfactory to me."

But he said reports that his campaign aides and other associates had contacts with Russia were "a joke" and "fake news put out by the media." The New York Times reported this week that phone records and intercepted calls showed repeated contacts between some of his associates and Russian intelligence officials in the year before the election.

"Russia is a ruse," Mr. Trump said. "I have nothing to do with Russia. To the best of my knowledge, no person that I deal with does."

Like presidents before him, Mr. Trump was peeved at a series of leaks, including about Mr. Flynn's call and his own conversations with foreign leaders. In addition to requesting the Justice Department investigation, he confirmed that he might assign a New York billionaire, Stephen A. Feinberg, to conduct a broad review of the intelligence agencies. "He's offered his services, and you know, it's something we may take advantage of," Mr. Trump said. But he added that it might not be necessary because "we are going to be able to straighten it out very easily on its own."

Mr. Trump returned again and again to his contest with Hillary Clinton, replaying key events from the 2016 campaign and reviving his favorite

attacks. He repeated a claim that Mrs. Clinton gave Russia access to American nuclear fuel supplies. "I've done nothing for Russia," he said. "Hillary Clinton gave them 20 percent of our uranium."

The State Department did sign off on the purchase of a Canadian company by a Russian state firm that gave Russia control of one-fifth of America's uranium production capacity, as did eight other agencies. But Mrs. Clinton was not in a position to approve or reject the deal when she was secretary of state, and it is not known if she was briefed on the matter.

Mr. Trump spent much of the conference berating reporters and their news organizations. Clearly exasperated by coverage of him, he said he did not watch CNN but then gave a detailed critique of one of its shows. He cited specific articles in The Times and The Wall Street Journal that he called "fake," even harking back to one from last year's campaign.

"The press is out of control," he said. "The level of dishonesty is out of control."

He added later, "The public doesn't believe you people anymore."

The acrimony grew so sharp at one point that CNN's Jim Acosta felt the need to tell Mr. Trump, "Just for the record, we don't hate you."

But that did not assuage him. At one point, he called on Jake Turx, an ultra-Orthodox Jewish reporter from Ami Magazine. "Are you a friendly reporter?" he asked.

"I haven't seen anybody in my community accuse either yourself or anyone on your staff of being anti-Semitic," Mr. Turx said. But, citing bomb threats against Jewish centers, he said, "What we haven't really heard being addressed is an uptick in anti-Semitism and how the government is planning to take care of it."

Mr. Trump bristled, taking it as a suggestion that he was anti-Semitic even though the reporter specifically said the opposite. "I am the least anti-Semitic person that you've ever seen in your entire life," Mr. Trump said.

Mr. Turx protested that he was not suggesting otherwise. "Quiet, quiet, quiet," Mr. Trump said. "See? He lied. He was going to get up and ask a very straight, simple question." Instead, Mr. Trump said, the question was "repulsive" and "very insulting." He later accused Democrats of posing as supporters and holding up offensive signs at his rallies to smear him.

When April Ryan of American Urban Radio Networks asked whether he would meet with the Congressional Black Caucus to discuss his urban agenda, Mr. Trump again seemed piqued.

"Do you want to set up the meeting?" he challenged her. "Are they friends of yours?"

"I'm just a reporter," said Ms. Ryan, who is African-American.

"Well, then, set up the meeting," Mr. Trump said.

That exchange and others included claims that were false or disputed. Mr. Trump told Ms. Ryan that he had planned a meeting with Representative Elijah E. Cummings, an African-American Democrat from Maryland, but that Mr. Cummings had said: "It might be bad for me politically. I can't have that meeting."

Mr. Cummings later denied that. "I have no idea why President Trump would make up a story about me like he did today," he said. "I was actually looking forward to meeting with the president about the skyrocketing price of prescription drugs."

Similarly, Mr. Trump asserted that his Electoral College victory was the largest since Ronald Reagan's. But he won fewer Electoral College votes than three of the four presidents since Reagan: Barack Obama, Bill Clinton and George Bush.

When a reporter pointed that out, Mr. Trump brushed it off. "I was given that information," he said.

Carol E. Lee, Damian Paletta and Michael C. Bender

Updated Feb. 17, 2017 12:00 a.m. ET

## **Trump Lets Loose Against Critics (UNE)**

WASHINGTON—About midmorning on Thursday, President Donald Trump abruptly decided to hold his own news conference, setting into motion a freewheeling, sometimes angry, 80-minute exchange.

"My message is being filtered," Mr. Trump told senior administration officials inside the Oval Office hours before the news conference, a person familiar with the matter said. "I want to speak directly to the

American people about the progress we've been making."

Mr. Trump delivered an opening statement highlighting what he called successes, including executive actions scaling back

government regulations and the nomination of a Supreme Court justice. But his appearance quickly devolved into a litany of grievances about media coverage.

"I turn on the TV, open the newspapers and I see stories of chaos," Mr. Trump said. "Yet it is the exact opposite. This administration is running like a fine-tuned machine, despite the fact that I can't get my cabinet approved."

- Bob Harward Turns Down National Security Adviser Job

The retired Navy SEAL told President Donald Trump that he couldn't accept the job to succeed Mike Flynn, who resigned over his conflicting statements about his contacts with Russian officials before Mr. Trump's inauguration.

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- Trump Picks Alexander Acosta to Serve as Labor Secretary

Alexander Acosta, a law school dean and former U.S. attorney, was nominated as labor secretary.

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- Trump Plans New Immigration Order Next Week

The Justice Department told an appeals court there was no reason to reconsider a case on President Trump's controversial executive order on immigration and refugees. A new order will be issued next week.

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- Intelligence Officials Keep Information From Trump

U.S. intelligence officials have withheld sensitive intelligence from President Donald Trump because they are concerned it could be leaked or compromised.

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- Pence Caught in Power Struggle

Mike Pence showed his clout with the firing of Mike Flynn, but the vice president also was kept in the dark about Mr. Flynn's deceptions for two weeks in the White House's loose-knit power structure.

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- Senate Majority Leader Takes on High-Wire Balancing Act

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, trying to manage an ambitious legislative agenda amid White House turmoil, aims to focus on shared goals with President Trump.

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#### TRUMP'S FIRST 100 DAYS

The pushback effort comes as Mr. Trump, a Republican, seeks to go on the offense amid escalating tensions between the White House and U.S. intelligence officials, with the president accusing the intelligence community of leaking classified information to the news media.

The White House is also facing a mushrooming number of investigations and inquiries on Capitol Hill, where some Republicans are demanding more information about news media reports on contacts between Mr. Trump's associates and Russian officials.

Mr. Trump said he has asked the Justice Department to investigate the leaks to the news media. "Those are criminal leaks," he said, during Thursday's news conference.

The president said he isn't aware that any of his aides had contact with Russian officials during his campaign.

"No. Nobody that I know of. Nobody," he said.

Rep. Devin Nunes (R., Calif.), chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, said Thursday that U.S. intelligence officials have been unable to provide evidence of any contact between Russian officials and Mr. Trump's campaign staff, or members of the presidential transition team, beyond those acknowledged by former National Security Adviser Mike Flynn.

"If a Russian intel officer was talking to any American, even if they were loosely associated with any campaign, I'd be very interested in that," Mr. Nunes said in an interview. "I have repeatedly asked these questions to the appropriate officials."

Barring any clear evidence of such contacts, "what people are asking me to do is a witch hunt against American citizens who I have no basis, no information, no nothing from anyone."

Mr. Trump pointed specifically to leaks that led to Monday's firing of his national security adviser for misleading Vice President Mike Pence about whether he discussed U.S. sanctions on Russia with the country's ambassador, Sergey Kislyak.

Mr. Flynn had told Mr. Pence and other administration officials that sanctions never came up during the calls, prompting them to repeat that publicly. But transcripts of Mr. Flynn's calls, which were picked up in U.S. wiretaps of the ambassador's phone, show he did discuss sanctions, according to people familiar with them.

Mr. Flynn was interviewed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation in late January with respect to his conversations with Mr. Kislyak, officials have said. In the interview, Mr. Flynn provided investigators with an account that minimized the subject of sanctions and offered a roundabout and sometimes confusing rationale for the discussion, according to people familiar with the matter. While his answers weren't viewed as complete, officials don't expect he will be charged with lying to the FBI, these people said.

Mr. Trump needs to find a new national security adviser after his choice for Mr. Flynn's successor, retired Vice Adm. Bob Harward, declined the job.

Friday morning, Mr. Trump tweeted that his interim national security adviser, Keith Kellogg, "is very much in play for NSA - as are three others."

The president said he hopes to have his pick for director of national intelligence, former Sen. Dan Coats of Indiana, on board soon, although the Senate has yet to receive the paperwork required to schedule a hearing for his appointment, congressional officials said.

Mr. Trump stopped short of further stoking those tensions with the intelligence community by deciding not to name billionaire Steven Feinberg to lead a review of the U.S. intelligence agencies. He had considered the appointment, but he said such a role wasn't needed given the makeup of his national security team.

U.S. intelligence officials have withheld some sensitive information from Mr. Trump because they are concerned it could be leaked or compromised, current and former officials familiar with the matter have said. On Thursday, the president denied that any intelligence was being withheld from him.

While Mr. Trump has long faced criticism about his approach to Russia, the revelations about Mr. Flynn have renewed the focus on a U.S. counterintelligence investigation into whether Mr. Trump's campaign had contacts with Russia.

The calls in question between Messrs. Flynn and Kislyak took place on Dec. 29, the day then-President Barack Obama's administration adopted new sanctions against Russia in response to Moscow's alleged efforts to interfere in the U.S. election to help Mr. Trump.

Mr. Trump said Thursday he had no issue with Mr. Flynn discussing sanctions with Mr. Kislyak last year. "I would have directed him to do it if I thought he wasn't doing it," Mr. Trump said.

The flap involving Mr. Flynn has also renewed speculation about Mr. Trump's campaign's communications with Russia, as the president was often praising Russian President Vladimir Putin. Mr. Trump sought Thursday to put to rest any questions about his ties to Russia.

"I own nothing in Russia. I have no loans in Russia. I don't have any deals in Russia," he said.

Meantime, lawmakers expanded their requests for information surrounding Mr. Flynn's contacts.

On Thursday, House Oversight and Government Reform Committee Chairman Jason Chaffetz (R., Utah) and Rep. Elijah Cummings (D., Md.), the panel's top Democrat, asked for documents relating to payments that Mr. Flynn received for a December 2015 trip to Moscow.

Late Wednesday, Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Chuck Grassley (R., Iowa) and Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D., Calif.), the top Democrat on the committee, asked the Justice Department and the Federal Bureau of Investigation for a briefing on the circumstances that led to Mr. Flynn's resignation.

The two said that reports about Mr. Flynn's departure "raise substantial questions about the content and context of Mr. Flynn's discussions with Russian officials, the conclusions reached by the Justice Department and the actions it took in response, as well as possible leaks of classified information by current and former government employees."

On Thursday, Sen. Chuck Schumer (D., N.Y.) said that Attorney General Jeff Sessions should recuse himself from any probe into ties between Russia and Mr. Trump's campaign.

"When the FBI looks into a matter, they do so right alongside prosecutors from the Justice Department," Mr. Schumer said. "Those prosecutors should not be reporting to the first senator who endorsed Donald Trump's campaign, who served on the same

committee as Gen. Flynn, and nominated Donald Trump at the national convention."

At his confirmation hearing, Mr. Sessions told lawmakers that he was "not aware of a basis to recuse

myself from" issues surrounding Mr. Flynn or Russian hacking, and said he had not had any contact with Russians during the campaign.

"If a specific matter arose where I believed my impartiality might

reasonably be questioned, I would consult with department ethics officials regarding the most appropriate way to proceed," he said.

—Siobhan Hughes, Devlin Barrett, Shane Harris contributed to this article.

## The Washington Post

# Trump claims he 'inherited a mess' at sprawling, grievance-filled news conference (UNE)

By Ashley Parker and John Wagner

President Trump aired his grievances against the news media, the intelligence community and his detractors in a sprawling, stream-of-consciousness news conference Thursday, capping an extraordinary four weeks in office marked by tumult, disarray and infighting.

The beleaguered chief executive defended his advisers against claims of improper contacts with Russia and claimed — contrary to widespread perceptions both inside and outside the White House — that his fledgling administration "is running like a fine-tuned machine."

"To be honest, I inherited a mess," he said in a news conference that lasted an hour and 17 minutes and was, by turns, rambling, combative and pure Trump. "It's a mess. At home and abroad, a mess."

Yet moments later, the president seemed to acknowledge the widespread reports of turbulence and upheaval emanating out of the West Wing, only to claim that his White House — which so far has been marred by staff feuding, a controversial travel ban, false statements and myriad leaks — was operating seamlessly.

"I turn on the TV, open the newspapers and I see stories of chaos — chaos," he said. "Yet it is the exact opposite. This administration is running like a fine-tuned machine, despite the fact that I can't get my Cabinet approved."

Trump's news conference — with the president firmly at the center as both complainer and defender in chief — capped a month of turmoil in what so far is the most tumultuous start to any U.S. presidency in modern history. His approval ratings are underwater in most polls, and he is battling setbacks including the firing Monday of national security adviser Michael Flynn and the decision Wednesday by Labor Department nominee Andrew Puzder to withdraw amid mounting opposition on Capitol Hill.

The turmoil continued Thursday evening as Trump's pick to replace Flynn, retired Vice Adm. Robert Harward, turned down the job,

according to people familiar with the offer.

*[In an erratic performance, President Trump shows his supporters who's boss]*

A senior U.S. official said that "family considerations changed his mind," and a friend of Harward's added that the hard-charging former Navy SEAL was not fully comfortable with the quickly moving process. One factor in Harward's decision was that he could not get a guarantee that he could select his own staff, according to someone close to Trump with knowledge of the discussions.

Trump had said earlier at the news conference that one of the reasons he felt he could let Flynn go was because he had a good replacement in mind, without naming that person. "I have somebody that I think will be outstanding for the position," he said. "And that also helps, I think, in the making of my decision."

Asked about recent reports in The Washington Post that Flynn had improperly discussed Russian sanctions with the country's ambassador to the United States before Trump was sworn in, the president defended Flynn as a "fine person," saying he had done nothing wrong in engaging the Russian envoy.

But Trump said Flynn had erred by misleading government officials, including Vice President Pence, about his conversations with Russia, which is why he ultimately demanded his resignation.

"He didn't tell the vice president of the United States the facts," Trump said. "And then he didn't remember. And that just wasn't acceptable to me."

Trump also made clear that he had no problem with Flynn discussing with the Russian ambassador the sanctions imposed on Moscow by the Obama administration, saying it was Flynn's job to reach out to foreign officials.

"No, I didn't direct him, but I would have directed him if he didn't do it," Trump said.

*[Fact-checking President Trump's news conference]*

Asked several times about reports in the New York Times and on CNN that his campaign had repeated contacts with Russia, including senior intelligence officials, Trump grew testy as reporters pushed him for a yes or no answer.

He said that he personally had not had contact and that he was not aware of such contacts during the campaign.

"Russia is a ruse," Trump said. "I have nothing to do with Russia. Haven't made a phone call to Russia in years. Don't speak to people from Russia. Not that I wouldn't. I just have nobody to speak to."

Trump's general defense of Russia stood in contrast to comments Defense Secretary Jim Mattis made at a NATO meeting Thursday in Brussels, where he said that there was "very little doubt" that the Russians have either interfered or attempted to interfere with elections in democratic nations.

Thursday's news conference was ostensibly billed as a chance for Trump to announce Alexander Acosta as his new pick for labor secretary, making him the first Latino in Trump's Cabinet if approved.

But for 77 minutes, the president offered the verbal equivalent of the brash and impetuous early-morning tweets that have become the alarm clock for much of Washington. He took aim at everything from the recent controversies over Russia, which he dismissed, to the "criminal leaks" within the intelligence community. Although he inherited a growing economy, low inflation and low unemployment, he repeatedly portrayed a country in shambles under President Barack Obama.

Trump also said he would use his remarks to bypass the "dishonest media" and speak directly to the American people about the "incredible progress" his administration has made.

The president began on a subdued, almost melancholy note, looking down repeatedly to read from prepared remarks on his lectern. But he became more fiery and animated — joyful, even — when he

began to banter and joust with the assembled reporters.

*[Trump's Labor pick, a former Justice official, would be first Hispanic in his Cabinet]*

He reprised some of his favorite themes from the campaign trail, complaining about Hillary Clinton, whom he referenced 12 times; criticizing Obama's policies, from his Affordable Care Act to his failed reset with Russia; and relitigating wounds old and new, in a Festivus-caliber airing of grievances.

And he boasted of his accomplishments so far. "I don't think there's ever been a president elected who in this short period of time has done what we've done," Trump said.

He said he's asked the Justice Department to look into the leaks coming out of U.S. intelligence agencies. He promised a new executive order by the middle of next week that would replace the now-frozen directive that temporarily barred refugees and citizens of seven Muslim-majority countries from entering the United States. Trump also said he would put forward a plan to repeal Obama's Affordable Care Act by mid-March, with a tax reform package soon after.

"Tax reform is going to happen fairly quickly," he said. "We're doing Obamacare. We're in final stages."

Trump repeatedly lambasted the "fake news" media — which at one point he upgraded (or downgraded) to the "very fake news" media — while promoting some dubious claims and fake news of his own.

Trump was pressed on his incorrect assertion that he had the largest margin of victory in the electoral college since President Ronald Reagan, when Obama, Bill Clinton and George H.W. Bush had bested him in all of their victories. The new president blamed faulty facts.

"I was given that information," he said. "Well, I don't know, I was given that information."

During the news conference, Trump alternated between showering the media with scorn and adopting a more playful, almost jaunty, tone. At



one point, he insisted he was enjoying himself.

"I'm not ranting and raving — I love this," he said. "I'm having a good time doing this."

*[Trump's combative, complaint-filled news conference, annotated]*

In an exchange with April Ryan of American Urban Radio Networks — the only black reporter called upon by Trump — the president asked her to arrange a meeting with the Congressional Black Caucus.

"Do you want to set up the meeting? Are they friends of yours?" he asked.

Trump also claimed that he had tried to meet with Rep. Elijah E. Cummings (D-

Md.), a prominent member of the group, but that Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.), whom he called a "lightweight," had urged Cummings not to attend.

In a statement, Cummings rebutted Trump's version of the facts. "I have no idea why President Trump would make up a story about me like he did today," he said. "Of course, Senator Schumer never told me to skip a meeting with the President."

In another notable exchange with a Jewish reporter, who asked what Trump was going to do to tamp down on the uptick in anti-Semitism in the country since he took office, the president rejected the idea that he or his rhetoric might be partially to blame.

Today's WorldView

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"Number one, I am the least anti-Semitic person that you've ever seen in your entire life," Trump said. "Number two, racism, the least racist person."

Trump's Thursday performance seemed an acknowledgment, by the president, that he may be his own best press secretary and senior adviser, and allowed him to appear both confident, comfortable and in control.

While many of his comments, as well as the sometimes disjointed

nature of his delivery, are certain to alarm official Washington, they are also the sorts of red-meat talking points that delighted his base during the campaign and helped propel him to victory.

"I won with news conferences and probably speeches," he told the assembled reporters. "I certainly didn't win by people listening to you people."

Robert Costa, Adam Entous and Jenna Johnson contributed to this report.

**The  
New York  
Times**

## Editorial : For a Troubled President, the Media Is a Satisfying Target

The Editorial Board

After a tumultuous month of incumbency, President Trump actually plans to begin his 2020 re-election campaign Saturday in Florida with one of his most vital campaign props in tow — the news media that he makes a daily art form of undermining with institutional and personal attacks.

"You know, you're dishonest people," he told reporters at his news conference Thursday, with the ease of an insult comic in a Las Vegas lounge. "But I'm not ranting and raving. I love this. I'm having a good time doing it," the president was fair enough to admit as he lambasted the media nonstop.

"Fake news!" "Russia scam!" "Ruse!" he proclaimed, dismissing

reports on the turmoil in his White House.

After a while it began to make sense: Of course, Mr. Trump craves a break from the White House caldron for the familiar escape to another hyperbolic campaign stop at an airport hangar full of zealous supporters. He needed the press to play the punching bag that so delighted his political base. Aides filed for re-election on Inauguration Day, an extraordinary step that lets Mr. Trump raise campaign funds for what will be a state of endless campaigning.

The news conference proved to be another signature recapitulation of himself by himself — Mr. Trump's relentless superlatives of self-congratulation, his paint-ball putdowns of any and all critics, his

swaggering dismissal of controversies already occurring in plain sight.

Viewers may wonder why the president returned repeatedly to his media attacks. But the news workers who thrive on information more than insult already know the answer — they're a perfect distraction from real events hatched in Mr. Trump's new administration, like the embarrassing retreat of his labor secretary nominee from Senate scrutiny, the dismissal of his national security adviser for secretly buttering up Russian adversaries and the courts' unceremonious spiking of Mr. Trump's unconstitutional attempt to choke off Middle East immigration with a photo-op stroke of his pen.

"The press honestly is out of control," was Mr. Trump's reaction to "fake news" and "illegal leaks" — shocking news stories that originated with trusted news sources alarmed at what has been happening in less than a month of the Trump era.

He'd better get used to it. American history shows there's no reasonable alternative to the power of human curiosity in a democracy, especially when a president dares to claim exclusive ownership of reality.

"Will we be incessantly harassed and vilified?" Martin Baron, editor of The Washington Post, asked after the election. "The answer, I believe, is pretty simple," he said with barely a shrug. "Just do our job. Do it as it's supposed to be done."

**The  
New York  
Times**

## Brooks : What a Failed Trump Administration Looks Like

David Brooks

Everything about Trump that appalls 65 percent of America strengthens him with the other 35 percent, and he can ride that group for a while. Even after these horrible four weeks, Republicans on Capitol Hill are not close to abandoning their man.

The likelihood is this: We're going to have an administration that has morally and politically collapsed, without actually going away.

What does that look like?

First, it means an administration that is passive, full of sound and fury, but signifying nothing. To get anything done, a president depends on the vast machinery of the U.S. government. But Trump doesn't mesh with that machinery. He is personality-based while it is rule-

based. Furthermore, he's declared war on it. And when you declare war on the establishment, it declares war on you.

The Civil Service has a thousand ways to ignore or sit on any presidential order. The court system has given itself carte blanche to overturn any Trump initiative, even on the flimsiest legal grounds. The intelligence community has only just begun to undermine this president.

President Trump can push all the pretty buttons on the command deck of the Starship Enterprise, but don't expect anything to actually happen, because they are not attached.

Second, this will probably become a more insular administration. Usually when administrations stumble, they fire a few people and bring in the grown-ups — the James Baker or

the David Gergen types. But Trump is anti-grown-up, so it's hard to imagine Chief of Staff Haley Barbour. Instead, the circle of trust seems to be shrinking to his daughter, her husband and Stephen Bannon.

Bannon has a coherent worldview, which is a huge advantage when all is chaos. It's interesting how many of Bannon's rivals have woken up with knives in their backs. Michael Flynn is gone. Reince Priebus has been unmanned by a thousand White House leaks. Rex Tillerson had the potential to be an effective secretary of state, but Bannon neutered him last week by denying him the ability to even select his own deputy.

In an administration in which "promoted beyond his capacity" takes on new meaning, Bannon

looms. With each passing day, Trump talks more like Bannon without the background reading.

Third, we are about to enter a decentralized world. For the past 70 years most nations have instinctively looked to the U.S. for leadership, either to follow or oppose. But in capitals around the world, intelligence agencies are drafting memos with advice on how to play Donald Trump.

The first conclusion is obvious. This administration is more like a medieval monarchy than a modern nation-state. It's more "The Madness of King George" than "The Missiles of October." The key currency is not power, it's flattery.

The corollary is that Trump is ripe to be played. Give the boy a lollipop and he won't notice if you steal his lunch. The Japanese gave Trump a

new jobs announcement he could take to the Midwest, and in return they got presidential attention and coddling that other governments would have died for.

If you want to roll the Trump administration, you've got to get in line. The Israelis got a possible one-state solution. The Chinese got

Trump to flip-flop on the "One China" policy. The Europeans got him to do a 180 on undoing the Iran nuclear deal.

Vladimir Putin was born for a moment such as this. He is always pushing the envelope. After gifting Team Trump with a little campaign help, the Russian state media has

suddenly turned on Trump and Russian planes are buzzing U.S. ships. The bear is going to grab what it can.

We're about to enter a moment in which U.S. economic and military might is strong but U.S. political might is weak. Imagine the Roman Empire governed by Monaco.

That's scary. The only saving thought is this: The human imagination is vast, but it is not nearly vast enough to encompass the infinitely multitudinous ways Donald Trump can find to get himself disgraced.

## **The New York Times** In 77 Chaotic Minutes, Trump Defends 'Fine-Tuned Machine' (UNE)

Michael D. Shear, Maggie Haberman and Glenn Thrush

From there he offered a disjointed and emotional performance in which he appeared to release pent-up anger and suspicion about the "dishonest media," Democrats, intelligence officials, "criminal" leakers, Hillary Clinton, environmentalists and judges.

Taking a room of reporters and the television audience on a journey through the Trump psyche, the president was at times angry (at the news media), playful ("I love this,") bewildered (by "bias and hatred"), occasionally respectful ("It's a great honor to be with you") and needy ("I'm really not a bad person, by the way").

Ever the salesman, Mr. Trump painted his presidency as he wishes it to be: an Electoral College victory so massive it was historic — a falsehood pointed out by a reporter in the room — plus accomplishments in the first four weeks that have outpaced, he said, every other president.

For his supporters, the performance was certain to be energizing. Mr. Trump turned sober questions from journalists into, at times, mesmerizing television. He attempted to reassert his command of "dishonest" journalists at a time when the news media is questioning his capacity to lead. It all made the brooding boss feel better, people close to Mr. Trump said.

The news conference, they said, was Mr. Trump's best effort at spitting the bit out of his mouth and escaping the bridle of the West Wing, where he

views his only way to communicate his side of any argument is his 140-character limited Twitter feed.

Still, it is unlikely that Mr. Trump's 77-minute performance will divert much long-term attention from questions about his campaign's relationship with Russia, or reassure wavering Republicans on Capitol Hill that their agenda is on track. Yet Mr. Trump's close allies said he had met his more immediate goal of soothing himself with a sense of control over his own administration.

Mr. Trump, who has long required employees to sign nondisclosure agreements, has been unnerved, aides said, by leaks big and small, ranging from disclosures about his evenings spent alone in the White House residence to the details of his calls with global leaders. Now, Mr. Trump finds himself at the mercy of a vast, leaky bureaucracy.

"The first thing I thought of when I heard about it is: How does the press get this information that's classified? How do they do it?" Mr. Trump said of the leaks. "The press should be ashamed of themselves."

The news conference was not without its high points for the embattled president. His initial statement about a surge of optimism in the business world and more jobs was, however fleetingly, a focused message on the issue that helped elect him. And he lured a few reporters into a trap of debating the quality of their reporting as opposed to the merits of their original questions.

And after complaining to aides about the dour delivery of his press secretary, Sean Spicer, at the daily

televised briefing, Mr. Trump laced his own banter with humor.

But he also revealed how crushing he is finding the onslaught of criticism that a president receives, saying that he has long preferred the business media to the political press corps he must now deal with.

With the same lack of discipline that his supporters on the campaign trail found refreshing, Mr. Trump lashed out at the news media, which he called "out of control." He accused The New York Times of publishing what he termed a "discredited" story — evidently a reference to an article this week about current and former American officials who say that phone records and intercepted calls show that members of his campaign had repeated contact with senior Russian intelligence officials in the year before the election.

He said The Wall Street Journal had published an article that was "almost as disgraceful." He mocked Jim Acosta, a CNN correspondent, saying at one point, "Yeah, go ahead, Jimmy."

His exchange with Mr. Acosta — a frequent foil for Mr. Trump in his news conferences on the campaign trail — made it clear that the president believes that the American people are with him, and against the news media. "That's why the public sees it," Mr. Trump said. "They see it. They see it's not fair. The public is smart, they understand it."

Mr. Trump also blamed former President Barack Obama — whom he had often described in glowing terms since his inauguration — for handing him a failing government.

"I inherited a mess," Mr. Trump asserted. "It's a mess. At home and abroad, a mess. Low pay, low wages, mass instability overseas, no matter where you look."

At one point, Mr. Trump searched for a new face among the veteran White House reporters who were challenging him and settled on a journalist wearing a skullcap whom he clearly did not recognize, hoping for the best.

"Are you a friendly reporter?" Mr. Trump said. The response of the reporter, Jake Tux of Ami magazine, a Jewish publication, could not be heard in the room.

The president's anger then flared when Mr. Tux asked about a rise in anti-Semitic incidents around the country.

Telling Mr. Tux to sit down and accusing him of lying about asking a "very straight, simple question," Mr. Trump rejected the charge that he is personally anti-Semitic — something the reporter had explicitly said he was not asserting.

At one point, Mr. Trump predicted how the news media would cover the event — and preemptively rejected that, too.

"Tomorrow, they will say, 'Donald Trump rants and raves at the press,'" Mr. Trump said. "I'm not ranting and raving. I'm just telling you. You know, you're dishonest people. But — but I'm not ranting and raving. I love this. I'm having a good time doing it."

## **The Washington Post** Trump family's elaborate lifestyle is a 'logistical nightmare' — at taxpayer expense (UNE)

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

On Friday, President Trump and his entourage will jet for the third straight weekend to a working getaway at his oceanfront Mar-a-Lago Club in Palm Beach, Fla.

On Saturday, Trump's sons Eric and Don Jr., with their Secret Service details in tow, will be nearly 8,000 miles away in the United Arab Emirates, attending the grand opening of a Trump-brand golf resort in the "Beverly Hills of Dubai."

Meanwhile, New York police will keep watch outside Trump Tower in

Manhattan, the chosen home of first lady Melania Trump and son Barron. And the tiny township of Bedminster, N.J., is preparing for the daunting prospect that the local Trump golf course will serve as a sort of northern White House for as many as 10 weekends a year.

Barely a month into the Trump presidency, the unusually elaborate lifestyle of America's new first family is straining the Secret Service and security officials, stirring financial and logistical concerns in several local communities, and costing far beyond what has been typical for past presidents — a price tag that, based on past assessments of

presidential travel and security costs, could balloon into the hundreds of millions of dollars over the course of a four-year term.

Adding to the costs and complications is Trump's inclination to conduct official business surrounded by crowds of people, such as his decision last weekend to host Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe for a working dinner while Mar-a-Lago members dined nearby.

Robert Kraft, the owner of the Super Bowl-winning New England Patriots, joined President Trump, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and their wives for dinner on Friday, Feb. 10 at Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach, Fla. Robert Kraft, the owner of the Super Bowl-winning New England Patriots, joined President Trump, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and their wives for dinner on Friday, Feb. 10 at Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach, Fla. (Reuters)

(Reuters)

The handful of government agencies that bear the brunt of the expenses, including the Defense and Homeland Security departments, have not responded to Washington Post requests for data laying out the costs since Trump took office.

But some figures have dribbled out, while others can be gleaned from government documents.

Trump's three Mar-a-Lago trips since the inauguration have probably cost the federal treasury about \$10 million, based on figures used in an October government report analyzing White House travel, including money for Coast Guard units to patrol the exposed shoreline and other military, security and staffing expenses associated with moving the apparatus of the presidency.

Palm Beach County officials plan to ask Washington to reimburse tens of thousands of dollars a day in expenses for deputies handling added security and traffic issues around the cramped Florida island whenever Trump is in town.

In New York, the city is paying \$500,000 a day to guard Trump Tower, according to police officials' estimates, an amount that could reach \$183 million a year.

This month, The Post reported that Secret Service and U.S. embassy staffers paid nearly \$100,000 in hotel-room bills to support Eric Trump's trip to promote a Trump-brand condo tower in Uruguay.

"This is an expensive way to conduct business, and the president

should recognize that," said Tom Fitton, president of the conservative group Judicial Watch, which closely tracked President Barack Obama's family vacation costs and said that it intends to continue the effort for the Trump administration.

"The unique thing about President Trump is that he knows what it costs to run a plane," Fitton added, noting that Trump should consider using the presidential retreat of Camp David, a short helicopter ride from the White House, or even his golf course in Northern Virginia. Of Mar-a-Lago, Fitton said, "Going down there ain't free."

For Trump, the costs come with an additional perk: Some of the money flows into his own pocket. While Trump has removed himself from managing his company, he has refused to divest his ownership, meaning that he benefits from corporate successes such as government contracts.

The Defense Department and Secret Service, for instance, have sought to rent space in Trump Tower, where leasing a floor can cost \$1.5 million a year — though neither agency has disclosed any details. In addition, Trump's travel to his signature properties while trailed by a press corps beaming images to the world allows the official business of the presidency to double as marketing opportunities for his brand.

The White House did not address broader concerns of the costs and potential conflicts inherent in Trump's early travels. But White House spokeswoman Stephanie Grisham told The Post this week that Trump is always working, even when he has left Washington behind.

"He is not vacationing when he goes to Mar-a-Lago," Grisham said. "The president works nonstop every day of the week, no matter where he is."

Trump's frequent travel belies his repeated criticism of Obama as a "habitual vacationer" enjoying taxpayer-funded golf getaways. It also comes after his own promises: He told the Hill newspaper in 2015, "I would rarely leave the White House because there's so much work to be done."

Presidential families have for decades been guaranteed round-the-clock protection, no matter the expense or destination. Every presidency has brought new operational challenges and lifestyle habits, from George W. Bush's frequent stays at his remote ranch in Texas to Obama's annual trips to Martha's Vineyard and his native state of Hawaii. Judicial Watch

estimated that Obama-related travel expenses totaled nearly \$97 million over eight years.

But based on the first four weeks, Trump's presidency appears on track to cost hundreds of millions of dollars more.

The burden is especially acute for the Secret Service, the presidential protection force that has endured years of budget shortages, low morale and leadership shake-ups, including the announcement this week that its director, Joseph Clancy, is stepping down.

Agents are now tasked with guarding multiple homes and protecting Trump's four adult children, including the globe-trotting sons running the family business and daughter Ivanka, whose family recently moved into a Northwest Washington neighborhood.

"There was an anticipation of how stressful it was going to be on the agency, but the harsh reality is that the stress is just overwhelming," said Jonathan Wackrow, a 14-year Secret Service employee who served in Obama's detail and now works as executive director of the risk-mitigation company RANE.

Even veteran agents, Wackrow said, are feeling the pressure of the "monumental" task, including manning high-security perimeters in Washington, Florida and New York, along with protecting family members' private-business travel across three continents.

"It's a logistical nightmare," Wackrow said. Agents are "at severe risk of burnout, and the very last thing you want is to have your agents burned out."

A Secret Service spokesman said the agency is equipped to handle the demands of a Trump presidency. "Every administration presents unique challenges to which the Secret Service has effectively adapted," according to an agency statement. "Regardless of location ... the Secret Service is confident in our security plan."

Experts and local officials have pointed to security and logistical concerns surrounding Mar-a-Lago, the lavish estate that Trump turned into a club in 1995 and now calls the "Winter White House."

Club members pay \$200,000 to join — a fee that has doubled since his election — and \$14,000 a year to belong, giving them access to the beach, tennis courts, a spa and, now, on occasional weekends, to the president.

But Rep. Lois Frankel (D-Fla.), who represents Palm Beach, said Mar-a-Lago is a poor choice for a

president's long-term home: an exposed oceanfront club on a narrow, busy island, where traffic problems were already routine.

"Mar-a-Lago is no Camp David," Frankel said. "It's not set up with the intention or the forethought of keeping the president safe."

The challenges for Mar-a-Lago as a presidential home were apparent from pictures posted on social media last weekend by club guests — including close-up images of the presidential limousine and a picture of a military official carrying the nuclear "football."

In one Instagram video recorded Friday night outside Mar-a-Lago, a woman fawns as men with earpieces inspect under the hood of a line of cars heading into the club, "The Secret Service is so hot."

The weekend brought the presidential entourage to two other Trump properties, as Trump and Abe golfed 27 holes at the president's courses in Jupiter and West Palm Beach. The events meant global publicity for the Trump brand — and even more security complications.

The federal and local governments have spent considerable sums to help safeguard the sprawling estate on items big and small.

In advance of Trump's Super Bowl weekend trip to Mar-a-Lago, the Secret Service paid for a bevy of security costs, including more than \$12,000 for tents, portable toilets, light towers and golf carts, purchase orders show.

The bills have racked up outside the club, too. Palm Beach County Sheriff Ric Bradshaw said Trump's 25 days in the county since the election have cost local taxpayers about \$60,000 a day in overtime police payments.

Local officials said the U.S. Coast Guard has run round-the-clock shoreline patrols alongside Mar-a-Lago when the president is in town. A Coast Guard spokesman declined to share costs or specifics, citing security concerns.

The Town of Palm Beach recently implemented a "presidential visit seasonal traffic mitigation plan" in hopes of stemming the island's worsening traffic woes. Running every weekend until May, the plan includes a town order demanding sanitation and public-works crews leave the island every Friday by 3 p.m.

Local officials usually learn only a few days in advance that the president is coming, said Kirk - Blouin, the town's director of public safety. "We plan as if he is going to

be here most weekends," Blouin said, "because otherwise it's too hard to plan."

Overseas travel by Trump's adult sons is adding to the burden on taxpayers.

Eric Trump and his security detail flew this month to the Dominican Republic, during which the president's son met with developers proposing a Trump-brand luxury resort. Purchase orders showing government expenditures for that trip are not yet available, but records show that Secret Service officials traveled there in advance to scope out the area — staying at the five-star, oceanfront AISol Del Mar hotel at a cost of \$5,470.

After this weekend's trip to Dubai — during which early Secret Service hotel bills have already surpassed \$16,000, records show — the Trump brothers will travel to Vancouver, B.C., for the Feb. 28 grand opening of another Trump-brand skyscraper.

The State Department has declined to provide details related to its

expenditures for Trump family travel around the world, including the participation of embassy staffers when Eric Trump and Don Trump Jr. travel on behalf of the family business.

The best public estimate for the full cost of Trump's presidential getaways may come from a U.S. Government Accountability Office report in October, which estimated that a four-day trip for President Obama cost taxpayers more than \$3.6 million.

During that Presidents' Day weekend trip in 2013, Obama flew to Chicago to give an economic speech, then to Palm City, Fla., to golf with Tiger Woods and the owner of the Houston Astros baseball team.

That money went toward operating aircraft flown in from 10 states — including Air Force One, which costs an estimated \$200,000 an hour to fly — as well as assorted watercraft, military working dogs, rental cars, hotel rooms and a Coast Guard rescue helicopter.

The trip drew the ire of many Republicans in Congress, including Sen. John Barrasso (R-Wyo.), who requested that the GAO review Obama's costs. Asked whether Barrasso would file a similar request for Trump's trips, his spokeswoman said equating the two presidents' trips would be "misleading at best."

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"Former President Obama flew to Florida for the express purpose of a golf lesson and a round of golf with Tiger Woods. President Trump was in Florida with the Prime Minister of Japan," Barrasso's press secretary, Laura M. Mengelkamp, said in a statement. "Regardless, every level of the federal government needs to be mindful of the way it spends taxpayer dollars."

In November, when Trump spent a weekend at his Trump National Golf Club in Bedminster, N.J., the 8,000-resident township received just 48

hours' notice demanding an all-hours security detail of six police officers from its 16-officer force.

Township officials have begun preparing for the possibility that Trump will make up to 10 visits this year, including a potentially extended summer stay for the first lady. Officials there offered a projection, based on seven Trump trips, that could cost the township more than \$300,000.

"Bedminster is a small municipality with a small police force and a small budget," Mayor Steven E. Parker (R) wrote in a letter asking for federal help in recouping security costs. "We want to welcome President Trump with open arms, but we don't wish to burden our taxpayers disproportionately for these visits."

David A. Fahrenthold and Carol D. Leonnig contributed to this report.



## Psaki : My unsolicited advice for Sean Spicer, Kellyanne Conway and the team

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)During my eight years in the Obama administration, there was an offhand comment uttered from time to time in the hallway after something went off the rails, "It's a communications problem."

The reality is that is the case sometimes, but most of the time the problem is much larger.

Some of the major fumbles of the first few weeks of the Trump administration have been due to the communications team: whether it was the sloppy rollout of the executive order on immigration or the series of television interviews with senior officials who were either unprepared, out of the loop or pompous enough to think they could wing it with a network anchor.

But not all the problems are communications issues. Far from it.

It is highly unlikely that press secretary Sean Spicer and presidential counselor Kellyanne Conway loaded their boss up with Red Bull Thursday morning and

advised him to become unhinged during the press conference.

I doubt they encouraged him to ask April Ryan, an African-American reporter, to set up a meeting with the Congressional Black Caucus or to say, "Nuclear holocaust would be like no other."

As my old boss, Rahm Emanuel, used to say, "The fish rots at the head."

Not only is the current White House team led by an undisciplined President lacking depth or intellectual curiosity, but a President who believes bullying, freezing out the mainstream media, lying to the public, and fostering a chaotic "Game of Thrones" style environment is how you make America great again.

Spicer and Conway can't change that. But if I had a candid conversation with them, there are a few things I would suggest.

-- **Stop lying.** If the fact that you are speaking on behalf of the United States government and that the American people rely on the information you share isn't enough, then the reality that this isn't Russia, we don't have a state-run media and you will be caught in your lie should be reason enough. If you don't have the information or the answer, just say so.

-- **Second, you need something to sell.** The reason everyone is so spun up about who is up and who is down on the staff is because there is nothing else to talk about. Beyond toothless executive orders and one that has already been placed on indefinite hold by the courts, this administration isn't making policy, isn't laying out a plan for legislative action. Simply saying you are very busy and active isn't cutting it. Push the chief of staff, the policy heads, Steve Bannon or even Trump himself on the need for an agenda.

-- **Force decision-making about the message strategy in the morning meeting in front of all your colleagues.** Let Reince Preibus be the arbiter of differing viewpoints. That's his job. If you need to decide whether you are standing behind a member of the Cabinet, raise it then. If you are determining how to push back on a bad storyline, discuss it then. And if news breaks after the meeting, call another one. There is nothing more powerful than forcing people to spill their views at a table face to face.

-- **Use your research team and fact check details before saying them publicly.** If you don't have a research team: hire one. They are the unsung heroes of every White House. At a minimum it will decrease the material "Saturday Night Live" has to work with.

-- **Staff up your national security, state and defense communications teams.** By not having a briefing at the State Department for the last four weeks, you are failing to communicate to dozens of key countries, partners, allies and even adversaries around the world. These reporters don't play gotcha, they are trying to explain the positions of the United States on global events.

-- **Don't replicate Donald Trump's personality from the press room podium.** He may yell at reporters and accuse people of being stupid and lying, but that doesn't mean you need to use that behavior as a model. Develop your own style. Go back to the roots of what helped you rise in the Republican Party in the first place.

-- **Call on reporters who are from left-leaning organizations like the Huffington Post or Talking Points Memo, not just right-leaning.** How bad could it be?

-- **Hold the policy team's feet to the fire to make decisions based on what will come up at the briefing.** If they want you to sell their policies, they should make some. And they should provide you with every ounce of information necessary to sell it.

-- **Bring in more heavy policy hitters to brief the press.** And not Stephen Miller. Some of the best



briefers we had are still public servants. Rely on experts who aren't political, who won't possibly misspeak, because they have been working on the issue for 20 years.

-- **Change your television strategy.** Identify officials who appeal to a broader audience, who can speak to why decisions were

made and what motivates your boss, people who aren't just getting through the interview, but are storytelling.

-- **Get back out into the country more.** Not for big rallies, but so Trump can reconnect with the people who believe he is going to change their lives for the better. At

best that will bring him greater focus and humanity, at worst it will give the press something else to talk about other than staff infighting stories.

Finally, your credibility is more important than any job on your resume. There isn't a press staffer on either side of the aisle who

wouldn't love to be the White House press secretary or a senior adviser one day. But not at any cost. Do your job like you could walk away. You may choose to one day.

## **The New York Times** Editorial : Bring On the Special Prosecutor

In light of the stunning events of the past week, the question is not whether the Trump administration's ties to the Russian government need to be investigated immediately and fully — clearly they do. It's who will be in charge of that investigation?

The Republicans in Congress can't decide whether they would rather act like a responsible, independent branch or just the friendly legislative arm of the White House. Jason Chaffetz, chairman of the House oversight committee, would sooner investigate a cartoon character named Sid the Science Kid than any allegations relating to President Trump.

The prize for partisan candor goes to Senator Rand Paul of Kentucky, who said on Tuesday, "We'll never even get started with doing the things we need to do, like repealing Obamacare, if we're spending our whole time having Republicans investigate Republicans."

James Comey, the embattled F.B.I. director, can't be trusted to be a neutral investigator, either — not after his one-sided interference in the 2016 election compromised the bureau's integrity and damaged Hillary Clinton's campaign in its final days. Anyway, Mr. Comey reports directly to the attorney general, Jeff Sessions, who was not only Mr. Trump's first and most ardent supporter in the Senate, but the

chairman of the Trump campaign's national security advisory committee.

Despite his closeness to Mr. Trump, Mr. Sessions has said he sees no reason to recuse himself from any inquiry into the relationship between the president's top aides and Russia. Mr. Trump's unexplained allegiance to that country and its thug of a president, Vladimir Putin, has been a major concern from the start of his candidacy. But the scope of a potential investigation expanded sharply in the last four days, with the firing of Mr. Trump's national security adviser, Michael Flynn, for lying to the White House about his contacts with the Russian ambassador, and the news that members of the Trump campaign's inner circle were in repeated contact with Russian intelligence agents last year, at the same time that Russia was actively attempting to swing the election to Mr. Trump.

There is, in fact, only one person who could conduct such a high-profile, politically sensitive investigation fairly and completely — a special prosecutor.

Some Republican senators have recognized the need for an investigation, and it would be right for the Senate to move ahead in its role as a check on the executive.

But the need for an independent actor who can both investigate and prosecute criminal wrongdoing in

the executive branch is clear, because the attorney general and the Justice Department cannot be reliably impartial about their own bosses. Of course, what's simple in theory has been politically fraught in practice. In scandals from Watergate to Iran-contra to Whitewater and Monica Lewinsky, special prosecutors have butted heads with presidents and their staffs, sometimes with calamitous results.

A 1978 law, the Independent Counsel Act, created a mechanism for appointing special prosecutors who were empowered to investigate broadly and protected from presidential meddling. But the law expired in 1999 amid partisan dispute; today only the attorney general has the power to appoint a special prosecutor.

In this case, the need couldn't be more obvious. For starters, did Mr. Trump order Mr. Flynn, directly or indirectly, to discuss sanctions with the Russian ambassador? If not, why did he not fire Mr. Flynn weeks earlier, when he apparently first learned of his lies? Were Mr. Trump's aides colluding with Russian agents during the campaign? Perhaps most important are Mr. Trump's tax returns, which could tell us whether he is beholden to, and thus compromised by, the Russians? House Republicans, assuming their standard supine stance toward Mr. Trump, voted on Tuesday against requesting the

returns from the Internal Revenue Service; a special prosecutor would not feel so politically constrained.

It's never easy to conduct robust, independent investigations of the most powerful people in the world, but it is one of the foundations of a functioning democracy. The concern is particularly great in the case of the Trump administration, which seems uninterested in telling the truth in matters large and small.

Mr. Sessions must appoint a special prosecutor, and he knows why. As an article published on Fox News's website days before the election said, "The appropriate response when the subject matter is public and it arises in a highly charged political atmosphere is for the attorney general to appoint a special counsel of great public stature and indisputable independence to assure the public the matter will be handled without partisanship."

The article, which called for an investigation into Hillary Clinton's private email server and pay-to-play allegations surrounding the Clinton Foundation, argued that Loretta Lynch, then the attorney general, could not serve as a neutral arbiter, given her impromptu meeting with Bill Clinton on her airplane earlier in the year. One of the article's co-authors was Jeff Sessions.

## **The Washington Post** Flynn in FBI interview denied discussing sanctions with Russian ambassador (UNE)

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

Former national security adviser Michael Flynn denied to FBI agents in an interview last month that he had discussed U.S. sanctions against Russia with that country's ambassador to the United States before President Trump took office, contradicting the contents of intercepted communications collected by intelligence agencies, current and former U.S. officials said.

The Jan. 24 interview potentially puts Flynn in legal jeopardy. Lying to the FBI is a felony offense. But several officials said it is unclear whether prosecutors would attempt to bring a case, in part because Flynn may parse the definition of the word "sanctions." He also followed his denial to the FBI by saying he couldn't recall all of the conversation, officials said.

Any decision to prosecute would ultimately lie with the Justice Department.

Checkpoint newsletter

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A spokesman for Flynn said he had no response. The FBI and the Justice Department declined to comment.

Flynn spoke to Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak following Trump's election and denied for weeks that the December conversation involved sanctions the Obama administration imposed on Russia in response to its purported meddling in the U.S. election.

Flynn's denial to the FBI was similar to what he had told Trump's advisers, according to the officials who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter.

President Trump said he asked for former national security adviser Michael Flynn's resignation on Feb. 13, but also defended him, saying, "what he did wasn't wrong," during a news conference on Feb. 16 at the White House. Trump on Flynn firing: 'I asked for his resignation' (Reuters)

(Reuters)

In a recent interview with the Daily Caller, Flynn said he didn't discuss "sanctions" but did discuss the Obama administration's expulsion of 35 Russian diplomats it said were "intelligence operatives." The move was part of the sanctions package it announced on Dec. 29.

Earlier, in an interview with The Post, he denied discussing sanctions but later issued a statement saying "that while he had no recollection of discussing sanctions, he couldn't be certain that the topic never came up."

Trump asked for Flynn's resignation Monday night following reports in The Washington Post that revealed Flynn had misled Vice President Pence in denying the substance of the call and that Justice Department officials had warned the White House that Flynn was a possible target of Russian blackmail as a result.

*[Justice Department warned White House that Flynn could be vulnerable to Russian blackmail, officials say]*

One day after his dismissal, the Defense Intelligence Agency suspended Flynn's security clearance. Officials said the spy agency was reviewing Flynn's adherence to security procedures in part due to FBI concerns about his conduct.

Two days after the FBI interview, then-acting Attorney General Sally Q. Yates and a career national security official informed Donald McGahn, Trump's White House counsel, about the contents of the intercepted

phone call in a meeting at the White House. Yates and other officials were concerned that Russia could not only exploit the mischaracterization of the call — which Pence had repeated on nationwide television — but also did not think it was fair to keep Pence in the dark about the discrepancies, according to officials familiar with their thinking.

At a news conference Thursday, Trump called Flynn a "fine person" and said he had done nothing wrong in engaging with the Russian envoy. Trump said he did not direct Flynn to talk to Kislyak. However, the president added, "I would have directed him because that's his job."

Michael Flynn has resigned as President Trump's national security adviser. Don't know what all the fuss is about? Don't worry, we've got you covered. Don't know what all the fuss is about? Don't worry, we've got you covered. (Daron Taylor, Jhaan Elker/The Washington Post)

(Daron Taylor, Jhaan Elker/The Washington Post)

Trump said he had asked for Flynn's resignation because of what the national security adviser had told the vice president about his communications with the Russian diplomat. "I was not happy with the way that information was given," Trump said.

The president said the real issue in the Flynn saga was the divulging of classified information. "It's an illegal process, and the press should be ashamed of themselves," he said. "But more importantly, the people

that gave out the information to the press should be ashamed of themselves, really ashamed."

*[The Michael Flynn situation just went from bad to worse for Flynn — and the White House]*

Senior officials who have reviewed the phone call thought Flynn's statements to Kislyak were inappropriate, if not illegal, because he suggested that the Kremlin could expect a reprieve from the sanctions.

At the same time, officials knew that seeking to build a case against Flynn for violating an obscure 1799 statute known as the Logan Act — which bars private citizens from interfering in diplomatic disputes — would be legally and political daunting. Several officials said that while sanctions were discussed between Flynn and Kislyak in the December call, they did not see evidence in the intercept that Flynn had an "intent" to convey an explicit promise to take action after the inauguration.

"It wasn't about sanctions. It was about the 35 guys who were thrown out," Flynn told the Daily Caller in an interview just before he resigned and published Tuesday. "So that's what it turned out to be. It was basically, 'Look, I know this happened. We'll review everything.' I never said anything such as, 'We're going to review sanctions,' or anything like that."

It is not clear when the FBI began to probe Flynn's communications with Kislyak. Senior members of the Obama administration learned in early January that the FBI was

investigating the relationship, according to former officials.

On President Barack Obama's final full day in office, Yates, Director of National Intelligence James R. Clapper and CIA Director John O. Brennan recommended informing the Trump team of the Flynn matter. But FBI Director James B. Comey pushed back, arguing that doing so could interfere with the bureau's ongoing investigation. The FBI is examining contacts between Trump associates and Russian officials.

Comey dropped his objections after the FBI interviewed the national security adviser.

After Yates informed McGahn, the White House counsel informed Trump and then conducted an internal review of the matter, according to White House press secretary Sean Spicer.

*[Who is Donald McGahn?]*

While McGahn and Trump were briefed on the matter on Jan. 26, it does not appear that they informed Pence. A spokesman for the vice president said he first learned that he had been misled when The Washington Post on Feb. 9 disclosed that Flynn had, in fact, discussed sanctions with Kislyak, contrary to the vice president's public statements.

Flynn said in his resignation letter that he had "inadvertently briefed the Vice President Elect and others with incomplete information regarding my phone calls with the Russian ambassador."

## The New York Times McMullin : A Party to the Russian Connection

Evan McMullin

Some also questioned Mr. Trump's attacks on Hispanics, Muslims, women and people with disabilities, or his positions on entitlement reform, discretionary spending and national security. Others were unnerved by his volatile temperament, egoism and authoritarian tendencies. In public, they occasionally offered light criticism of Mr. Trump's most objectionable comments, but mostly remained silent for fear of antagonizing his supporters.

As Mr. Trump campaigned, his consistent affection for Russia's president, Vladimir V. Putin, and apparent defense of Russian intervention in Ukraine raised further concerns. In December 2015, on "Morning Joe," Mr. Trump said of Mr. Putin, "He's running his country and at least he's a leader, unlike what we have in this country." He also equated Mr. Putin's

murderous regime with the American government: "Our country does plenty of killing, also" — a remark he has repeated as president.

Suspect public comments like these led one senior Republican leader to dolefully inform his peers that he thought Mr. Trump was on the Kremlin's payroll, suggesting that Mr. Trump had been compromised by Russian intelligence. Other leaders were surprised by their colleague's frank assessment, but did not dispute it.

As Mr. Trump prevailed in state after state, the leaders came to terms with the possibility, then the likelihood, that he would win the nomination. During the process, most leaders had not endorsed a candidate and hoped that Mr. Trump would be stopped. By early May 2016, however, his victory appeared a fait accompli, placing them in an unenviable position. As

senior leaders, opposing the outcome of the party contest was unthinkable.

Eventually, one by one, they all committed to supporting Mr. Trump, often simply saying they would support the nominee, conspicuously avoiding uttering Mr. Trump's name. In a fascinating political metamorphosis, some even found reason to be excited about Mr. Trump.

They were understandably anxious to win back the White House to advance policy priorities and appoint conservative Supreme Court justices. Some believed that, despite his faults, Mr. Trump could bring the dramatic disruption they thought Washington needed. Others saw career opportunities in supporting Mr. Trump, who had yet to select a running mate and, if elected, would also make cabinet appointments.

Shockingly, some of the leaders most concerned about Russian subversion and Mr. Trump's possible compromise were his first and most vocal supporters among congressional leaders — some publicly, some privately. It was an inauspicious trade of national security for political self-preservation and partisan ambition.

Now the leaders' worst fears seem validated. Mr. Flynn has become the third Trump team member to step down over Russia-related issues, following the campaign chairman Paul Manafort and the foreign policy adviser Carter Page.

This plotline is unlikely to improve of its own accord, and America's security is now at stake. For Republican leaders in Congress, there is no more room for cognitive dissonance. Instead, it is urgent that they recommit to patriotic prudence. They should demand that Attorney General Jeff Sessions appoint an

independent special counsel to investigate Russia's assault on American democracy and Mr. Trump's possible collusion with the Kremlin.

At a minimum, they must establish a bipartisan special select committee with subpoena power in the House or the Senate for the same purpose. This job is too big and significant to be entrusted to the standing

intelligence committees, which have critical tasks and limited staff. The nation must have accountability — including public hearings where possible — on these matters.

After their grand bargain to back Mr. Trump's Moscow-assisted victory, congressional Republicans are now responsible for protecting the nation from its dangers.

**The  
Washington  
Post**

## **Ignitius : Flynn is gone, but a mystery remains**

President Trump confronts complicated problems as the investigation widens into Russia's attack on our political system. But his responsibilities are simple: A month ago, he swore an oath that he would "faithfully execute" his office and "preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States."

That's apparently easier said than done. In a rambling news conference Thursday and his blizzard of tweets, Trump has dismissed inquiries into his campaign's contacts with Russia and denounced leakers as "low-life" and "un-American." These statements seem more likely to confound ongoing investigations than faithfully execute his role as chief executive.

Michael Flynn's forced resignation as national security adviser this week, after he concealed details of his contacts with a Russian diplomat, has been blurred by Trump's contradictory comments. So it's worth going back to basics: Why was the United States expelling Russian spies at the time Flynn made his late-December call to Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak? Why would Flynn have hidden for weeks that he talked with Kislyak about those anti-Russian sanctions, or have denied it to the FBI, as The Post reported late Thursday? What would Trump have known about these issues?

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**Bloomberg**

## **Lake : Separating Fact From Innuendo in the Flynn Fiasco**

Eli Lake

After getting a lot of flak over my last column on the political assassination of Michael Flynn, I'd like to clear something up about national security leaks. I am in favor of them. What's more, I oppose the rigorous enforcement of the outmoded laws meant to protect state secrets, particularly if that involves monitoring or investigating reporters.

The issue with the ouster of Flynn as national security adviser is not the mishandling of classified information, despite some of President Donald Trump's tweets about it. It's about Flynn's detractors

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You don't need leaks of classified information to understand why Flynn's dealings with an aggressive Russia were inappropriate. You just need to look at the public record.

The seriousness of Russia's assault on America first became clear on Oct. 7, when the intelligence community released a statement charging that "Russia's senior-most officials" (meaning President Vladimir Putin) had launched a cyberattack "intended to interfere with the U.S. election process."

Intelligence officials had been briefing members of Congress about the Russian activities since the summer. Adam B. Schiff (Calif.), the ranking Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, had pushed the White House since September to respond, to no avail. FBI Director James B. Comey, meanwhile, had decided against disclosing the bureau's own preelection investigation of possible links between Russia and the Trump campaign.

So on Election Day, the public wasn't aware of the growing belief among intelligence analysts that Russian hackers were trying to help Trump and hurt his rival, Hillary Clinton. That judgment was shared many weeks after the election, in a Jan. 6 report that said Russia sought to "denigrate Secretary

Clinton and harm her electability and potential presidency" and that the Kremlin "developed a clear preference" for Trump.

President Barack Obama finally took decisive action on Dec. 29, when he announced sanctions including expulsion of 35 Russian intelligence operatives and closure of two "vacation" compounds, on New York's Long Island and Maryland's Eastern Shore, which the Russians were using to collect signals intelligence. (The loss of those monitoring platforms may explain why a Russian spy ship carrying a forest of antennae sailed up the Delaware coast toward Connecticut this week.)

Here's where the timeline gets intriguing: The White House said in a Dec. 29 conference call with reporters that Obama had informed Trump about the impending sanctions on Dec. 28, one of the days when Flynn communicated with Kislyak, according to the Trump team. (U.S. officials told me a call took place Dec. 29.) Hours after the expulsion was announced, Trump issued a bland statement: "It's time for our country to move onto bigger and better things."

We now know that Flynn promised Kislyak that Trump would "review" the U.S. reprisals — a fact Flynn withheld from Vice President Pence and the public for weeks. Flynn finally shared his version with the conservative Daily Caller on Monday, the day he was fired. He said his conversation with Kislyak "was about the 35 guys who were

thrown out. ... It was basically, 'Look, I know this happened. We'll review everything.'"

Flynn's promise to review the case evidently encouraged Putin to forgo the usual tit-for-tat retaliation, despite an initial Kremlin statement that there was "no alternative to reciprocal measures." On Dec. 30, Putin said that rather than taking immediate countermeasures, he would instead seek "to restore Russian-U.S. relations based on the policies of the Trump administration."

Trump tweeted later that day: "Great move on delay (by V. Putin) — always knew he was very smart!"

Given the magnitude of Russia's cyberattack on the United States, it remains puzzling that Flynn and Trump were so cavalier about the U.S. government's attempt to hold Moscow accountable. That's one reason investigators keep asking what contacts the Trump team had with Russia before the election. Trump said Thursday there hadn't been any. Yet Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said Nov. 10: "Obviously, we know most of the people from [Trump's] entourage."

The FBI and the Senate Intelligence Committee are investigating the scope of Russia's pro-Trump activities. Inevitably, there will be leaks, but that issue is a red herring. For all Trump's talk about "fake news," the country needs answers.

Flynn is not a target at this point of an FBI probe.

So what law did Flynn violate? According to the New York Times, he may have violated the Logan Act, an antiquated statute that prohibits private citizens from negotiating with foreign adversaries. The Times reported that Obama administration advisers believed Flynn may have negotiated a deal with Russia just after Obama had imposed new sanctions and expelled Russian spies as punishment for Moscow's interference in the election. On Thursday, the Washington Post reported that he may have misled

FBI agents investigating the phone calls.

There are a few important points here. To start, there is no indication that Flynn made any quid pro quo with the Russians. The Times reports this, and I have confirmed it with my own sources. Second, the Logan Act, which dates back to 1799, is likely unconstitutional. The Justice Department does not prosecute Americans violating it. And in this case, the private citizen was about to become the national security adviser. If it's illegal for incoming U.S. officials to discuss policy with foreign adversaries, then the hard work of preparing the transition of a foreign policy agenda for an incoming administration will be outlawed. The FBI investigation is more serious, but so is disclosing the bureau's ongoing investigations to the press.

It's also been reported that Flynn had contacts with Russians during the election. That's a bit more troubling, but in and of itself it means very little. It's also not unprecedented. In 2008, an Obama foreign policy adviser, Daniel

Kurtzer, traveled to Damascus to offer the government there his views on the Syria-Israeli peace talks.

Many Democrats, including former Secretary of State John Kerry, took meetings with Iran's ambassador to the United Nations during George W. Bush's final years as president, at a moment when our military leaders accused Iran of killing U.S. soldiers in Iraq by providing militias with improvised explosive devices. If Bush's FBI had launched Logan Act investigations in that period, would Democrats have cheered on the leaks of the investigations?

It's possible that Flynn has concealed his contacts with Russian nationals in the last year. He did attend a 2015 conference in Moscow put on by the Russian propaganda network RT, and he was paid for this by his speaker's bureau. Some reporters have raised the prospect that Flynn's receipt of money that initially came from Russia violated the Pentagon's guidelines for retired members of the military.

The weakest reed in all of this is the charge that Flynn would be susceptible to Russian blackmail because he did not tell Vice President Mike Pence the full story about his phone call. According to the Washington Post, acting attorney general Sally Yates felt compelled to take this information to the White House at the end of January because she was so concerned that Flynn was compromised.

This sounds like concern-trolling to me. If Flynn forgot the brief discussion of sanctions in his phone call with the Russian ambassador, as he claimed in his resignation letter, it's far-fetched to think the Russians could coerce him to betray his country to not expose the "lie." This is why it's so important to release the transcripts of these phone calls to the public, as former U.S. attorney Andy McCarthy argues in his National Review column.

Nonetheless, the damage is now done. Republicans are saying that Flynn should be asked to testify before Congress. His security

clearance has been suspended. He has retained a lawyer. Flynn will likely spend months and possibly years defending himself because he briefly talked to the Russian ambassador about sanctions a few weeks before he was about to become Trump's national security adviser.

If that's all there is to this, then the Democrats and the FBI should be ashamed of themselves. There is a far more important matter to investigate: the Russian influence operation against the U.S. election and whether Trump and any associates aided and abetted it. So far, no one has alleged that Flynn had anything to do with that. This hasn't stopped his accusers though from trying and convicting him in the press. Flynn's enemies waged this campaign by disclosing communications that we should be able to trust the government to monitor with proper discretion. Thanks to these leaks, that trust has eroded.

## NATIONAL REVIEW ONLINE

### Krauthammer : Flynn Phone Call Coverup Searching for Crime

It's a Watergate-era cliché that the cover-up is always worse than the crime. In the Mike Flynn affair, we have the first recorded instance of a cover-up *in the absence of a crime*.

Being covered up were the December 29 phone calls between Flynn and the Russian ambassador to Washington. The presumed violation was Flynn negotiating with a foreign adversary while the Obama administration was still in office and, even worse, discussing with Sergey Kislyak the sanctions then being imposed upon Russia (for meddling in the 2016 elections).

What's wrong with that? It is risible to invoke the Logan Act, passed during the John Adams administration, under which not a single American has been prosecuted in the intervening 218 years. It prohibits private citizens from negotiating with foreign powers. Flynn was hardly a private citizen. As Donald Trump's publicly designated incoming national-security adviser, it was perfectly reasonable for him to be talking to foreign actors in preparation for assuming office within the month.

Worst case: He was telling Kislyak that the Trump administration might lift sanctions and therefore, comrade, no need for a spiral of retaliations. How different is this

from what Barack Obama told Russian president Dmitry Medvedev, on an inadvertently open mic, during his 2012 reelection campaign? "This is my last election," he said. "After my election, I have more flexibility."

Flynn would have been giving the Russians useful information that might well have contributed to Russia's decision not to retaliate. I'm no Russophile. But again: What's wrong with that? Turns out, the Trump administration has not lifted those sanctions. It's all a tempest in an empty teapot.

The accusations of misbehavior by Flynn carry a subliminal echo of a longstanding charge against Richard Nixon that he interfered in the Paris peace talks in October 1968 to prevent his Democratic opponent from claiming a major foreign-policy success on the eve of the presidential election.

But that kind of alleged diplomatic freelancing would have prolonged a war in which Americans were dying daily. The Flynn conversation was nothing remotely of the sort. Where's the harm?

The harm was not the calls but Flynn's lying about them. And most especially lying to the vice president, who then went out and told the world Flynn had never discussed sanctions. You can't

leave your vice president undercut and exposed. Flynn had to go.

Up to this point, the story makes sense. Except for one thing: Why the cover-up if there is no crime? Why lie about talking about sanctions? It's inexplicable. Did Flynn want to head off lines of inquiry about other contacts with Russians that might not have been so innocent? Massive new leaks suggest numerous contacts during the campaign between Trump associates and Russian officials, some of whom were intelligence agents. Up till now, however, reports the *New York Times*, there is "no evidence" of any Trump-campaign collusion or cooperation with Russian hacking and other interference in the U.S. election.

Thus far. Which is why there will be investigations. Speculation ranges from the wildly malevolent to the rather loopily innocent.

It is risible to invoke the Logan Act, passed during the John Adams administration, under which not a single American has been prosecuted in the intervening 218 years.

At one end of the spectrum is the scenario wherein these campaign officials — including perhaps Flynn, perhaps even Trump — are compromised because of tainted

business or political activities known to the Russians, to whom they are now captive. A fevered conspiracy in my view, but there are non-certifiable people who consider it possible.

At the benign end of the spectrum is that the easily flattered Trump imagines himself the great deal-maker who overnight becomes a great statesman by charming Vladimir Putin into a Nixon-to-China grand bargain — we jointly call off the new Cold War, join forces to destroy the Islamic State, and reach a new accommodation for Europe that relieves us of some of the burden of parasitic allies.

To me, the idea is nuts, a narcissistic fantasy grounded in neither strategy nor history. But that doesn't mean Trump might not imagine it — after all, he maintains that if we had only stayed in Iraq to steal its oil, we wouldn't have the Islamic State. And if this has indeed been his thinking about Russia, it would make sense to surround himself with advisers who had extensive dealings there.

I believe neither of these scenarios, but I'm hard put to come up with alternatives. The puzzle remains. Why did Flynn lie? Until we answer that, the case of the cover-up in search of a crime remains unsolved.



Schmitt

WASHINGTON — Robert S. Harward, the retired vice admiral and former Navy SEAL who was President Trump's top choice to replace his ousted national security adviser, on Thursday turned down the post in the latest setback for a White House already in turmoil.

"This job requires 24 hours a day, seven days a week focus and commitment to do it right," Mr. Harward said in a statement. "I currently could not make that commitment."

He added that since retiring from a 40-year military career, he now had "the opportunity to address financial and family issues that would have been challenging in this position."

Two senior administration officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly about the matter, confirmed that Mr. Harward cited family and financial considerations in turning down the post.

But his decision reflected the continuing upheaval in Mr. Trump's White House,

**THE WALL  
STREET  
JOURNAL**

Shane Harris

Updated Feb. 16, 2017 11:02 p.m. ET

Retired Vice Adm. Bob Harward, President Donald Trump's choice to succeed Mike Flynn as his national security adviser, has turned down the job, compounding the turmoil that has surrounded the White House in its first weeks and leaving a key security post in limbo.

Adm. Harward, a highly regarded retired Navy SEAL, told Mr. Trump on Thursday that he couldn't accept the job, according to people familiar with the conversations. Adm. Harward confirmed his decision in a statement.

The development represents a setback for Mr. Trump and delays the president's effort to quickly restore balance in the White House's security apparatus following the downfall of Mr. Flynn, which capped weeks of disarray and controversy over conflicting statements he made about his contacts with Russian officials.

Adm. Harward, a former deputy commander of U.S. Central

## Trump's Pick to Replace Flynn Turns Down the Job

Julie Hirschfeld Davis and Eric

which was rocked this week by the resignation of Michael T. Flynn, the national security adviser, quickly followed by the abrupt withdrawal of Andrew Puzder, his nominee for secretary of labor.

White House officials had scrambled to head off the refusal, asserting as late as Thursday evening that Mr. Harward, who is close to Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, was still in the running to become Mr. Trump's national security adviser.

Current and former national security officials familiar with the situation, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to comment, said Mr. Harward had harbored strong reservations from the beginning about taking the post because of Mr. Trump's unpredictable style and the level of chaos that has engulfed his White House. Those were only underscored this week in the politically charged aftermath of Mr. Flynn's ouster, despite the attempts of Mr. Trump's inner circle to allay his concerns.

One person briefed on the discussions said that Mr. Harward, who had been interviewing for a different administration post when

he was tabbed for the N.S.C., had been startled by media accounts of Mr. Trump telling the deputy national security adviser, who was close to Mr. Flynn, that she could stay in her post. It added to his concerns about working for a mercurial president.

Mr. Trump suggested earlier Thursday that he had demanded Mr. Flynn's resignation on Monday partly because of enthusiasm about an unnamed person he had in mind to replace him. The president had known since last month that Mr. Flynn had misrepresented conversations he had with the Russian ambassador to the United States, before Mr. Trump was inaugurated, about American sanctions on Moscow.

"I have somebody that I think will be outstanding for the position," Mr. Trump said at a news conference on Thursday. "And that also helps, I think, in the making of my decision."

But by then Mr. Harward, who is a top executive at Lockheed Martin, had decided he was not willing to take the post. He wrote to Mr. Trump and Mr. Mattis conveying his decision, two of the officials said.

Mr. Trump's National Security Council has become embroiled in political controversy. In an executive order last month — which Mr. Trump later complained privately that he had not been fully briefed on — the president placed Stephen K. Bannon, his chief strategist, on its principals committee, giving a political adviser a position of parity with the secretaries of state and defense, and with the national security adviser.

Two former national security officials who have worked closely with Mr. Harward said he would have been unlikely to take the position without assurances from Mr. Trump that he could run the N.S.C. free of intervention by political advisers. They also spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak about the matter.

Mr. Harward's withdrawal from consideration prompted David H. Petraeus, the former general and director of the Central Intelligence Agency, to step up his lobbying for the national security adviser post, according to officials familiar with the process.

## Bob Harward Turns Down National Security Adviser Job (UNE)

Gordon Lubold, Carol E. Lee and

Command who has close ties to Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, had expressed a preference for hiring his own staff at the National Security Council but was rebuffed, according to people familiar with the discussions.

- Trump Lets Loose Against Critics

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### TRUMP'S FIRST 100 DAYS

Adm. Harward wanted to replace a number of staffers, potentially including the current deputy, former Fox News personality K.T. McFarland, to make room for his own staff choices, according to officials in the White House. But such a wholesale overhaul of the NSC was viewed by Mr. Trump and his advisers as too disruptive, according to the people familiar with the discussions, and Adm. Harward was told that replacing the NSC staff wasn't an option.

Some of these people also indicated that Adm. Harward, now a top executive at Lockheed Martin Corp.'s operation in the United Arab Emirates, passed on the job because it would entail a significant reduction in income.

Mr. Trump's choice for Army Secretary, Vinnie Viola, recently withdrew his nomination for that job because the task of extracting himself from his various financial involvements became problematic, U.S. officials have said.

Mr. Trump and Adm. Harward were expected to talk again late Thursday, officials said, suggesting that a negotiation between the two men remained a possibility.

In a statement Thursday night, Adm. Harward said it was difficult to subject his family to additional hardships after 40 years of military deployments.

"Since retiring, I have the opportunity to address financial and family issues that would have been challenging in this position," he said. "Like all service members understand, and live, this job requires 24 hours a day, seven days a week focus and commitment to do it right."

Adm. Harward was widely seen by Democrats and Republicans alike as a worthy choice to take on the

job at the NSC and bring discipline to a White House national security apparatus hungry for leadership.

He worked at the NSC once before, as a Navy captain, and was familiar with many of the ins and outs of that job, according to individuals familiar with the discussions. He was also viewed as having the kind of personality that could manage the broad and critical array of issues handled by the NSC.

Adm. Harward also had the strong backing of Mr. Mattis. When Mr. Mattis was named Pentagon chief, he had looked for jobs that Adm. Harward could fill. When it appeared that Mr. Flynn would be leaving the job, Adm. Harward's name rose quickly to the top of the shortlist to replace him.

On Thursday, Mr. Trump in a news conference indicated that the decision to remove Mr. Flynn, who stepped down Feb. 13, was made easier because he had Adm. Harward as a possible replacement.

"I have somebody that I think will be outstanding for the position," Mr.

Trump said, without naming Adm. Harward. "And that also helps, I think, in the making of my decision."

The president, according to people familiar with the matter, asked Mr. Flynn to resign sometime after he became aware that Mr. Flynn had misrepresented communications he had with the Russian government after the election but before Mr. Trump's inauguration, a possible violation of the Logan Act, a federal law that prohibits private citizens from conducting foreign policy,

Mr. Trump on Thursday maintained that Mr. Flynn "didn't do anything wrong." But he said he had lost confidence in Mr. Flynn, who had been by his side from the early days of the election campaign, because he didn't tell the truth.

"He didn't tell the vice president of the United States the facts," Mr. Trump said. "And then he didn't remember. And that just wasn't acceptable to me."

In addition to Adm. Harward, Mr. Trump had also been considering for the post the acting national

security adviser, Keith Kellogg, and David Petraeus, a retired Army general and former Central Intelligence Agency director. On Friday morning, Mr. Trump tweeted that Mr. Kellogg, "is very much in play for NSA—as are three others."

Mr. Trump now must decide whether to try to choose one of these men for the post, or restart a search process that would leave him without a permanent security adviser as he grapples with potential global threats and a procession of calls and visits with foreign leaders.

Even before Mr. Flynn's ouster, there was widespread unease within the NSC as many career foreign-policy experts said they were being left out of the policy-making process and were unsure whether they would retain their jobs. Some have opted to leave earlier than scheduled because of the disarray, people familiar with the NSC have said.

## The New York Times

### G.O.P.'s Grand Visions for Congress Now Look Like a Mirage (UNE)

Jennifer Steinhauser

At this point in Barack Obama's presidency, when Democrats controlled Washington, Congress had passed a stimulus bill totaling nearly \$1 trillion to address the financial crisis, approved a measure preventing pay discrimination, expanded a children's health insurance program, and begun laying the groundwork for major health care and financial regulation bills. President George W. Bush came into office with a congressional blueprint for his signature education act, No Child Left Behind.

But in the 115th Congress, the Senate has done little more than struggle to confirm Mr. Trump's nominees, and Republicans ultimately helped force his choice for labor secretary, Andrew F. Puzder, to withdraw from consideration on Wednesday in the face of unified Democratic opposition.

The House has spent most of its time picking off a series of deregulation measures, like overturning a rule intended to protect surface water from mining operations. For his part, Mr. Trump has relied mostly on executive orders to advance policies.

The inactivity stems from a lack of clear policy guidance — and, just as often, contradictory messages — from the Trump administration,

which does not appear to have spent the campaign and transition periods forming a legislative wish list.

Democrats have also led efforts to slow the confirmation of nominees to Mr. Trump's cabinet who might otherwise be leading the charge.

"When you spend a lot of time talking about policy and debating policy in the presidential campaign, it is far easier to be specific about legislation when you get into office," said Austan Goolsbee, who served as the chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers during the Obama administration. "President Trump spent the campaign fleshing out nothing in detail, so it's not really a surprise that they can't even agree on priorities, much less on actual legislative detail."

House Republicans say slow and steady was always the plan. "We are 100 percent on pace with the 200-day plan we presented to President Trump and to members at our retreat," Brendan Buck, a spokesman for Speaker Paul D. Ryan, wrote in an email. "Budget first (check), then regs (check), then Obamacare bill (in process and on schedule), and then tax (after Obamacare)."

But even Democrats, who had been gearing up for fights and compromises on health care, a tax overhaul, infrastructure and other policy matters, are bored and frustrated. "It's painful for someone

like me who was excited about infrastructure and tax reform," said Representative Jim Himes, Democrat of Connecticut. "It seems like the administration and the majority are nowhere."

Congressional Republicans seem wary of offering their own bills, lest Mr. Trump or one of his aides, who have largely been distracted by personnel and intelligence scandals, undercut their efforts. This was most visible when Mr. Trump demanded that Republicans come up with a replacement plan for a health care law they had hoped to simply repeal, sending members flailing. The administration also gave conflicting messages on a tax plan embraced by House Republicans that would apply the corporate tax rate to all imports while exempting exports.

"On our side, it's pretty clear who drives policy," said a Republican aide who spoke on the condition of anonymity to avoid being written about by Mr. Trump on Twitter. "But take any issue and try to figure that out from their side."

Is the leading influence Mr. Trump's policy adviser, Stephen Miller, who presents himself as the voice of the White House? Or the president's son-in-law, Jared Kushner? Or Vice President Mike Pence? No one seems to know.

Huge overhauls of the nation's health and tax systems — long congressional Republicans' fantasy

— are hard under the best of circumstances. When Democrats run Congress, "it's easier for them to move ahead because they're looking for ways to expand and grow government," said Senator Jeff Flake, Republican of Arizona. "Republicans are looking to rein government in."

Republicans say things would be going great if only Democrats would allow Mr. Trump his cabinet. Under current Senate rules, Democrats are unable to filibuster any of the nominees, but they have gone out of their way to use procedural tools to drag out the process, partly because many of the president's choices are contentious, and partly because of their antipathy for Mr. Trump. Their lone victory so far: toppling Mr. Puzder.

"They have undertaken the most unprecedented obstruction of cabinet nominees in history," Senator Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, the majority leader, said on the Senate floor on Wednesday. The Senate is also preparing for battle over Mr. Trump's nominee for the Supreme Court, Judge Neil M. Gorsuch, who has been meeting with senators. "So far, Democrats are gumming up the works," said Senator Patrick J. Toomey, Republican of Pennsylvania. "We will persevere. We will work our way through it."

But if every nominee were magically confirmed tomorrow, "where would they go next?" asked Senator

Richard J. Durbin, Democrat of Illinois. "There is no leadership there."

Indeed, a largely policy-free campaign left the Trump administration flat-footed from the start, and questions about his campaign's communications with Russia and other distractions have prevented serious lawmaking discussions.



The Christian Science Monitor

February 16, 2017 —If Neil Gorsuch is to become the next US Supreme Court justice, Senate Democrats say, he will have to prove to them that he is in the judicial "mainstream."

What Judge Gorsuch's confirmation hearings could highlight is how the traditionally conservative philosophy of originalism has become so mainstream and, arguably, bipartisan.

Originalism calls for the Constitution to be interpreted as the Framers intended it to be more than 200 years ago. Since a staunch commitment to originalism helped scupper a Supreme Court confirmation three decades ago, the philosophy has become increasingly popular. This growing popularity is due in large part, experts say, to originalism diversifying and moderating itself, moving from an exclusively conservative philosophy to one that now has support across the ideological spectrum.

When Ronald Reagan nominated the late Justice Antonin Scalia to the high court in 1986 "originalism was a much less influential and followed opinion," says Michael Rappaport, a professor at the University of San Diego School of Law.

"Today somebody could say it's one of the two leading approaches to interpreting the Constitution," he adds.

The fundamentals of the originalist judicial philosophy have existed for as long as the independent judiciary itself. But the modern originalist movement emerged about 30 years ago in response to what conservative legal scholars perceived as "activism" from the Warren court, regarding landmark decisions such as *Brown v. Board of Education* or *Roe v. Wade*.

While proponents like Scalia rose to the high court, originalism remained a fringe philosophy for some time. President Reagan nominated Robert Bork to the court in 1987, for example, but a bipartisan coalition

Some Republicans are frustrated that even social policy bills that have long been mainstays in the House, but died in the Senate or were vetoed by Mr. Obama, are not moving forward. "I'm much more concerned about what we are not doing in the House relative to these core value issues," said Representative Jim Jordan, Republican of Ohio.

in the Senate defeated his nomination in large part because of his staunchly originalist views, particularly regarding rights to individual liberties and privacy not explicitly protected by the Constitution.

"Over time, originalism has grown more sophisticated and in some ways different from what it was 30 years ago in just opposing Warren decisions," says Ilya Somin, a professor at George Mason University's Antonin Scalia Law School.

#### 'We are all originalists'

Fast-forward to Justice Elena Kagan's confirmation hearings in 2010 and the change becomes particularly stark. "We are all originalists," she said then, albeit making clear that in some cases the Constitution is open to broad interpretation.

Perhaps no decision better encapsulates this evolution than *District of Columbia v. Heller*, the 2008 Supreme Court affirming an individual's right to carry a gun. In that 5-to-4 decision, both the majority and the principal dissent built their opinions on an originalist interpretation of the Second Amendment.

But that is not originalism coming to dominate the judicial mainstream, experts say. Instead it is a product of originalism becoming one of several methodologies now in the judicial mainstream that judges and justices use to form opinions.

"Originalism has become very mainstream, and as it's become mainstream I guess you could say it's become watered down," says Ernest Young, a professor at the Duke University School of Law.

"People like [Bork and Scalia] have really succeeded in persuading everyone from the right to the left that we ought to do more historical research in constitutional interpretation than maybe we did under the Warren court," he adds. "Everyone is pretty much persuaded that history counts, [but] very few people think that only history matters."

There have been some tentative steps toward cooperation, like an examination of Russian involvement in the presidential election. "To date, the Republicans have been pretty constructive partners on things like Russian hacking," Mr. Himes said.

But that collaboration has its limits. A bill that would force the Trump administration to consult Congress

before taking any steps to lift sanctions on Russia has been waylaid.

"We've got to have a government functioning first," said Senator John McCain, Republican of Arizona, a sponsor of the bill.

## Supreme Court nominee Neil Gorsuch and the rise of originalism

### 'Living Constitution'

The main philosophy competing with originalism is commonly known as "living constitutionalism," the philosophy that the Constitution is dynamic and can evolve and be reinterpreted as society changes. This philosophy tends to give more weight to Supreme Court precedents and changes in social and cultural norms, and is generally more popular among progressive jurists.

But even staunchly conservative originalists don't automatically side with Republican administrations. When George W. Bush pushed to expand the scope of executive power amid the war on terror, for example, Scalia pushed back.

For many observers, the beauty and popularity of originalism is in its intuitive simplicity. If a certain right isn't enumerated in one of the founding legal texts, an originalist would argue, then you shouldn't write an opinion saying it's a right – no matter how nonsensical it may appear in the modern social context. If laws need to be updated or adapted, that should be the job of Congress.

In a way it takes power out of the jurist's hands and places it in the texts, and that is another appeal of the philosophy, particularly in an era when judges and justices are often derided as unelected "activists" for authoring opinions unfavorable to the opposing ideology.

"The concern is that judges need to be able to point to some source of authority for what they're doing that's outside their own views and precedents," says Professor Young. "They need to be able to say, 'The Constitution made me do it.'"

But some argue that, in many instances, originalism is only facially neutral. David Strauss, a professor at the University of Chicago School of Law described originalism as "a form of rhetoric, rather than a coherent analytical approach," in an email to the Monitor.

"Originalists are able to find ways to reconcile their supposed originalism

with mainstream views, at least whenever they want to," he added.

Indeed, because originalism is so grounded in history, critics argue that it is easy for jurists to cherry-pick historical details to fit their desired conclusions.

### Same Amendment, different interpretation

Take *Heller*. In that decision, both sides were parsing the text of the Second Amendment. Scalia, writing for the majority, said it "protects an individual right to possess a firearm unconnected with service in a militia, and to use that arm for traditionally lawful purposes." In his dissent, Stevens wrote that the text doesn't specify an individual right to own a gun, only a collective right as part of a "well-regulated militia."

The *Heller* ruling "illustrates how, on the one hand everyone has accepted that originalism is one way to interpret the Constitution," says Steven Schwinn, a professor at the John Marshall Law School in Chicago. "On the other hand, it also illustrates what the limits of originalism are – when judges and justices can come up with entirely different conclusions based on an originalist analysis."

A decade as a federal appeals court judge in Colorado will not have tested Gorsuch's originalist bona fides anywhere close to what the Supreme Court would, since often only the toughest, most unsettled cases reach the high court. So it is unclear what kind of originalist he would be.

What is clear is that originalism has come a long way since the failed Bork nomination—an event that many argue triggered the cycle of presidents selling nominees, of reliable ideology, as apolitical legal technicians. And while some would argue that originalism isn't as neutral as proponents claim, few would dispute that it has brought an extra layer of legal rigor to the judicial mainstream.

"People on the left who might have once been skeptical of broad appeals to history, are now more accepting of it – they just don't think



it's whole ball game. But people on right don't think that's true either,"

says Young. "That's kind of what's happened, people have hashed

things out, they've moved toward each other."

**The  
Washington  
Post**

## Editorial : Trump can help Americans trust him by releasing his taxes

IN A 28-day tenure already marred by many blunders — both by his staff and by himself — President Trump's rambling news conference Thursday, riddled with misstatements of fact and attacks on reporters, stands out mainly for its consistency with what came before. It was seemingly meant to counteract growing concerns, including among Republicans on Capitol Hill, that the ouster of a national security adviser for lying to the vice president was indicative of administration competence generally, or of a sinister association with the regime of Vladimir Putin. If so, Mr. Trump's stream-of-consciousness performance — "I'm not ranting and raving," he said at one point — may not have done the trick.

At several key moments, Mr. Trump dismissed questions about any connections he and his circle may have had with Russia. "The whole Russian thing, that's a ruse," he declared. News reports suggesting

that some of his associates had contact with Russian officials during the election were "fake," he insisted — even as he condemned the leakers who released classified information to the media. The bottom line, according to the president, is this: "I own nothing in Russia. I have no loans in Russia. I don't have any deals in Russia."

This would be good news, and it may well be true. If only the public could trust it.

Act Four newsletter

The intersection of culture and politics.

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Mr. Trump ran as the least transparent major-party candidate in modern U.S. history, and he has done little since his victory in November to change that. Bucking decades of practice, he refused to release his tax returns, after promising he would do so. His

excuses did not wash. Though his recent returns may be under audit, nothing is stopping him from releasing the documents he swore were true when he sent them to the Internal Revenue Service. There is certainly nothing preventing him from releasing returns from earlier years. If Mr. Trump wants Americans to take his assurances about his international business arrangements seriously, releasing his tax information is the starting point.

It may be that, as Mr. Trump has indicated in the past, his tax returns would not shed as much light on his business entanglements as some have suggested. In fact, that is an argument for even more transparency, not less. Mr. Trump was a unique presidential candidate in the potential scale and scope of his international conflicts of interest. That demanded an unusual level of disclosure — thorough and complete accounts of how he conducted his business affairs, which he claimed as his central

qualification for the presidency, and his positions heading into the White House.

Though Mr. Trump announced some worthwhile steps to separate himself from his business empire, they are significantly less valuable if the public does not know what his exposure was before he signed away operations to his sons. We should know what sorts of assets he has in what places, to whom he owes money and at which governments' pleasure his businesses operate.

Throughout Mr. Trump's sprawling news conference, as he spoke about Russia, the "mess" the country is in, media "dishonesty," Democrats' errors and a variety of other issues, this point rang true: It would be a lot easier to give the president the benefit of the doubt if he backed his words with evidence.

**THE WALL  
STREET  
JOURNAL**

## Strassel : Don't Wimp Out on Climate

Kimberley A. Strassel

President Trump will soon turn his attention to another major campaign promise—rolling back the Obama climate agenda—and according to one quoted administration source his executive orders on that topic will "suck the air out of the room." That's good, but only if Team Trump finishes the job by casting into that vacuum the Paris climate accord.

That's no longer a certainty, which ought to alarm anyone who voted for Mr. Trump in hopes of economic change. Candidate Trump correctly noted that the accord gave "foreign bureaucrats control over how much energy we use," and he seemed to understand it risked undermining all his other plans. He unequivocally promised to "cancel" the deal, which the international community rushed to put into effect before the election. The Trump transition even went to work on plans to short-circuit the supposed four-year process for getting out.

That was three months ago—or approximately 93 years in Trump time. Word is that some in the White House are now aggressively pushing a wimpier approach. A pro-Paris contingent claims that quick withdrawal would cause too much international uproar. Some say leaving isn't even necessary because the accord isn't "binding."

Then there's Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, who in his confirmation hearing said: "I think it's important that the United States maintain its seat at the table on the conversations around how to address threats of climate change, which do require a global response." Those are not the words of an official intent on bold action, but of a harassed oil CEO who succumbed years ago to the left's climate protests.

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More By Kimberley Strassel

Here's the terrible risk of the wimpy approach: If the environmental left has learned anything over the past 20 years, it's that the judicial branch is full of reliable friends. Republicans don't share the green agenda, and the Democratic administrations that do are hampered by laws and procedures. But judges get things done. Need a snail added to the endangered species list? Want to shut down a

dam? File a lawsuit with a friendly court and get immediate, binding results.

Lawsuits are already proving the main tool of the anti-Trump "resistance." CNN reported that 11 days into his tenure, Mr. Trump had already been named in 42 new federal lawsuits. John Walke, an attorney with the Natural Resources Defense Council, told NPR that his group will litigate any Trump efforts to roll back environmental regulations. He boasted about green groups' winning track record at the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia, which Mr. Obama and Harry Reid packed with liberal judges.

It is certain that among the lawsuits will be one aimed at making the Paris accord enforceable. The Competitive Enterprise Institute's Myron Ebell says judges could instruct the Environmental Protection Agency to implement the deal. "If President Trump doesn't withdraw Obama's signature, and Congress doesn't challenge it," he says, "then the environmentalists stand a good chance of getting a court to rule that our Paris commitments are binding and direct EPA to make it happen."

Think that's impossible? Instead, think Justice Anthony Kennedy, who in 2007 cast the deciding vote to declare carbon dioxide a pollutant,



and who in September defended his habit of looking for guidance to international law. And consider that a few years back, CEI's Chris Horner unearthed a legal memo from the New York attorney general's office that laid out a strategy to get courts to force CO<sub>2</sub> cuts under international treaties.

Even with the Obama administration's economy-crushing climate program, the U.S. is about 45% short of meeting its Paris obligations. If Mr. Trump rolls back the Obama regulations, the U.S. would fall about 70% short. If Mr. Trump would like to see short work made of his economic agenda, let Paris stand, and let a court decree the proper way to implement it. Bye-bye fracking. Bye-bye offshore drilling. Bye-bye Continental Resources and Keystone.

Paris was the capstone of a unilateral Obama climate agenda that ignored the law, the will of Congress, and the people. Mr. Trump ought to shred it on those grounds alone. There's also the point that he made a rock-solid campaign pledge to both end the Paris accord and completely defund United Nations climate programs—promises that rallied many blue-collar workers to his cause.

A withdrawal from Paris is a perfect way to reset—overnight—the international climate debate, and to position Mr. Tillerson's State Department to lead on economic growth and international security. Paris is a distraction from—if not an outright hindrance to—both. If Mr. Trump cares to succeed with the rest of his pro-growth agenda, he needs to follow through: *Au revoir*, Paris.